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DESIGNER SECRETS

"A SPARKLING CEILING TREATMENT CAN UNIFY THE WHOLE ROOM"

HILLARY THOMAS & JEFF LINCOLN

ON A 1960S TOWN HOUSE IN WASHINGTON, D.C.

In the living room of a Washington, D.C., town house, designers Hillary Thomas and Jeff Lincoln reference two William Haines signatures—the elegant but informal game table and tufted chairs. Lucite table and leather chairs, Kendall Wilkinson. **OPPOSITE:** The black and white of Montgomery 1 marble floor tiles by Ann Sacks and Block Print Stripe wallpaper by Farrow & Ball is reminiscent of Dorothy Draper. The foyer's graphic punch extends to the kitchen.

Interior design by HILLARY THOMAS & JEFF LINCOLN *Interview by* DAVID A. KEEPS *Photographs by* ERIC PIASECKI

DAVID A. KEEPS:

If the walls of this Washington town house could talk, what would they say?

HILLARY THOMAS: They would tell you things that would have made J. Edgar Hoover blush.

JEFF LINCOLN: In the 1960s it was the home of Joseph Alsop, the political columnist. Everyone from John F. Kennedy to visiting diplomats partied here, so we wanted to maintain that sophisticated salon feeling.

HT: The house makes you want to put on some Chet Baker and get all *Mad Men* with a pack of cigarettes and a shaker full of gin martinis.

Is it classic Georgetown architecture?

JL: No, not at all. It's a 1960s contemporary International Style design, and the ghost of the previous decor—Maison Jansen style—was still in residence.

Is this palette your sophisticated take on the American flag?

HT: It's our chic, patriotic ode to Georgetown. The living room had ebonized floors and white ceilings, and we added the red Murano globe chandeliers and integrated the turquoise from the kitchen backsplash. Those tiles influenced the palette throughout the house—even the pink solarium and the gold dining room have touches of blue.

LEFT: Red glass Planet S chandeliers from La Murrina are focal points of the salon-style living room, which integrates Chinese, neoclassical, and modern furnishings. The designers created a custom wall color "that unifies everything in the room but is ethereal, showcasing the art and making the walls recede," Lincoln says. Curtains and sofa pillows, Jim Thompson New Silk Twill in Antique Aqua. Curtis Jere brass lamps and gold-rimmed bowl, David Bell Antiques.

The black and white foyer is an exception, then.

JL: We both like snappy architectural solutions—like the patterned floor and striped wallpaper—that give black-tie panache to small spaces.

HT: As soon as you walk in the house, that foyer says, 'Hold on to your pants, people!'

How did you arrive at this vibrant mix of '40s French, Park Avenue posh, and Georgetown grandeur?

JL: We both grew up in Locust Valley, New York, a bastion of traditionalism. So our tastes are similar. My touchstones are Jean-Michel Frank, Giacometti, and Billy Baldwin.

HT: And Jeff and I are both Virgos, so we're very big on symmetry. He brings the classicism, and I add the fun and whimsy—I'm a huge fan of Dorothy Draper and the theatricality of Tony Duquette's Dawnridge.

The living room could easily seat 16, but it doesn't look cluttered. What's your secret?

JL: For me, a well-proportioned coffee table is your pebble in the pond—everything ripples out from there. We used a two-tiered glass-and-steel coffee table with a pair of tailored geometric sofas that have very thin arms. For extra seating, we used stools that can be tucked away. The Lucite-base game table and glass-topped Billy Baldwin accent tables have an open look, so the room doesn't seem clogged.

HT: If you want a room to look light, use furniture with trim legs and avoid armchairs, especially ones that have arms wide enough to hold a glass. There should always be enough tables scattered about for people to set their drinks down properly.

The built-in mirrors under the living room windowsills are so clever. How did that come about?

JL: That's another secret. The sills were ridiculously high, and full-length curtains just didn't look good. So we added mirrored panels to create the appearance of floor-to-ceiling windows.

HT: You can also achieve that effect by hanging a Roman shade high above the top of a short window frame. Just don't ever pull the shade all the way up.

Duly noted. You certainly take window treatments seriously, don't you?

HT: Windows need a strong personality. For the curtains, we used square nickel rods with square rings, which are edgy and unexpected but also have a clean architectural profile.

JL: Sheers look fussy and old-fashioned to us. In the living room, we used silk curtains with a Greek key trim that ties into all the neoclassical motifs in the rooms. We killed a lot of birds with that one window treatment.

I notice you also like neoclassical X-based furniture. Why does the X hit the spot?

JL: I'm a sucker for anything with an X motif. It's timeless and has been interpreted in so many ways. A lot of people talk about eclecticism as if you can throw anything you want in a room willy-nilly, but you have to find the design continuum that runs through history and allows you to mix things with an intelligent rationale. For me, that's the X motif.

You're also not shy with paper and paint, are you?

JL: In the old days of Park Avenue hostesses, it was considered déclassé to use wallpaper. You needed FFF—Fine French Furniture—and a good paint job. Lacquering a room means weeks of mess, and wallpaper is wheat paste, two days, and—voilà!—you get a strong point of view.

HT: I love a painted ceiling. A sparkling ceiling treatment can unify the whole room. We lacquered the dining room ceiling in pale pink and used silver leaf on the dome in the ceiling of the Venetian plastered pink sunroom. Both of those rooms just sparkle like cozy little jewel boxes.

Are there any colors you can't abide?

HT: I hate orange and blue together, although I love them separately.

JL: Celadon is a wishy-washy, neither-here-nor-there color. And I am not going to do a red dining room. It's appealing at first, but after a while I want to run from it.

What else raises a red flag of design disaster?

HT: If I see even one primary-colored plastic toy in the living room, it gives me severe angst.

JL: Pinball machines.

Which trend do you wish would just end already?

JL: This cult of contemporary name art that is just so pretentious. If I see one more Damien Hirst spin painting or Anish Kapoor polished disc wall sculpture.... And as much as I hate to say it, because I like it so much, David Hicks's graphic geometry is overexposed.

HT: I am so over the industrial reclaimed look. I mean, please, people—do you want something rusting in your living room? I don't even know if it works in a loft anymore.

What's one of your guilty-secret shopping spots?

JL: I have to admit that I like Ikea.

HT: I'm sure Jeff will cringe, but some of my greatest accessories deals come from Ross Dress for Less. You know, good design doesn't have to cost a fortune.

JL: Though I prefer if it does!

PRODUCED BY DORETTA SPERDUTO

RIGHT: "A good coffee table is your money shot," Lincoln says. The two-tiered blackened steel-and-glass design by John Boone echoes the form of the Billy Baldwin side tables and the arms of George V sofas covered in Big Dreams Velvet in Malibu, both from Holly Hunt. Ceramic garden stools from Inner Gardens offer extra seating in front of the fire.

Lincoln and Thomas designed the kitchen as a contemporary counterpoint to the rest of the house. They injected a jolt of color and graphics with a Turkish patterned tile from Ann Sacks and Absolute Black granite countertops. Lucite and leather Whiz barstools from Paston Rawleigh Everett "virtually disappear," Thomas says. Cabinetry by Boffi.

1. Janus et Cie's Azimuth Cross collection brings neoclassical simplicity to the terrace. **2.** A white Roman shade bordered in black adds more graphic punch to the foyer. **3.** Red, white, and blue gets a bohemian twist in the library with lacquered walls, a silver ceiling, and ethnic textiles. **4.** Phillip Jeffries Arches wallpaper and a Claremont bedcover give the guest bedroom "a 1960s Morocco-a-go-go vibe," Lincoln says. **5.** On a bone-inlay bedroom nightstand by Paul Marra, a Kier Design glass lamp continues the turquoise theme. **6.** Living room benches in the style of Jean-Michel Frank are covered in zebra Ultrasuede from Hinson and tucked under a Carling Nichols Chinese console. **OPPOSITE:** A 1940s French chandelier and de Gournay Plum Blossom wallpaper give the dining room a shimmery glamour. Thomas Pheasant dining chairs by Baker are covered in Kravet Versailles velvet and Lee Jofa Fiorentina Matelassé.

Cobra candlesticks and framed snake prints add a touch of intrigue to the ultra-feminine solarium, decorated with a Jansen-style daybed designed by Lincoln. French iron side tables holding Murano lamps coordinate with vintage Milo Baughman scoop chairs, and a bone-inlay table from John Rosselli coordinates with the hand-carved stone tile floor by Robert Kuo for Ann Sacks. Walls in a custom stucco finish by O'Neill Studios. Girona pendant lights from Vaughan. Snake prints, Arader Galleries. **OPPOSITE:** For the master bedroom curtains and bedcover, a Rose Tarlow print, Sea Leaves, "strikes the right balance between femininity and masculinity," Thomas says. They hang from custom Morgik metal rods. Shams and linens, Hillary Thomas Designs. FOR MORE DETAILS, SEE RESOURCES