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Asian Infusion

by **BRIGID SWEENEY** • 9/18/2009, 1:35 a.m.

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A young family's Beacon Hill apartment might be the last place you'd expect to find an abundance of 17th- and 18th-century Asian art. But after you step off the cobblestone street and ride the caged elevator to the third floor, the traditional brownstone façade reveals an interior brimming with Imperialist details.

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The Eastern accents—from the dining room's 18th-century Chinese wallpaper panels to the Beijing-sourced ceramic dogs in the master bedroom—are the calling card of Back Bay architect and designer Jeffrey Delvy. His affair with the Asian decorative arts blossomed in the early '90s, after he bought a set of Colonial-era blue and white dishes on Beacon Hill. The china, Delvy explains, was the pattern used by the first five U.S. presidents—but it's actually a Cantonese design. Thus began a fascination

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^ with the 18th-century China trade period, when animal skins departed Boston Harbor for Guangzhou, where they were exchanged for tea, silk, and porcelain.

As fate would have it, Delvy's former architecture colleague, a young wife who had recently purchased this three-story, three-bedroom penthouse off Charles Street, shares his love of Asian art. A Boston native blessed with an antiques-dealing grandmother, she'd inherited an enviable array of European Art Deco furniture, plus several Japanese pieces brought back by her grandfather after World War II. In 2007, she asked Delvy to incorporate the antiques into a high-low design perfect for the family she and her husband hoped to start.

By capitalizing on the unexpected Art Deco-Asian combination, Delvy integrated the heirlooms without turning the home into a solemn museum. Take, for example, the family room, where an antique gold leaf Japanese screen sits above a kid-friendly Mitchell Gold sofa covered in an inexpensive Williams-Sonoma Home tan velour. "We didn't want the décor to be too precious, because kids would be jumping on the furniture," says Delvy.

The screen, which shows up in many of the wife's childhood snapshots, is now the backdrop to photos starring the couple's one-year-old daughter.

Nearby, the juxtapositions continue: Black Chinese chests dating to the 1920s are offset by a Swiss Art Deco painting of Adam and Eve ("their hair colors match the owners' perfectly," Delvy notes), lamps that were picked up in Maine, and a 1960s Sputnik chandelier the husband found in California.

Many of the home's newly acquired pieces hail from nearby businesses, as Delvy spent the year-long renovation period scouring antiques shops on Charles and Newbury streets. The finds, including Cantonese porcelain plates from Polly Latham Asian Art & Antiques and a 1920s Chinese rug from Marcoz Antiques, mix with 1930s French settees and a turn-of-the-century, Boston-made Ivers & Pond piano.

Upstairs on the unit's top floor, Delvy combined two original servants' rooms to create the husband's office. A 1930s French desk from Brookline's Antiquers III, a mirrored coffee table from a 1970s department store, and Ralph Lauren chrome bookcases commingle with what he describes as a "very traditional gentleman's sort of Chesterfield sofa" and an Oriental rug.

Down the hall, the guest room's traditional Colonial theme—complete with a blue and white star-sprinkled duvet on an antique bed discovered on the North Shore—is complemented by persimmon drapery printed in gold with the Chinese symbol for happiness and a single wall papered in a pattern depicting 19th-century Chinese village life. The room's closet was cut down in order to redo the staircase up to the roof deck. Once a hazardously narrow spiral, the new stairs can accommodate people laden with children, glassware, and trays of food. A hanging wood screen in the stairwell, designed by the project contractor's son, subtly reinforces the Asian theme while also obscuring the adjacent bathroom.

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^Visitors need only a glimpse of the roof deck view, spanning the Esplanade's Hatch Shell on one side and the State House's golden dome on the other, to understand why the family eats there from April through October. As one of the tallest buildings on the block, the brownstone offers a very "king of the world" rooftop vibe, which Delvy accentuated with an ipê wood deck edged with mahogany, Restoration Hardware patio furniture, a large flat-screen TV, and a gas fireplace.

But the home's real beauty, beyond the breathtaking views and Asian details, is its adaptability. Delvy developed a plan to accommodate an expanding brood of children: The guest room can be converted, the husband's office may get smaller, or, down the road, they may even buy the building's lower two floors. With so much effort put into preserving family history, Delvy says, "it's going to be exciting to watch the next generation grow up here."

Trade Secrets

Insider tips on what makes this space great

- 1. DINING ROOM** Drapery from Charles Street's Baranzelli Silk Surplus complements the room's gold-flecked ceiling and gold and ochre walls.
- 2. ROOF DECK** "We've been pleasantly surprised by how well it's weathered," says Delvy of the Restoration Hardware patio furniture.
- 3. GUEST BEDROOM** The window seat, covered in a Baranzelli fabric, features a long needlepoint pillow—originally intended as an under-the-door draft blocker—that the wife stumbled across in Bloomingdale's.
- 4. DINING ROOM** A French Art Deco chair upholstered in a zebra print adds levity to the antiques-laden room. "I should lie and say I remade the chair myself, but the truth is that I found it at Marcoz Antiques [on Newbury Street]," says Delvy.
- 5. STAIRCASE** Punched up with a zebra-print runner from Landry & Arcari, the original staircase creates a dramatic backdrop for the newly created sitting area.
- 6. DETAILS** Because the unit's second floor was originally designed for bedrooms, it lacked the stately finishes appropriate for public space. Delvy created this intricate floor pattern to add grandeur to the new living room.
- 7. GUEST BATHROOM** An intricate tile pattern renders a rug unnecessary.
- 8. OFFICE** The home retains all of its original doors, including this one to the husband's office. "We were careful to leave as many structural details in place as possible," Delvy says.

ARCHITECT Jeffrey Delvy Design & Decoration, Boston

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