

HOUSE OF MARTHA



Flanked by double archways with Corinthian columns, a plaster mantel that stretches to the ceiling is the centerpiece of the living room in a 1920s Mediterranean-Moroccan home in Palm Beach, Florida, designed by Ellen Kavanaugh. The architectural details and the pecky-cypress ceiling—all original to the home—were restored and reworked during an eight-month overhaul. The vintage 10-arm French chandelier is patinated brass.

What happens when Ellen Kavanaugh takes a not-so-serious approach to a refined 1920s Palm Beach home? Perky colors, sly cinematic references, and an extravaganza of high-spirited patterns.

Interior Design **ELLEN KAVANAUGH**

Architecture **MICHAEL PERRY** Interview **KATHLEEN RENDA** Photography **JAMES MERRELL** Producer **DORETTA SPERDUTO**

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Am I getting a Wes Anderson vibe from this 1926 Mediterranean Revival home in Palm Beach?

ELLEN KAVANAUGH: You are! The client, who's a former art teacher, wanted the quirkiness and retro-nostalgic pastels of an Anderson movie. Luckily, Wes is one of my favorite filmmakers, so we were in sync from the get-go! What's cool about his cinematography is how it nods to childhood the way it's remembered, not the way it was lived, so the visual style is singular and very fun. It's the same with these rooms. They are elegant and playful and don't take themselves too seriously. There's a vintage, collected-over-time feel, as if the homeowners have always lived there. It's not an eccentric look—that isn't the client—but it's layered and eclectic, with nothing matchy-matchy whatsoever.

KATHLEEN RENDA: How did you give the rooms character on such a tight turnaround?

It's crazy, but we had only eight months to renovate the entire place. The family was newly relocated from Manhattan, and this was going to be their primary residence, not a vacation retreat, so we were in a time crunch. Untouched for decades, the house was dark and dated, and some period details, like the pecky-cypress ceilings, had been removed or covered up. While the builders restored the 1920s charm and created an open layout, I was hitting the local antiques stores for anything soulful and unique. It was such a fast timeline that I just had to trust my instincts that it would all work together. For example, at a Worth Avenue shop, I spotted matching chairs on casters. They were 1970s gorgeous, with sleek chrome and blush-pink velvet upholstery probably added in the '80s. I knew they'd be perfect as is in the living room along with the vintage Lucite-and-brass coffee table, the 1920s Persian rug, and the second, custom coffee table in walnut and iron.

Did you intend to have so many distinctive chairs in the living room, or was that a happy accident?

I wanted to bring a lightness to the space—because of the foliage and the home's position on the lot, the room is often in shadows—with no heavy furniture weighing it down. Another goal was to create two seating areas, since there's a lot of square footage.

Chairs are nimble and versatile, and I zeroed in on those that hit the sweet spot between old and new, formal and informal, modern and not modern. To me, the 1950s French Provincial tête-à-tête seats absolutely make the room. Would you believe I bought the pair at a Florida antiques mall for a grand total of \$200? Refinished and reupholstered in white linen, they're Hollywood Regency stunning.

That's a vivacious den!

Credit the wallpaper. It has a zoo's worth of exotic animals and blooming flowers, and the colors—lilac, bunny-nose pink, cobalt—repeat the hues used throughout the house. The choice did take a bit of convincing, but the room needed it. There's lots of texture happening with the cypress ceiling and the new terra-cotta-tile floor, and the wallpaper's exuberance balances that. The vintage split-rattan coffee table also delivers personality. It's a sculptural scroll shape, and it morphed into an ottoman with padding and trippy zebra-stripe upholstery. With the deep custom sofa you can literally sink into, as well as windows surrounding you on three sides, it's a comfy space tailor-made for curling up and relaxing. It's the Palm Beach version of New England cozy.

Why did you detail the ceilings with paint?

It's a historical callback. When the home was built, there was stenciling overhead. Some of it was still visible, but in terrible condition and not in our palette. So we pecan-blasted the ceilings—it's an eco-friendly stripping method, similar to sandblasting, but with pecan shells—to reveal the original wood. Then, in the dining and living rooms, an artist hand-painted a tiny little chain-link design in a soft celadon green or outlined the rafters in lavender. It's whimsical, and it echoes a border of small glazed tiles—in milky shades such as turquoise, earth, lagoon, and iridescent purple—that we added to the terra-cotta floors.

Any concerns that more clients will ask you to do their homes in the style of a famous film director?

Not at all! Unless they want interiors inspired by that other moviemaker named Wes—Wes Craven, who did those *Nightmare on Elm Street* horror flicks. Freddy Krueger is pretty scary!

OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Hugo Guinness linocuts grouped on adjacent walls define the living room's conversation nook, which includes 1970s rolling chairs that are easy to reposition. The den's fanciful Pierre Frey wallpaper mixes with other patterns, including Raoul Textiles' pimiento-colored zebra stripe on a vintage ottoman; the silk ikat on the lampshade is from Penny Morrison. "You can never go too big with lighting," says Kavanaugh, who converted a jumbo ginger jar into a table lamp to balance the scale of the windows. The new front door, painted in a custom verdigris, is "a tip-off to the color story inside the house"; the entry is flanked by 1920s bronze lanterns salvaged from a local teardown.

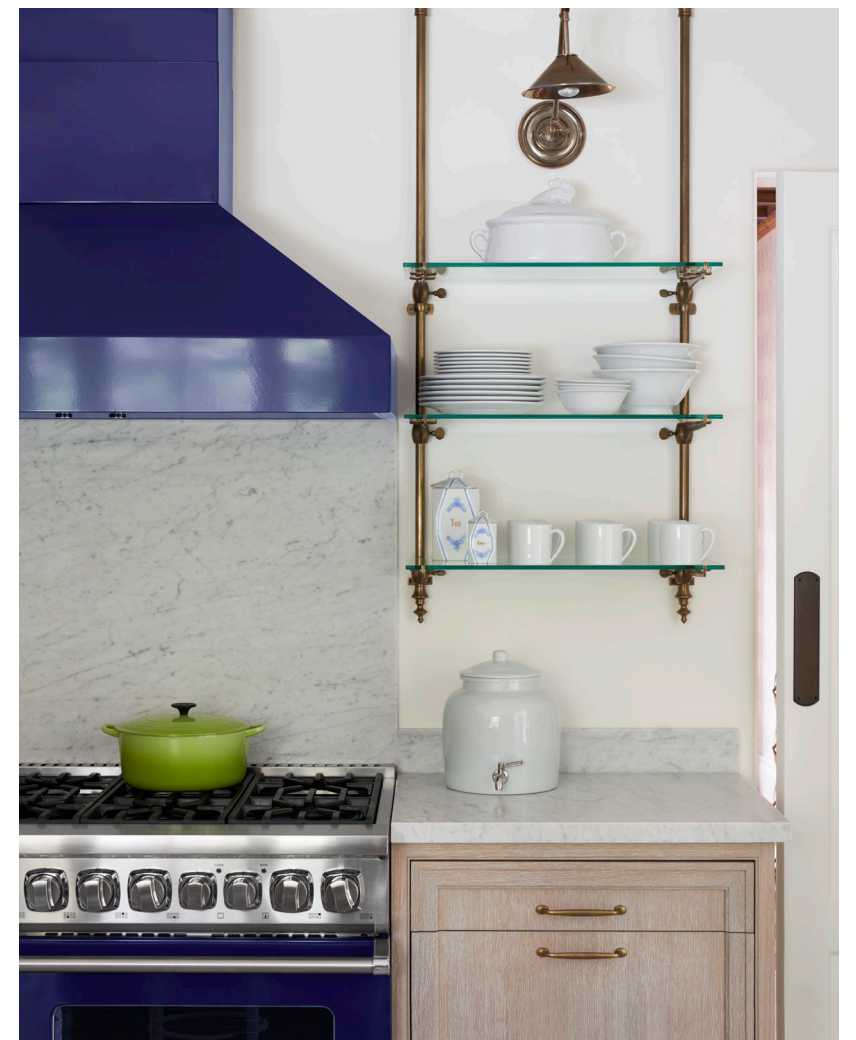


Lighthearted touches in the breakfast room include an Authentic Provence globe light etched with tiny stars and New Ravenna marble floor tiles with a flower motif. The Côté Jardin Antiques French chairs are in a John Robshaw Textiles linen. **OPPOSITE, FROM TOP:** Weathered 19th-century Portuguese tiles reclaimed from a building facade “offset the newness of the kitchen, which was completely gutted and expanded,” says Kavanaugh; the Stone Forest farmhouse sink is carved from a single block of Carrara marble; puppy vase, Jeff Koons. For a streamlined European look, the kitchen’s upper cabinets were replaced with slim brass-and-glass open shelves that are illuminated by a sconce from the Urban Electric Co.; range and hood, Viking.



CONNECT SPACES

Kavanaugh's approach to the breakfast room: Treat it as a transition that links the utilitarian kitchen to the more design-forward den next door. With a bold cobalt range and marble counters on one side, and the den's verve and riotous pattern on the other, the lively dining spot bridges the look of the adjoining spaces with its own style moves—from a marble-topped Saarinen table to antique French chairs in a hand-blocked floral.





The foyer's architecture was filled with Spanish influences, including original hand-painted floral terra-cotta stair tiles and a wrought-iron railing. Kavanaugh played against type by adding a Chinese Chippendale rattan console to the space.

OPPOSITE, FROM TOP: Rattan Serena & Lily chairs, teamed with the client's own hand-hewn table, dial back the formality in the dining room; wallpaper, Eskayel; Donald Baechler artwork. A lunch tablescape with fresh-cut garden roses in Moroccan glass cups, Loretta Caponi placemats and napkins, and Alberto Pinto Foliage Limoges plates reflects the home's mix of laid-back and luxe. **FOR MORE DETAILS, SEE RESOURCES**