

ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

THE INTERNATIONAL DESIGN AUTHORITY

JULY 2011



Restorative Power

Thomas Jayne's stylish renovation of a 19th-century Philadelphia townhouse tempts a country gentleman to give up the suburbs and embrace a new life

TEXT BY JEAN NATHAN PHOTOGRAPHY BY PIETER ESTERSOHN PRODUCED BY HOWARD CHRISTIAN

A limestone solarium is at the heart of a Philadelphia house decorated by Thomas Jayne. Wicker seating from Newel is grouped around Moroccan tables from John Rosselli Antiques. The throw pillows are made from a Clarence Hosue fabric, and the dhurrie is by Shyam Ahuja. For details see Sources.



A Charles Edwards lantern adds a splash of color to the entrance hall. Albert Paley sculpted the iron gates, and the Swedish neoclassical table and Danish mirror are from H. M. Luther Antiques.





He wasn't an urban dweller.

At least that's what the owner of this circa-1865 townhouse in Philadelphia's Center City had always thought. Though he ventured downtown for his work as a commercial-real estate developer, home was two acres in the suburbs with a contemporary house he describes as "all glass and polish, and very precise."

He and his wife built that house in the early 1970s, and over the next 30 years they raised three children there and filled its rooms with Continental antiques they collected in their travels. When his wife died in 2001, the children, grown and with families of their own, tried luring him into the city, but he was convinced that high-rise apartments were not for him and that townhouses were much too dark and narrow.

That is, until he saw a four-story, 11,000-square-foot Greek Revival house on what he considered to be the city's best block. At 37 feet wide, it felt unusually spacious; light filtered in through nine-foot-tall parlor-floor windows and a stairwell skylight. And with six bedrooms, there would be plenty of space for his children and their families to visit. Still, the developer resisted. Although structurally intact, the interior was a shambles. "I was very nervous about it," he says. "I asked myself, 'Does this place just need a lot of care, or is it too far gone?'"

That's when he called in New York City decorator and family friend Thomas Jayne, whom his late wife had met on a 1995 trip to Holland with the Furniture History Society. The property

ABOVE: The drawing room is furnished with a custom-made sofa and chairs upholstered in silk and a camelback sofa covered in a Clarence House damask. Rembrandt Peale's portrait *The Odalisque* hangs over the mantel. The curtains are made of a silk faille from Claremont.



was too good to pass up, Jayne assured him, and they could most definitely restore its former glory. Jayne could not, however, predict how captivating—and ultimately how healing—the project would turn out to be for his new client.

To get their bearings, the men commissioned an architectural historian to trace the house's past. A 1931 renovation by architect Herman Louis Duhring Jr. had given the residence its most dazzling feature: a solarium, with walls of Texas shell limestone, that connected the dwelling to a study built over the rear garden. A myriad of further accretions had also popped up in Duhring's time, as decorator and client made careful note. (He added a mosaic-tiled taproom, for instance, and several elaborate bathrooms featuring pink marble and gold-plated fixtures.) If subsequent owners had done the house no favors, at least their changes were easily reversed. From 1949 until the mid-'70s, the building was loosely divided into four apartments and a doctor's office. Another occupant, a colorful *bon vivant*, stitched the place back together and made

it the setting for boisterous parties filled with famous guests—and even engineered a star turn for it in the 1983 movie *Trading Places*.

The current owner, though, had different priorities—ones centered on conservation, restoration, and minimally invasive updates. Jayne, a graduate of the decorative-arts program at Winterthur, proved an adroit accomplice. While his client masterminded moving the garden-level kitchen up to the parlor floor, to make space for a garage, and adding central air-conditioning and an elevator, Jayne sketched out the aesthetic next steps, which included painting the hall floors an aqueous blue-green to unify the space and installing a striped runner on the neoclassical central staircase. To replace the damaged floor of the solarium, Jayne chose gray-and-white Mexican stone and devised a geometric pattern that would pull the room together; his client puzzled out the math to make it fit.

The collaboration went without a hitch—except when the owner, dating again, would bring various girlfriends by to take a look at the

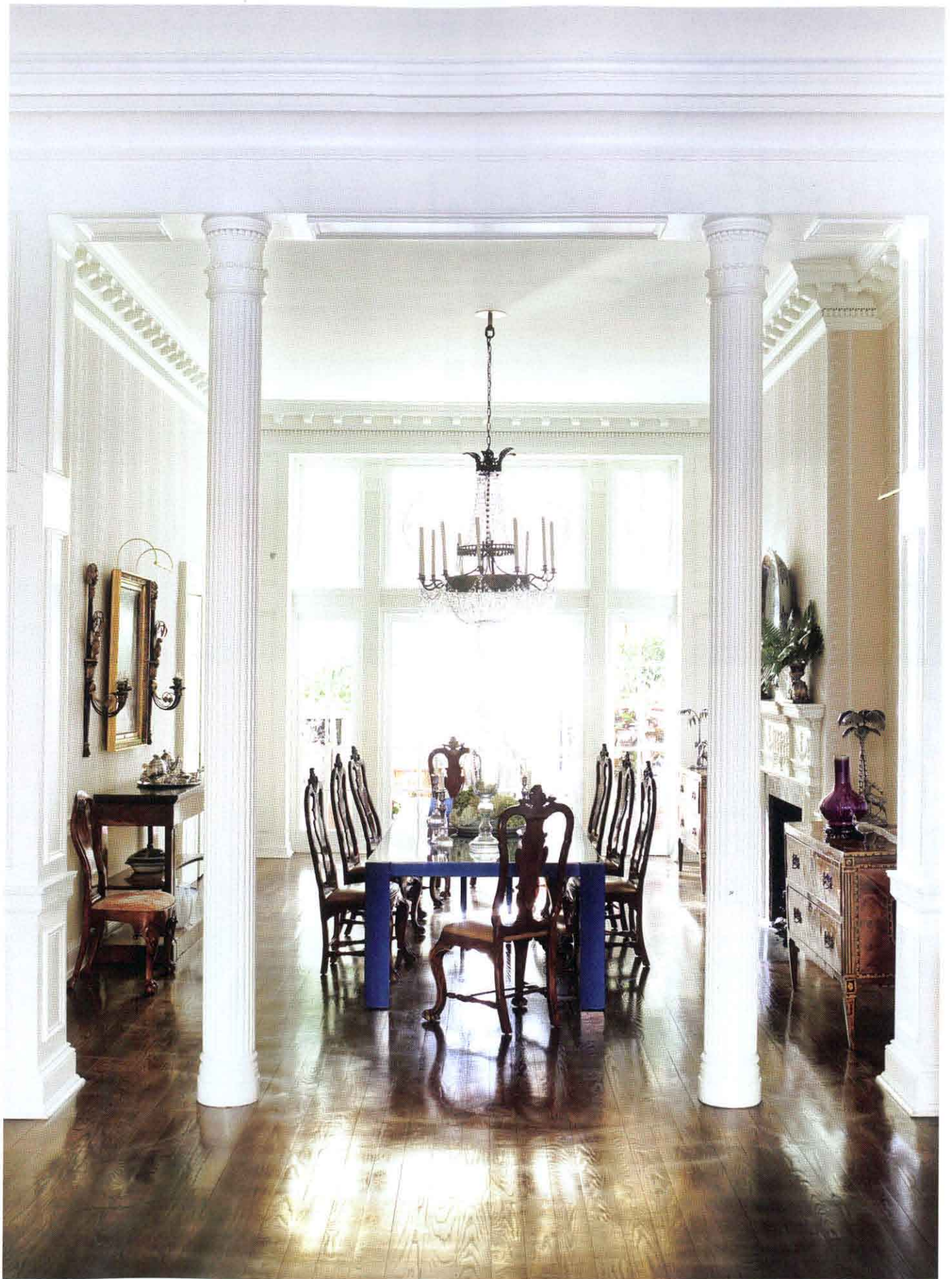
ABOVE, FROM LEFT: An Italian rococo secretary from Foster-Gwin stands in the drawing room. A custom-made runner stripes the staircase. **OPPOSITE:** In the library, French Empire chairs flank an English Regency table. The Samarqand carpet is from Darius Antique Rugs.



THE HISTORY OF THE
TRINITY
OCCURRENCE
ALIVE
AD WORK
THE PAPER

A lacquered Parsons-style table makes a modern statement in the dining room. The Portuguese rococo chairs are from Therien & Co., and the 18th-century marquetry commode (one of a pair) is from Florian Papp; the wall covering is from Claremont. **OPPOSITE:** Fluted columns separate the dining and drawing rooms; the chandelier is Italian Empire.







Jayne could not predict how captivating—and ultimately how healing—the project would turn out to be for his new client.

progress. “They wanted to get their hands in the pie,” he recalls. “Thomas used to say to me, ‘Please don’t bring her back.’”

Jayne had challenges enough as it was. In addition to working around all the structural upgrades, the decorator was trying to synthesize the disparate array of art and antiques collected by the client and his first wife with furnishings acquired from the house’s former owner. There were also strictly sentimental attachments to consider and incorporate, such as a mauve Parsons-style dining table that made the trip in from the suburbs. Freshly lacquered blue to echo the color of the floor in the adjacent entrance hall,

the table now takes its place in the dining room, surrounded by 18th-century Portuguese rococo chairs and set amid neoclassical Italian marquetry commodes, a French Empire console table, and an Italian Empire chandelier. Most unexpected is one of the few touches with local provenance: Hanging over the drawing-room mantel is *The Odalisque*, a circa-1845 oil painting by the Philadelphia portraitist Rembrandt Peale.

By the time the house was completed in 2004, the owner had finally met a woman who passed what could be called the Thomas test. They were married a year later. “She loves this place,” says her husband, pausing. “It’s hard not to love.” □

ABOVE, FROM LEFT: An English Regency mirror and a pair of Marc Chagall drawings are displayed in a guest room. In another bedroom, a Saarinen table by Knoll joins a bed draped in toile de Jouy. **OPPOSITE:** Lined with marble and painted decades ago to resemble a tent, a bath is furnished with a Judi Boisson rug and antique Chinese garden stools.

