



GOOD DESIGN AMONG FRIENDS

BY LAUREN BROOKS

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANNE GUMMERSON

INTERIOR DESIGNERS OFTEN BEFRIEND THEIR CLIENTS during the design phase—such a close relationship is inherent to the process. Good designers must educate themselves on all aspects of their clients' lives—tastes, desires, fears, hobbies, and habits—playing psychologist, marriage counselor, coach, and comrade along the way. And with every new project, be it a room change or a home change, the relationship between homeowner and professional deepens. Take Baltimore designer Rhea Arnot and her client (or should I say friend) Anne Stone—after collaborating with Stone on two previous houses, designing a third home to suit her needs and tastes seemed more like shopping with a good friend than working for a client. Appropriate, then, that Stone discovered the dusty gem of a house while doing just that—shopping with a friend who was in the market for a new home.

The pair explored several houses including one adapted from an old barn that was “in dreadful shape,” according to Stone, although she couldn’t help but notice its charming potential. “I liked the water view and the tall ceilings, the space. So, when her friend chose to pass the place up, Stone decided to buy it, fix it, and sell it.

But like many do with projects so close to home, Stone began to relish the idea of making it her own. “I sort of fell in love with the place,” she remembers. Refinishing a house with the intention of selling it and designing a house to serve as home require different approaches, how-





THIS PAGE:

This great room comprises about half of the first level of the home. The interior designer used lighting and oversized carpets to divide the space into three distinct "rooms," including living and dining areas.

OPPOSITE PAGE:

The warm palette in the great room was taken from the colors in this large quilt, crafted by fiber artist Joan Lintault.



ever. Stone's decision to move into the house had a hand in the direction and quality of the final project. The home's layout needed to be tweaked to accommodate her large art collection and to make more efficient use of the second floor, which was "boxy and broken up." Stone called upon Rhea Arnot, interior designer and familiar friend, to create a comfortable and cozy environment from the expansive barn bones. "Rhea came in, and with a hop, skip, and jump, she made it work," says Stone.

The home's transformation began with several structural alterations. The second floor originally comprised a large master bedroom with a dark and diminutive bath plus two awkward bedrooms. Working with builder George MacLauchlan, Arnot and Stone created two nicely sized guest rooms and a generous master bathroom by expanding into the master bedroom. The steep main stair was also widened and modified to curve away from the front door and graciously lead to the great room, which constitutes about half of the first level of the house. Here, the team removed the decorative columns that stood in the middle of the sprawling room, making it "look like the Parthenon," according to Arnot. The team first assumed that the columns existed to bear the load of the second floor—a simple shake from the contractor's wife, however, revealed that they didn't actually support anything but were merely aesthetic. Taking the columns out meant Arnot would need to reach deep into her bag of tricks in order to creatively craft "rooms" within the open layout, but the



Interior designer Rhea Arnot stressed the importance of flow when planning the long kitchen layout. From an appliance alley along the center island to a welcoming bar area to grand double doors that open to the dining table, "the kitchen is a wonderful space to move around in," says the homeowner.



Interior designer Rhea Arnot commissioned Bill Poffel, formerly of Rooted In Wood, to create several furniture pieces throughout the house including this walnut “ball base” table.



columns seemed too intrusive on the space to warrant keeping them.

The addition of double doors between the dining area of the great room and the kitchen was one imaginative way of containing the large space. The doors provide an elegant transition from one space to the next. Arnot's careful attention to the relationship and flow of the kitchen to adjoining rooms was rewarded with Stone's love for the final layout—"It is a wonderful space to sit in and move around in." The foundation of the kitchen is topped off with a gorgeous taupe and gray granite that lends itself to the bright atmosphere.

Once the home's architecture was complete, Stone and Arnot began to piece together the interior. "It took about a year and a half to get it up to snuff," recalls Stone. Balancing her existing furniture (most of which she purchased with Arnot during projects past) with the need for new pieces proportional to the size of the home required a unique sensitivity on the designer's part. The design plans centered around three special

pieces—a large quilt from Stone's collection, a Grace Hartigan painting inspired by a Mexican souvenir, and an oversized living room carpet that Arnot had specifically designed for Stone's previous home.

Once a pottery artisan herself, Arnot understands her client's love for crafts—in fact, the two have frequented craft shows together—and she worked to develop personal spaces where both Stone and her collections would feel at home. The sizable quilt, crafted by fiber artist Joan Lintault, has been on numerous tours around the United States. Its brilliant hues commanded the warm color palette throughout the house. The Hartigan painting serves as a focal point for the upstairs landing; the inspiration for Hartigan's piece, a small shadowbox purchased at a roadside stand in Mexico for \$2, is also displayed to the right of the painting. Ticked by the Dr. Suess, Jerry Garcia, and Einstein chairs, which were purchased at the Baltimore Craft Show, as well as the coffee can cowboy boots and wooden blouse decoys, Arnot creat-

The designer made good use of an open landing by incorporating pieces from the homeowner's art collection into a gallery of sorts. From coffee can cowboy boots and wooden blouse decoys to a large painting by artist Grace Hartigan, the works displayed illustrate the owner's passion for folk art.



ed a mini-gallery of sorts on the landing, combining these pieces in a playful yet elegant space.

She also enlisted a 12' x 20' custom carpet from Stone's former home to help fashion a living room area on the airy first floor. Arnot's carpet design, a true reflection of her understanding of her client's tastes and passions, features a color gradient border based on a motif in one of Stone's quilt books. At the core of the carpet design is a basket knot that breaks the pattern into four quadrants; each quadrant is decorated with unique

and vibrant flowers, making for a "not too repetitious," layered design.

To further distinguish an independent living room, the duo selected larger sofas—"Rhea told me that I needed a bigger couch to fit the grand space," says Stone. They then carefully accented the seating area with recessed lights and a gorgeous painted silk chandelier. "I am rather proud of myself," chuckles Stone, who got the idea from a magazine photograph she had clipped long ago. Arnot was able to locate a similar chandelier from Odegard. The lighting serves to sep-

arate and define the "room" while incorporating shape and color into the long ceiling's sea of white.

Two additional spaces are tucked at either end of the great room—the dining area, which rests atop another large area rug, and a pleasant place to play cards and sip tea. Aware that Stone loves very detailed, ornate furniture, Arnot commissioned Bill Poffel, formerly of Baltimore's *Rooted in Wood*, to create an intimate table for visiting with guests. His walnut "ball base" table is one of many skillfully carved pieces throughout the house.



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A wall of walnut built-ins houses the homeowner's media system, with speakers incorporated into the column shelves on either end. Craftsman Bill Poffel also created a computer desk to match the library.

Poffel's talent is reflected in his intricately detailed work. In the small den, he crafted a wall of library shelves around Stone's existing media system, integrating speakers into the built-in columns. He also coordinated with Arnot and Stone to brainstorm functional pieces for the master bathroom such as lingerie cabinets, a dressing table, and an armoire. Gorgeous pear wood and curly maple give the bathroom a "furniture look" and enhance the richness of the blue glass tile. Stone asked Poffel to include a space to organize her necklaces, which he accomplished with "drawers" in the lingerie cabinets that open to reveal jewelry pegs. As an added touch, he exposed a group of shelves in the armoire for Stone to store towels and showcase small art pieces.

The "furniture bathroom" theme continues downstairs, where a classy black, white, and beige powder room features aged family photographs and silhouettes. The French sink from Waterworks exudes old-world style against a painted brick wall and black floor tiles from Chesapeake Tile & Marble. The crisp color (or really lack thereof) in this half bath is also sharpened by the vibrant blue hues of the adjacent hall. After experimenting with various colors, Stone discovered the dramatic blue paint, and "I saw this little light go on," recalls Arnot. "Anne is a pretty clear client—not in that she knows exactly what she wants, but once she's got it, you know that's it." With a good bit of

patience and a style-savvy friend by her side, Stone was able to make sense of the large spaces as well as smaller ones such as the powder room and hallways.

Just as close friends offer advice about life, interior designers offer advice about the spaces in which life is lived. In the process, the distinction between these roles often blurs, and the relationship that develops reaches far beyond that of a mere business acquaintance. Rhea Arnot and Anne Stone exemplify this unique connection between designer and homeowner. One needs simply to overhear their discussion of window treatments to understand. Arnot insists on simple treatments to help control the large living/dining room space, even though Stone has never really had curtains in her other homes. Stone finally concedes "Rhea, you are right. You are always right. I should tell your husband that..." ❖

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