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KITCHEN CENTRAL

DESIGNER NINA FARMER REIMAGINES A BEACON HILL TOWNHOUSE WITH A DAZZLING KITCHEN AND GLAMOROUS GREAT ROOM RIGHT INSIDE THE FRONT DOOR—AND THAT'S JUST THE FIRST FLOOR.

INTERIOR DESIGN *Nina Farmer*

INTERVIEW *Alice Gordon*

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In this renovated Federal Revival rowhouse in Boston's Beacon Hill neighborhood, "the living room is an extension of the kitchen," says Farmer. A TV hides behind the massive built-in mirror. The custom chesterfield sofa is covered in Rogers & Goffigon's Violetta. Armchairs in Lee Jofa's Oblique. Table accessories from E.R. Butler. **LEFT:** The front door and shutters are in a Fine Paints of Europe Hollandlac Brilliant black, with trim in Benjamin Moore's Decorators White.



ABOVE: The front door leads into the kitchen, where a welcoming nook includes a custom banquette and chair upholstered in Jerry Pair's Bella Pelle leather. Farmer chose subway tiles, Grove Brickworks by Waterworks, and covered the entire walls of the kitchen to "help the continuity of the space," she says. **BELOW:** Designer Nina Farmer on her clients' stoop.



What was once a parlor has been transformed into a spacious, gleaming kitchen that is the heart of the house. The ovens are by Miele, the range is by La Cornue, and the refrigerator and wine cooler are by Sub-Zero. Sink fittings, Kallista. Barstools, Emeco. Bon Marché pendant lights, Urban Archaeology. The cabinetry is painted in Benjamin Moore's Decorators White.





The color teal, a thread throughout the house, shows up on a vintage lamp from Reside atop Oly's Jonathan table in the den. The painting by John Teyral was found at Naga Antiques. Custom armchair in Rogers & Goffigon's Vulcan.

ALICE GORDON: Serenity seems key to your design. When your own Beacon Hill house was featured in *House Beautiful* [March 2014], one style blogger wrote, "Is this what heaven looks like? Wowza!"

NINA FARMER: Serenity is important to my work. Most of us want to come home to a relaxed atmosphere. It's a balancing act—finding the right amount of color and juxtaposition of different styles. Rooms need to flow and feel natural. Nothing should be jarring. Your clients for this project also wanted a house in your neighborhood, which took a year to find. That can't have been relaxing.

I went to every showing in the area for them, which was very interesting! It helped that the wife and I grew up together in Connecticut, and I understood what she and her husband hoped to find for themselves and their two small children. They had a short list of requirements, all tricky for a historic house, but they were willing to wait. This was the first place with the right potential.

What was on their must-have list?

They wanted a kitchen with easy access from the front door, for the best light and circulation. They didn't want to spend most of their time in the basement, where many of Boston's brownstone kitchens still are. This one was, too, but the front door led to a great double-parlor space, where the previous owners had entertained. I knew we could move the kitchen there and make it a spectacular place to gather.

What else was on their list?

Outdoor space and expansive rooms—hard to come by in the city. Luckily, a deck had already been built on top of what's now the playroom, which adjoins the den and backyard on the basement-garden level. But instead of spaciousness, the top three floors had too many rooms. We lowered the number: one master bedroom and bathroom on the second floor, two kids' rooms on the third, and one study plus one guest room at the top.

Working in a hallowed historic neighborhood must be a bit challenging.

Actually, I prefer a project with some kind of built-in vernacular. It gives you jumping-off points. A house like this has roots, unlike a new house that you have to invent a story for.



ABOVE: The den's custom sofa, covered in Rose Cumming's Antiqued Velvet, is a vivid counterpoint to the cerused-oak paneling. Armchairs in Muriel Brandolini's Smoke Grey print. Custom ottoman in Jerry Pair's Bella Pelle leather. Pheasant Feather lamps, Bunny Williams Home. Rug, Restoration Hardware.

It sets a tone and gives me elements to refer back to while respectfully working for a more current feeling.

What existing features led the design way?

We let the original window moldings establish what we'd do with the crown. We looked for Federalist elements, like the mirror in the master dressing area, to nod to the neighborhood's origins. And we embraced the brass that preservation regulations require outside, on every front door in Beacon Hill. We intertwined it with nickel, and some copper and painted metal, to achieve a traditional and contemporary mix.

You don't often see teal in an otherwise black-and-white palette. Where did it come from?

The Boston Athenæum is a historic library right up the street, and I love its metal-studded leather doors. The doors are red, but I wondered what they'd look like in teal. And then came the impulse to use a soft teal throughout the house.

Descending to the garden-level den you suddenly see honey brown, a departure from the graphic look above.

The ceilings are a lot lower down there, and once the kitchen disappeared it was clear not much was going on. The idea was to add

some character. We focused on warmth, with cerused white-oak paneling. I raised the teal up a notch in intensity, and the cognac was for balance.

There's a lot of custom furniture in this house.

Many people order furniture online, and they don't always know what they're getting. I do custom work often because every house has its own peculiar needs. In the living room, we wanted a sofa to seat a good number of people without blocking circulation to the deck behind it. We came up with an exaggerated chesterfield style. The kitchen furniture was about using metals and wood and stone to balance the same tones in the other end of the room. So, for instance, the black marble in the living room talks to the black counters in the kitchen.

How did all of those stairs figure into the renovation?

The original stairs had tight winders at the top of each floor, so we rebuilt them for more generous circulation. Since the family was going to spend a lot of time in the stairwell—the house has five floors—I wanted to treat it as its own room and give it some special touches. I didn't know the staircase would become one of the stars of the show!



ABOVE: Silver travertine tiles, Ann Sacks's Palladium, line the walls and floor of the master bath, as well as the bedroom fireplace, an example of Farmer's subtle recurrences of color and material to maintain flow and mood from room to room. Sink and shower fittings by Watermark. Allen sconce, Ralph Lauren Home. **BELOW:** The bedroom's custom chair is upholstered in a Jerry Pair leather.



Soft teal blended with gray and green give the master bedroom its serene atmosphere. Helena bed from Oly. Dara rug and Italian Hotel Satin Stitch linens, Restoration Hardware. Chair in Sonoma Lake and curtains in Stone Wall, both by Lee Jofa.







Nobilis's faux wood-grain wallpaper adds a touch of woodland whimsy in the son's room. Bed upholstered in Rogers & Goffigon's Vulcan. Henley lamp, Thomas O'Brien. Roman shade in Katie Ridder's Pagoda. Carpet by Steven King. **OPPOSITE:** Custom brass and black railings in the stairwell make traditional newel posts glamorous. A vintage mirror helps open up the space and conceals the circuit breakers. Brass caps from Brass Works. Walls painted in Farrow & Ball's Pavilion Gray offset the woodwork in Benjamin Moore's Decorators White. FOR MORE DETAILS, SEE RESOURCES