

interiors[®]





DOUBLE TAKE

INTERIOR DESIGN: TERRAT ELMS
TEXT: JORGE S. ARANGO
PHOTOGRAPHY: MICHAEL J. LEE



TO BENJAMIN FRANKLIN'S FAMOUS PRONOUNCEMENT

that "nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes," we must add another verity: tastes change. And so do the circumstances that lead to those shifting predilections. Just ask Ford and Kate O'Neil.

Back in 2011, they lived in a turn-of-the-last-century McKim, Mead & White residence in Boston's northern suburbs with their two children. But their busy investment businesses in the city, as well as Kate's work on many philanthropic and corporate boards, required an urban pied-à-terre. "We were working all the time," she recalls, which is why they gravitated toward a 20th-floor unit in the Clarendon, a full-service Robert A.M. Stern building boasting extraordinary views in the city's Back Bay neighborhood. They connected with Dee Elms of Terrat Elms, who had done several apartments in the Clarendon, and got to work.

"We wanted to absorb the view and celebrate it," recalls Elms. "We needed a soft backdrop to what was happening outside." The resulting palette was primarily neutral, but accented with punches of color. Within the open-plan main space for instance, a gray custom Stark carpet defined the living room area, where A. Rudin chairs upholstered in a warm vanilla-colored Holly Hunt fabric faced each other across a Desiron table. But the custom sofa was upholstered in a textured mellow gold from Nobilis, while the Giorgio Cavallon painting above it burst with marigold, tangerine, blue, green and orange shades.

The master bedroom was a symphony of oyster and silvery grays—linen wallcoverings, a headboard upholstered with Pollack's Glazed Caning in silver foil, a bench and chair in shimmering Chatelet and subtly rosy Etoile dusk, both from Mokum. But another bedroom popped with vintage orange lacquer nightstands against Phillip Jeffries wallcovering featuring a silver rivet pattern on tactile hemp.







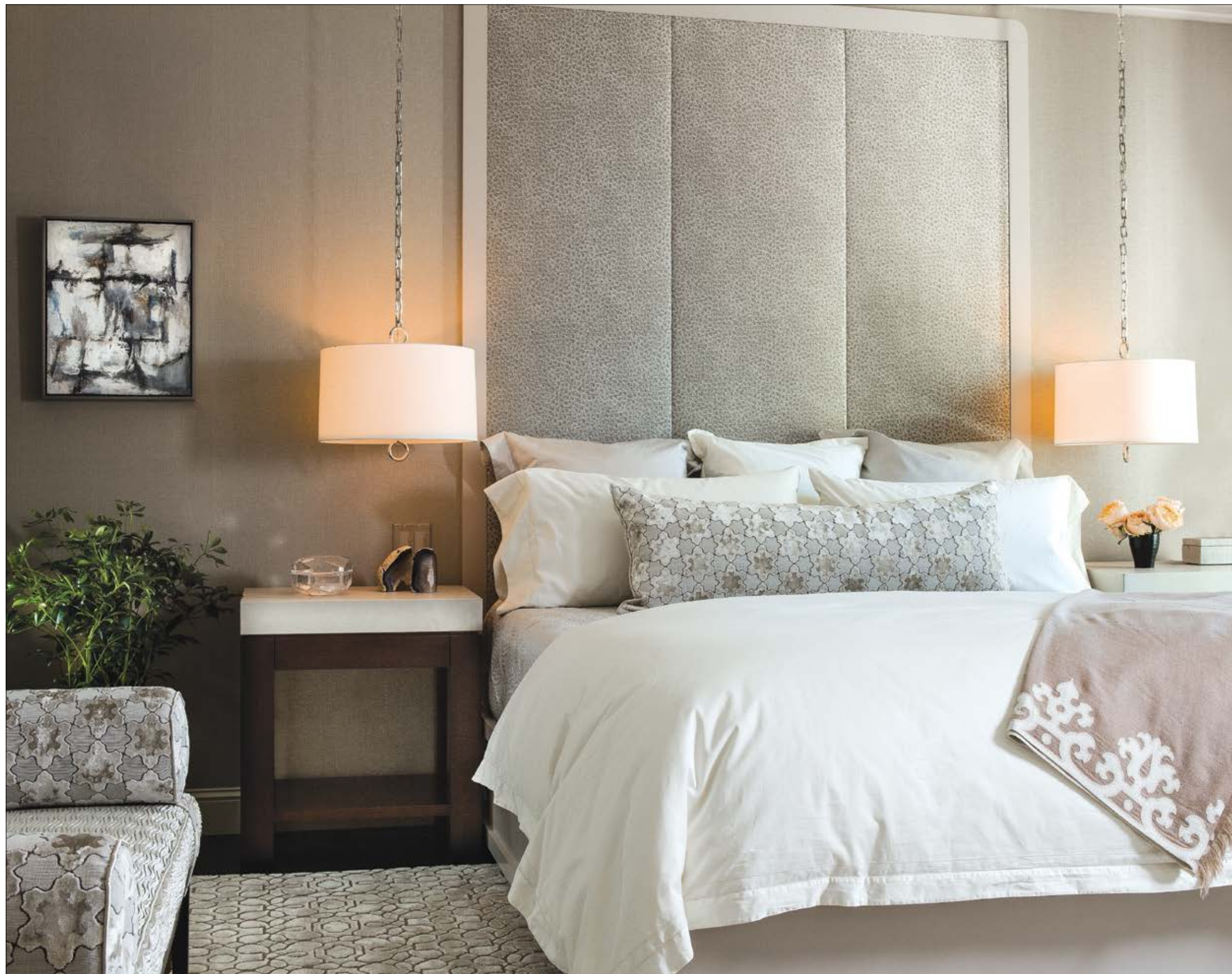
THEN LIFE CHANGED FOR THE O'NEILS. Their children were off to college, and though Kate remained busy with her boards, she took a sabbatical from work. Suddenly, a fourth-floor apartment in an 1860 Beacon Hill brownstone felt more attractive than the Clarendon. "It had more character and was more like a home," she says. "In the Clarendon we felt like we lived in a hotel. At the brownstone, I wake up to trees, dogs barking, joggers—you feel like you're in a neighborhood."

So the couple sold their high-rise unit partially furnished and called upon Elms once again. "She wanted it to feel more classic," Elms says of her client. "I thought we could do that with many of the forms we already had." The living room grouping was transferred intact to Beacon Hill, as was the oval Bolier dining table and Holly Hunt Paris chandelier over it. But the space in which they now reside, though renovated with a modern eye by Ruhl Walker Architects some years before, had far more personality. For one thing, the crown moldings and original window casings were wide, in the manner of 19th-century interiors, and the main room contained its original Nero Portoro marble fireplace ("a beautiful thing to work around," Elms says).

To strike a contemporary balance, Elms painted all the trim in a shade that blended into the almost imperceptible amethyst cast of the Phillip Jeffries grasscloth with which she wrapped the room. Lilac Holland & Sherry draperies telegraph that cast more explicitly.

There is also a generous bay window overlooking the Boston Common. Initially, the plan was to put a desk there. But, says Elms, "I was all about bringing everybody to that window." So she designed a circular curved-back banquette inspired by French Deco brasseries and added a custom linen-wrapped table and lithe midcentury modern chairs she discovered at Reside in Cambridge. Overhead, the Triad chandelier from Apparatus contributes an element of industrial chic.





WITH MORE FREE TIME ON HER HANDS, Kate became more involved, going to the showrooms with Elms and also shopping independently. The two were looking for “more old things, or furnishings with patina,” Elms says. To wit: an Oly étagère with a patinaed gold finish to the left of the fireplace. For the other side, Kate unearthed a bird’s-eye maple bar cabinet in the style of Gio Ponti from Albert Joseph Gallery on 1stdibs.com. “It could have been a cabinet from a showroom,” says Kate, “but this is more interesting.” The tall upholstered headboard in the former master gave way to a more traditional tufted version from Mitchell Gold+Bob Williams.

At the Clarendon, notes Elms, “There weren’t a lot of opportunities for art.” At Beacon Hill, however, the O’Neils could display their growing collection. In the dining room, for example, they now had room for two John Baldessari works over a custom ebony credenza and a large, graphic Frank Stella piece that was craned in through the windows.

The brownstone clearly illustrates the O’Neil’s evolving tastes. But it also embodies the way broader design ideas change across time. Historic trappings remain, yet the building’s 19th-century inhabitants would find it unrecognizable. It is layered and sophisticated as it would have been then, but more comfortable and modern to suit 21st-century concepts of home. “It’s what it means to be in a brownstone on Beacon Hill in 2015,” Elms says. ■ *Terrat Elms, 617 451 1555, terratelms.com*