

STARTING OVER

Jeffrey Bilhuber revamps a classic Seattle house for two stylish empty nesters

TEXT BY PETER HALDEMAN
PHOTOGRAPHY BY RICHARD POWERS
PRODUCED BY ANITA SARSIDI

A ceiling coated in Farrow & Ball's Setting Plaster paint lends a blushing glow to the living room of Lee and Stuart Rolfe's Seattle home, which was outfitted by designer Jeffrey Bilhuber. Grouped before the 18th-century Scottish mantel are a round cocktail table by Lucca Antiques and a custom-made lounge chair and sofas; the chandelier is by Démiurge New York, the painting is by Claire Sherman, the mirror is from Lucca & Co., and the rug is by Mitchell Denburg Collection. For details see Sources.





Steps lead to the living room, where an artwork by Tony de los Reyes is perched on a vintage chair. **Above:** The residence was renovated in collaboration with architect Stephen Sullivan.



Lee and Stuart Rolfe are Seattleites with deep and expansive roots in the Emerald City. Both were raised in the area in large close-knit families—hers built the Space Needle, while his once owned the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*. After marrying, the couple reared their own children in an early-1900s Craftsman house in Madison Park, a leafy neighborhood on the shore of Lake Washington. The place was a lodestone for friends and relatives, and Lee's memories of it have an almost Rockwellian glow: "A giant yard with kids running around, wonderful carnivals in our garden, Saturday morning pancakes. . . . It was just one of those homes where the cookie jar was always full."

Still, when Lee and Stuart—who is the president of Wright Hotels, a company that manages and develops properties in the Northwest—sent their youngest off to college three years ago, they looked forward to starting a new chapter. It would take place, conveniently, just blocks away. The pair traded in the Craftsman for a 1908 Colonial that overlooks the lake through stands of evergreens. Although of the same era, the two homes are like night and day. "The old house was sort of a dark box," Lee says. "Here, you walk in and you're flooded with light." (Sunlight is to Seattle residents roughly what space is to New Yorkers.) As interior designer Jeffrey Bilhuber, whom the Rolfes hired to update the new home, puts it: "This was a house that would allow the future into their lives."

For Lee, who spearheaded the project, greeting that future meant embracing her lifelong passion for the visual arts. →



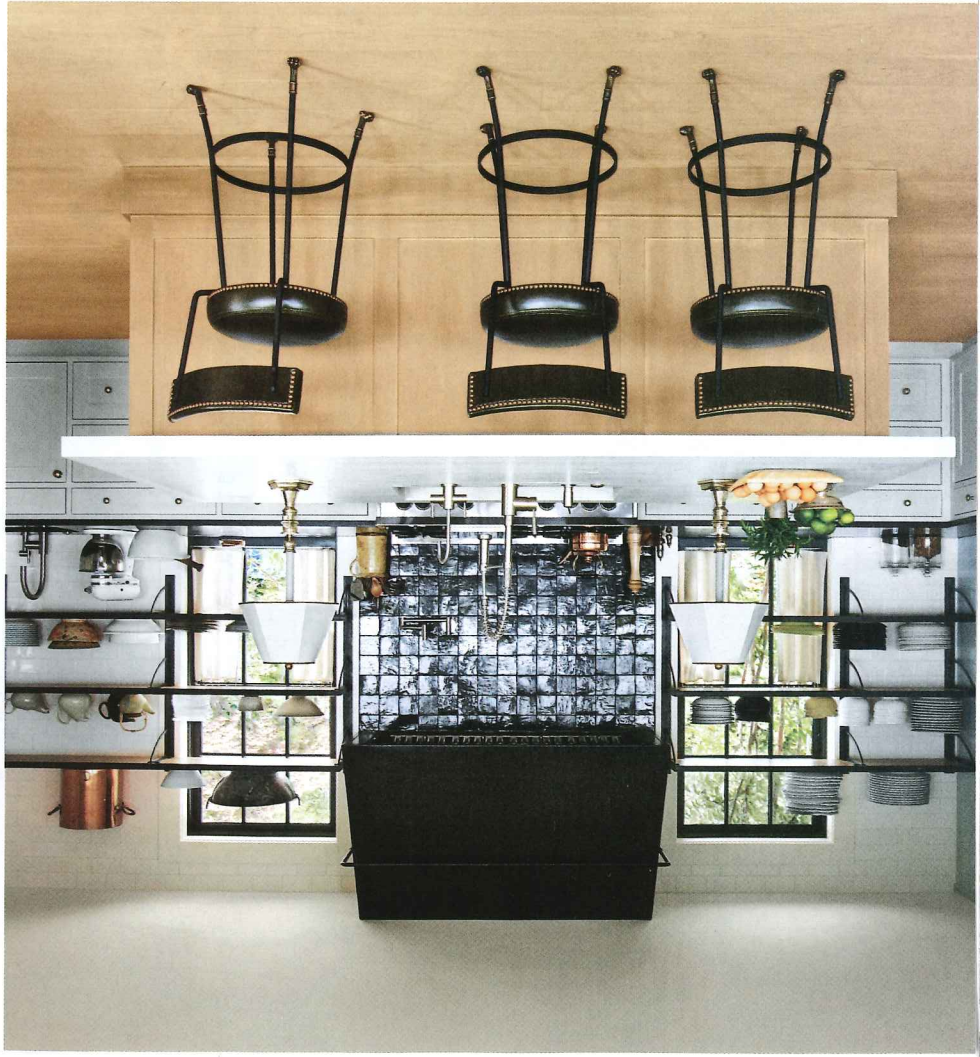
A Jeffrey Bilhuber-designed sofa and lounge chair, a stone-top cocktail table by Lucca & Co., and antique wood panels from Todd Alexander Romano set an inviting scene in the library; the chandelier is by Bourgeois Bohème, and the steel sculpture is by Peter Millett.



Antique-mirror wall panels shimmer in the dining room, where a suite of antique French chairs upholstered in an Edelman leather flank custom-made walnut tables; the banquet and lounge chair are Jeffrey Bilhuber designs, and the rug, by La Manufacture Cogolin, was commissioned from Tai Ping.



Clockwise from above:
The kitchen's hood was devised by Stephen Sullivan, and the back-splash tile is by Mosaic House. The living room terrace is furnished with outdoor lounge chairs by Janus et Cie. In the entry hall, vintage English lanterns overlook 18th-century French side chairs and a work on paper by Georges Braque.



"Poor Jeffrey—I threw a lot at him," Lee says of the direction she offered. "I had decades of memories and ideas and images." Among her reference points were historic British and Swedish decor, the refined homes of Bunny Mellon (Billhuber is also a fan), and the couple's collection of modern and contemporary art. Not to mention evocative movie sets like the classic London interiors of the 1958 film *Indiscreet* and the coolly elegant Milanese rooms in 2010's *I Am Love*.

After a renovation that included adding guest quarters and reconfiguring the second story to form a master suite and two other bedrooms—all completed in collaboration with architect Stephen Sullivan—Billhuber turned his attention to the challenge of weaving Lee's various inspirations into a single "light, clear, and engaging" narrative. His solution begins with the exterior, where he coated the clapboard siding, shutters, and moldings in a soft, silvery gray to achieve, in the designer's words, "a glorious halo around the house."

Just inside the front door, cream-color walls of combed plaster and resin serve as the backdrop for a vivid Georges Braque ink wash. The textured walls extend into the living room, where Billhuber gave the ceiling a pale-blush hue "to help it evaporate," he says, and painted the floors in a seemingly timeworn checkerboard pattern—an homage to Oak Spring, Mellon's Virginia estate. An 18th-century Scottish chimneypiece anchors the room, but only to a degree. The designer painted the French doors to the terrace a subdued celadon that he says makes them "dissolve into the clouds and water, furthering the effect that the house is floating." Here and throughout, he mingled antiques and upholstered pieces of his own design with a featherweight touch.

The dining room, meanwhile, channels the sophistication and ceremony of *I Am Love*. Billhuber daringly clad the walls in panels of hot-rolled antiqued mirror that have a rippled surface he likens to "a frozen lake or a Monet pond devoid of color." The gutsy move entailed some designer-client hand-holding. As a "safety net," Billhuber says, he put up linen curtains that can be pulled over the panels. But they've yet to be used. "It's so extraordinary at night when the candles are lit," says Lee, who hung a Milton Avery painting on one of the mirrored walls. "I was concerned, perhaps, about the glamorous factor, but sometimes it's okay to let go a little."

The most introverted room in the house—a nod to the Rolfe's previous residence—is the library, a former sunporch that didn't get any sun due to an abundance of trees. It is now an intimate space lined with antique paneling. But elsewhere, says the designer, "we were all about attaching ourselves to the light." In the master suite the bed was placed near French doors leading to a balcony; Moroccan tiles in the kitchen and master bath were chosen for their reflective qualities; and a new stone terrace off the airy family room draws people out to revel in the garden and the lake vistas.

"It's a joyful place that has expanded our whole point of view," Lee says of the home. She and her husband have been in the house only a matter of months, but in some ways, she says, it could be years. "It feels like we've been moving toward this landing for a long time." □



A John Stefanidis fabric envelops a guest room; the Chelsea Editions *lit à la polonaise* features a custom-made box spring and mattress upholstered in a Jasper fabric, while the chair is slipcovered in a Les Indiennes print.

"HERE, YOU WALK IN
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WITH LIGHT," LEE ROLFE
SAYS OF THE HOME.



Pendant lamps by Crate and Barrel hang in the top-floor study; the bespoke banquette is clad in a green velvet by Duralee, and the carpet is by Patterson Flynn Martin.