

New England HOME

Celebrating Fine Design, Architecture, and Building



Transformations

*BOLD BRILLIANCE IN
THE NEW YEAR*

The foyer features an eye-catching Patagonia granite flooring. The wallcovering is by Élitis, and Hope's Windows created the steel-and-glass partition. Rich Corner of BluBlk crafted the handrail. **FACING PAGE:** The elliptical staircase—which spans seventy-seven vertical feet—required an array of experts and artisans to complete. Ron Mott of Mott Iron Works customized the bronze balustrade. The skirts, risers, stringers, and wood handrail are by Hardwood Design in Exeter, Rhode Island. Clayton Austin of Boston Ornament Company created the stairway's plasterwork.



DRAMATIC *by DESIGN*

A Back Bay residence undergoes a top-to-bottom transformation with the help of savvy professionals.

*Text by Clinton Smith
Photography by Douglas Friedman*



LEFT: A custom sectional by Partners in Design provides a welcoming gathering spot in the living room. Curtains crafted from Holly Hunt fabric frame the Lonney White hanging sculpture in front of the windows. A Minotti lounge chair sits near the fireplace, which was designed as a modern interpretation of Savannah Helgeson's grandmother's fireplace. **ABOVE:** The breakfast nook is grounded by modern parquet flooring by Chris Zizza of C&R Flooring. **RIGHT:** The kitchen cabinetry is by Christopher Peacock. A custom hood by Mitchel and Mitchel hovers above a range by La Cornue.



About a decade ago, Henry and Savannah Helgeson hired Boston interior designer Nicole Hogarty to renovate the kitchen of their Back Bay brownstone, which at the time was a multifamily residence; the Helgesons occupied the top two floors. Fast forward a few years and Hogarty is called upon to revisit and reimagine the possibilities of the house after the downstairs neighbors decamped for the suburbs and the Helgesons snatched up the unit, deciding to convert the building back to its original single-family use. “From young families to empty nesters, we are finding our clients want the energy of the city while

maintaining the comforts of a suburban lifestyle,” says Hogarty. “We spend a great deal of time during the design phase anticipating the daily routine of our clients.”

Such was the case with the Helgesons. Although Hogarty had worked with them before, their tastes and priorities had shifted since that initial kitchen renovation. “They wanted to set the tone that this is not your typical brownstone,” says Hogarty. “They wanted it to feel a little European, a little modern, a little West Coast.” But before aesthetic considerations were made, there were other requirements to be resolved, including making room for a ground-floor attached garage, incorporating a new



Artwork by Lidia Masllorens presides over the dining room. Minotti chairs surround a custom dining table by Jeff Soderbergh, which is illuminated by an Ochre chandelier. Throughout the house, most of the walls, ceilings, and crown moldings are painted Benjamin Moore Oxford White. Ceiling heights that reach nearly thirteen and a half feet and multi-stepped crown moldings nod to the attention bestowed upon scale and proportion.



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: Poritz & Studio created the walnut swing bed for the entry-floor lounge. Bespoke cabinetry and display racks house the owners' extensive wine collection. The custom pool table located on the entry floor is by District Mills.



“THE OWNERS WANTED THE HOME TO FEEL A LITTLE EUROPEAN, A LITTLE MODERN, A LITTLE WEST COAST.”

—Interior designer Nicole Hogarty

wood-burning fireplace, integrating an elevator, and creating space for the sculptural, elliptical staircase that would become the home's pièce de résistance. Throughout the process, Charles J. Capone, the homeowner's representative, served as a critical conduit and liaison among the various project partners and collaborators to facilitate both major and minute decisions during construction.

For Payne | Collins Design and JW Construction, the firms involved in the architectural renovation, the demolition of the interior revealed the necessity



The primary bath features an Agape tub and Valéria Nascimento artwork. **FACING PAGE:** Large slabs of Caribbean Island marble from Cumar and Waterworks plumbing fixtures adorn the glass, steel, and marble shower. The doors and windows are by Hope's Windows and have a custom powder-coated finish.

to reframe the floors to ensure all spaces aligned perfectly. At one point, the house was a total blank canvas. “When you walked in the building from the basement, you could look up, and it was just the fire walls on each side all the way through up to the roof,” says builder Jon Wardwell of JW Construction.

The result was a completely new interior with everything level and plumb, much as when it was originally built. Time and again, the team at Payne | Collins, which specializes in sensitive

Back Bay and Beacon Hill town house renovations, has found that many of these older brownstones have been remodeled so many times over the years that the overall structural integrity has been significantly compromised and replacing the skeleton is the best way to ensure the building remains viable for the next hundreds of years. As an added benefit, in doing so, they were able to seamlessly integrate many important twenty-first-century amenities into the nineteenth-century shell, including



ABOVE: The primary bedroom showcases sumptuous bedding and a custom Partners in Design headboard. A glamorous John Pomp chandelier illuminates the space, which is enveloped in a Holly Hunt wallcovering. **BELOW:** Both the Helgesons' dressing rooms—that's Savannah's here—are outfitted with custom cabinetry by Christopher Peacock. **FACING PAGE:** A custom fixture by Apparatus illuminates Henry Helgeson's tidy dressing room.

the latest building, safety, and energy code requirements. A completely new wood-burning fireplace is just one of the engineering and building feats.

“Not only did we have to bring everything up to code but also work around a pretty complex heating and cooling system, although you wouldn't know when looking at the fireplace,” says Wardwell. “You would think it was an original feature of the house.”

The home's primary gathering spaces—the living and dining rooms and kitchen—reside on the second level as an open-concept floor plan. However, for the couple, creating spaces that were comfortable for their two young children as well as the friends, family, and colleagues who gather here in large groups was paramount. “We make a lot of fires and so, especially at this time of year, we're kind of gravitating toward the second floor,” says Savannah Helgeson.

Throughout the house, materials, including wood, stone, metal, and leather, are given pride of place through grand gestures, like the Patagonia granite flooring in the entry, to the most subtle

details, such as the leather-wrapped, hand-stitched interior door hardware. The palette of soft, soothing hues reveals itself throughout in sumptuous fabrics and upholstery, luxurious carpets, and



eye-catching textural wallcoverings. “I personally just kind of gravitate toward neutral colors,” Helgeson says. “Henry likes a little more color, so we tried to find artwork that allowed us to add in some pops of color to satisfy both needs.”

Another important consideration was that every space be utilized—nothing is superfluous. Private quarters occupy the floors above and include a full-floor primary suite, the children’s and guest rooms, and a new copper-clad headhouse and rooftop entertaining area with sweeping views of the Boston skyline.

For Hogarty, the success of this project can be attributed not only to the creative and technical collaborators involved but also the homeowners’ dedication to—and passion for—the process. “Henry and Savannah are such strong communicators,” says Hogarty. “They’re not shy. They come to the table with ideas. They know what works for their family, they know what works for them aesthetically. And then they trust you and step back. So, it’s this beautiful relationship where they’re very clear. It’s always an ongoing conversation.”

Indeed, that dialogue continues, as Hogarty has gone on to collaborate with the Helgesons on a vacation home on Nantucket. Who knows what’s next?

EDITOR’S NOTE: For details, see Resources.

INTERIOR ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN:

Nicole Hogarty,
Nicole Hogarty Designs

RENOVATION ARCHITECTURE:

Payne | Collins Design

RENOVATION BUILDER:

Jon Wardwell, JW Construction

LANDSCAPE DESIGN:

Perennial Gardens

Because of visibility and setback restrictions, members of Payne | Collins Design met with the Back Bay Architectural Commission during the mock-up phase of the copper-clad headhouse and roof-deck to successfully integrate it into the neighborhood, ensuring it was minimally visible from the street.

