



Picture Perfect

Jean Alan creates an ideal backdrop for an adventurous family in Winnetka.

By Diana Tychsen
Photography by Michael Robinson

MAIN STAGE
Alan assisted with the design of the kitchen, knowing it would play the biggest role in the lives of the foodie family of two. "Food and cooking are important parts of our lives," explains the wife. The star-shaped pendants are from Brighton, the bar stools were a vintage store she found the designer had repainted in leather from Ekleman and the semi-recessed lights are Penda Lights from Urban Electric.

Jean Alan of Alan Design Studio in Bucktown knows how to make a scene. Working as a professional set decorator for film and television in Chicago and L.A.—highlights include *The Blair Brothers* and *The Untouchables*—she gained an encyclopedic knowledge of design periods and the ability to create spaces to best suit the characters in each project. Now working as an interior designer, Alan can absorb the personalities of her clients and grow with them through their aesthetic ebbs and flows.

In the case of the clients whose historic single-family home interiors she designed in Winnetka, the partnership originated in 1994, long before the family had grown from two to—presently—four. "One day we wandered into Jean's store on Damen Avenue," explains the husband. "The relationship developed over the years, beginning with a small purchase [from her store]. Jean has a very unique approach to design that speaks to us."

What speaks most clearly is the collective love of adventure, it seems. So when the family needed assistance renovating their home on the North Shore, they called Alan, and the trio dove right in—starting with the formal dining room. The exploit began with a trip to Antique Resources in Lakeview to snag an 18th-century English Regency dining table. The couple committed on the spot. "They just went for it," says Alan. "Finding that table was such a gift." The solid, 36-inch mahogany inset that can come and go depending on the size of the party were an added bonus. "They are able to have a six-down dinner for 20 people with that table!" exclaims Alan. "It's such a unique piece." Other one-of-a-kind finds were the extraordinary 1930s French cerused oak sideboard with a verdigris-finished, wrought-iron overlay, sourced by the designer from *Isidors*, and an antique Persian *Lavar Kerman* rug from Reza's Rug Gallery in Lincoln Park. "Jean has a network of tradesmen who turn these busted pieces into beauties," explains the husband. The olive corner cabinets from *Olde Chicago Ltd.* Antiques also got some much-needed TLC, while the silk draperies and custom chairs—made in India with an intricate bone inlay detail—completed the look.



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Left: Alan designed this china cabinet himself, inspired by Czech designs. Right: Alan designed the splurge-worthy custom tufted sea foam green sofa in the living room, adorned with pillows in fabric sourced from Turkey. "I talked them into doing the custom Romo upholstered tufted sofa," she admits. "But everyone involved agrees it was well worth it." The table is from Leslie Hindman Auctioneers, and the trumpet light chandelier is from Wright Aesthetics. The chairs are by Paul McCobb and the picture was found by the owners while on vacation in Moha. "It's the forest they found around San Valley a couple years ago," the husband explains.

Many group approval outings for the other areas of the home followed, often with children in tow. "We took many trips with Jean and the kids to wonderful warehouses to see odd, one-of-a-kind furniture," says the wife, who insists her daughter, 11, and son, 9, gave a lot of input on the interior aesthetic.

The family also has a reputation for being audacious with food, and the kitchen was designed to encourage all kinds of risk-taking—both with the cuisine and décor. "Food and cooking are important parts of our lives," explains the wife. "And I have also always been interested in architecture," the husband chimes in. Starting with the scene-stealing Moravian star pendant lights over the island from Brighton, moving to the unique Punch Lights from Urban Electric and ending with the equally unusual mid-century metal bar stools Alan chose to upholster in Keleen leather from Edelman, it's obvious the family has a taste for the whimsical. Project architect Mark ver Bryck, along with their contractor, S.J. Baick Construction, managed the kitchen redesign. Ver Bryck borrowed the door style for the cabinet face from the existing millwork in the house, so there is a seamlessness in style as one travels through the home. Alan oversaw the finishes, which involved handpicking a luscious, white, oil-based paint for the cabinetry to give it a "feel of the hand," as Alan describes it. "We always want the textures of the space to speak for themselves, to look handmade and of the most superior quality."

The family room off the kitchen transports guests to a more exotic locale—fittingly, as the family is known to travel abroad quite frequently—with a sea foam green L-shaped sofa covered in pillows in a variety of colorful prints sourced from Turkey. An antique Kurdish rug lies under the seating area, which Alan admits was a bit of a splurge. "I talked them into doing the custom Romo upholstered tufted sofa," she admits. "But everyone involved agrees it was well worth it." Other smart spends were the Argentinian Perinbi table from Leslie Hindman Auctioneers and the Paul McCobb chairs, which were





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Many group approval outings for the other areas of the home followed, often with children in tow. "We took many trips with Jean and the kids to wonderful warehouses to see old, one-of-a-kind furniture," says the wife, who insists her daughter, 11, and son, 9, gave a lot of input on the interior aesthetic.

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given new Edelman leather seats and Manuel Canovas fabric seat backs. The couple certainly didn't skimp on lighting—a former set designer insists on giving it top billing, after all—in the sconces (behind the sofa) are vintage Koch and Lowy and above the casual dining table hang French Chandler trumpet lights, circa 1965, from Richard Wright's auction house.

Not only do the ladies at Alan Design Studio (Jean is "Mom" in the mother-daughter team; her daughter is the equally talented Ruthie) arrange furniture—they design and build it. The aforementioned tufted sofa was an Alan design, as was the china cabinet on the opposite wall of the kitchen—built from a series of benches by Alan and manufactured using a quarter cut figure antique wood veneer. The result can only be described as "Czech cubism, pre-World War II," Alan says matter-of-factly. "I spent some time in Prague and brought back all kinds of reference books. I wanted to create something really unique in their otherwise all-white kitchen, and [the clients] let me—I was lucky."

There was another fortunate occurrence when it came time to decorate the powder room. Alan just happened to stumble upon the perfect wallpaper from Flavor Paper. "An urban damask, we'll call it," she says with a laugh. "There are fire hydrants, pigeons, rats and parking meters—all hidden in the print." Alan had the company make it in the custom salmon color because "we needed some color in there, too!" she exclaims. The mother-of-pearl tile wall, the 1920s etched mirror and the R.C. sconces are the perfect neutral complements.

Now that the curtains are up, how are the reviews? "We dreamed of a place where we could all come together," says the husband. "And this is it."

Ah, success. Or, as they say in Hollywood, that's a wrap. ■

Here: Flavor Paper supplied the wallpaper, made-to-order in a custom of rose color that Alan dreamed up. Opposite page: The dining room is full of dramatic elements, such as the antique mahogany dining table (made in India), lion table chairs and a Persian rug.

Design Details

TYPE 1920s English Tudor

LOCATION Winnetka

AWARDS 2011 Winnetka Preservation Award

PROJECT ARCHITECT
Mark van Bryck

GENERAL CONTRACTOR
S.J. Bacik Construction

INTERIOR DESIGN Jean Alan
of Alan Design Studio

VENDORS

Istdibs

Sideboard in dining room
(istdibs.com)

Antique Resources

English Regency table in dining room
(antiqueressourcesinc.com)

Brighton

Pendants in kitchen
(brightoncollection.com)

Cowtan & Tout

Manuel Canovas fabric for family room chairs
(cowtan.com)

Edelman Leather

Sofa and chairs in family room
(edelmanleather.com)

Flavor Paper

Wallpaper in powder room
(flavopaper.com)

Leslie Hindman Auctioneers

Perizibi table in family room
(lesliehindman.com)

Olde Chicago Ltd. Antiques

Cabinets in dining room
(oldechicagoantiques.com)

Reza's Rug Gallery

Rugs in dining and living room
(texasaruggallery.com)

The Urban Electric Company

Punch lights in kitchen
(urbanelectricco.com)

Wright Auction House

Trumpet lights in family room
(wright20.com)





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INTERIOR DESIGN Jean Alan
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VENDORS

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(Istdibs.com)

Antique Resources
English Regency table in dining room
(antiquerresourcesinc.com)

Brighton
Pendants in kitchen
(brightoncollection.com)

Cowtan & Tout
Manuel Canovas fabric for family room chairs
(cowtan.com)

Edelman Leather
Sofa and chairs in family room
(edelmanleather.com)

Flavor Paper
Wallpaper in powder room
(flavorpaper.com)

Leslie Hindman Auctioneers
Petiribi table in family room
(lesliehindman.com)

Olde Chicago Ltd. Antiques
Cabinets in dining room
(oldechicagoantiques.com)

Reza's Rug Gallery
Rugs in dining and living room
(rezasruggallery.com)

The Urban Electric Company
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