





DESIGN FUNK

INTERIOR DESIGN: PROJECT INTERIORS

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The allure of the suburbs can't be denied, especially in these turbulent times. Greener acres are exactly what a young couple with small children was looking for when they decided to build their dream home from the ground up in South Barrington, a suburb 40 minutes northwest of Chicago. The classic limestone exterior with graceful arched windows and beautifully landscaped lawn fits seamlessly into the traditional neighborhood. But seeking something a little edgier for the interiors, a little more hip than the standard suburban fare, the wife reached out to her sister for recommendations on interior designers. Having worked at modern design emporium Knoll, she promptly suggested Project Interiors, a 16-year-old firm led by Aimee Wertepny, whose aesthetic at first glance might seem a bit too bold for the 'burbs.

"The exterior is more transitional, but they wanted to zhuzh it up on the interiors without being a total disconnect," says Project design director Lauren Warnock of the house, designed by John Belcher of JMB Architects. To that end, Warnock and team deferred to cleaner lines, relied on a high-contrast color palette and peppered in strategic elements of surprise. From small changes, such as removing millwork from case openings, to monumental architectural moves, "We took the developed plans and looked for opportunities to do something dramatic and really cool," Warnock says.

Nowhere is that more evident than the curved front staircase, which effortlessly pierces through the two-story foyer as if it's floating through air. "We wanted to make it an architectural masterpiece and a wow moment when you walk through the house," Warnock says. The neighboring dining room delivers its own visual design punch. Borrowing from Old World tradition, Project Interiors modernized plaster by applying trim overhead in a crisp, geometric form. "It's a modern rendition of that idea, come to life on the ceiling," Warnock says. The design firm also specified a custom table of ebonized oak and Lucite, and covered walls in a Phillip Jeffries grasscloth. Photographs of paper busts with unusual headpieces from Zoe Bios Creative play into the black and white contrast of case openings, sans millwork, and pull guests in.

Contrast was also used to dramatic effect in the living room, where the fireplace, installed against a murky Venetian plaster wall, became a focal point. The homeowners wanted a television in the space and they wanted it to be easily accessible. Rather than hide it behind a cabinet, Project Interiors mounted the screen above the fireplace for an unobtrusive placement against the dark backdrop. "It feels modern and provided texture in the living room," Warnock says of the wall treatment. "It added nice materiality to this white drywall and very architectural box." Sensing an opportunity for a built-in, her team turned the hearth of the fireplace into a window seat with integrated drawers for storage. They extended the plane 90 degrees to flow into a custom wall unit of blackened steel, exposed drywall and Venetian plaster. "We used this one element as a way to connect two elevations," Warnock says. A Mies van der Rohe daybed from Knoll, sheathed in glossy, sexy black leather, comes easily with a lounge chair by Interlude in polar opposite cream linen. An abstract wool and viscose rug in all the right neutrals from carpet emperor Oscar Isberian of Chicago lies underfoot.

In the kitchen, Tom Dixon's Beat pendants hover above a white marble island; nearby, Saarinen's forever classic Tulip chairs in white from Knoll are paired with a sculptural oak table finished in a deep matte espresso stain. The eat-in kitchen is as glamorous as it gets in the suburbs. The main floor powder room radiates glamour, too, with a floating marble countertop and contrasting wallcovering in a flamesitch pattern by Arte. And in the study, pendants from Buster & Punch hang from a black coffered ceiling, introducing an industrial feel to the sleek room.

To situate the bed in the master bedroom toward the fireplace while offering some privacy, Project Interiors designed custom millwork that functions as a headboard wall and quasi-room divider. It creates division of space when one of the homeowners needs to get up early without disturbing the other and is a portal to the master dressing room. Upholstered in a silky shag by Opuzen, the partition also conveniently integrates reading lights above nightstands. "Everything you're doing is behind this tall headboard," Warnock says. Facing opposite the wall is a wiry sculpture by Eric Gushee, turning this off-walked hallway into an art opportunity.

The suburbs offer a distinct benefit that the city doesn't: ample outdoor space. The design team took advantage of the greenery surrounding the house, with landscaping by Perricone Brothers, by planning the family room around the view. This room leads to the pool terrace, where the family can cuddle up on the screened, covered loggia, which the design team says has a "resort vibe." Just beyond, light globes from Flos dot the pool area and glow like lanterns in the evenings. Warnock commends the homeowners on their involvement in the design of their home, which ultimately leads to a more personal, elevated aesthetic. "Part of their goal was to make the residence stand out in a Midwestern suburban setting," she said. "They were into these moments of making a statement." ■ PROJECT Interiors, projectinteriors.com











