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MARYBETH WOODS ARCHITECT
INTERIOR DESIGN / LISA FRIEDMAN,
LISA FRIEDMAN DESIGN
HOME BUILDER / GEORGE DESMOND,
JOHN DESMOND BUILDERS



SERENITY NOW

CALMING NEUTRALS AND WARM
MINIMALISM MAKE FOR A SINGULAR FAMILY
HOME ON THE CONNECTICUT COAST.

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With purity of love comes the fortitude to meet any challenge that life—or an angry goddess—throws your way. That’s the moral behind the ancient tale of Cupid and Psyche. The lovers are the subject of Brazilian artist Vik Muniz’ large-scale work, *Amore et Psyche*, after Francois Gerard—one of the many impressive artworks from around the world that captivate all visitors who enter this Westport, Connecticut, home.

For interior designer Lisa Friedman, the myth’s teachings served as muse and mantra for the entire project: “Its underlying message is that strength and serenity can coexist,” she says. “Design can be quiet and still be powerful.”

It’s a given that most homeowners want their surroundings to be a soothing respite from the outside world, but for this family of four it was paramount. The husband is the founder of an investment firm and the wife is a life coach and grief counselor who often sees clients in her home office. Friedman has worked with the family on other projects over the years, so they knew they could trust her vision to create a calming refuge where they could recharge with their two preteen sons.

The family had fallen in love with a grand European-style manse that oozed old-world charm and had an enviable waterfront location, but it came with a few challenges. Built

in 2008, the house was constructed along the property setback, which was angled on one side toward the coastline, so all of the rooms in the entire left wing were slightly out of square. Friedman enlisted general contractor George Desmond—who worked on the home’s initial build—and architect Marybeth Woods to address the unusual geometry without altering the floor plan. “The existing house was beautiful; we weren’t going to tear it apart, but we did want to change the vibe and update it a bit,” says Woods.

One of the first items on the agenda: Employing clever, sleight-of-hand tricks, such as resetting the recessed lights, to give the rooms the illusion of being more linear. Next, the team pared back features that dated the residence. “Whatever room we touched, we tried to make the details cleaner and crisper,” notes Desmond. Plaster was removed from the ceilings in favor of a flat-painted finish and walls were given a lighter, more modern texture. Simplifying the millwork, updating the staircase and replacing the ornate fireplace mantels with contemporary stone surrounds were small but thoughtful changes that imbued the home with a dramatically different feel. “It wasn’t so much a renovation as a transformation,” Friedman is keen to point out. While the bathrooms were gutted and the kitchen was refreshed, no walls were moved on the first or second floors and the majority of the work was cosmetic.

Above: In this Westport, Connecticut, home, interior designer Lisa Friedman upholstered the same Gregorius I Pineo sofas in different styles “for a more interesting look.” A work by Kim Yongjin presides over a granite fireplace sourced from ABC Stone.

Opposite: Classic meets edgy off the front entry, where Grace Roselli’s *Our Marvelous Punishment 6* brings a feminine energy to a seating area. Reclaimed wood beams and creamy linen wallcoverings by Holland & Sherry set an informal yet elegant tone.

Friedman traversed three states to find the 2-inch thick Italian statuary marble for the kitchen countertops and backsplash. The adjacent breakfast area features an oak David latesta table and linen drapes of a Rogers and Goffigon fabric.

By contrast, the third floor saw the most radical reinvention. “The attic was originally a series of rooms that felt very chopped up,” says Woods. The clients dreamed of having a personal wellness sanctuary that combined a home gym with a meditation area and spa, so Friedman designed the ultimate staycation spot. Removing walls opened up the space and adding a skylight brought in more natural light while increasing the ceiling height. In order to give the walls the kind of patina that one might encounter while on holiday in a historic European villa, Friedman incorporated a Belgian plaster finish in the same gray as the limestone in the bath. She then wrapped the floors of the gym and the meditation area in custom leather tiles in a similar smoky gray. “It’s meticulous work; there are no visible seams, so you can’t see where anything begins or ends,” she says.

With such stunning craftsmanship on display, it made sense to open up the stairwell to the third floor with a custom anodized steel and glass wall. Not only does it allow light from the upper foyer to stream into the spa area, but it also offers sound protection, so time spent meditating or relaxing is mindful and free of interruption.

To unify all three floors, Friedman turned to a timeless neutral palette. Subdued hues lend a calming aura and put the focus on the clients’ growing art collection as well as the home’s tranquil seaside views. Shades of charcoal, platinum gray, creamy oatmeal and snowy white create a luxe cocoon in which understated elegance envelops every room like a soft cashmere wrap.

“The house has a seamless flow, yet each room has its own carefully curated identity,” she says. “At the same time, everything is interchangeable within this house; these pieces could be used in a different way, but still create the same sensibility. You need that connection from room to room to truly establish a sense of Zen.” ■





Above: A custom lighting fixture illuminates the plush second-floor landing. Iraqi artist Halim Al Karim's work *Schizophrenia 7* watches over the stairwell and introduces a jolt of deep indigo to the neutral space.

Opposite: The lounge's intimate bar area was modernized with brushed-bronze Holly Hunt pendants and a new bar top of Brazilian Cote D'Azur marble. "The veining reminded me of branches," Friedman says. "It looked like nature to me."



Texture, light and shadow combine in the restful master retreat, where a four-poster bed by Holly Hunt and a bench by Formations offer comfortable spots to take in the waterfront vista. The new Italian limestone fireplace is a grounding focal point.



Opposite: Custom Edelman leather provides a luxurious covering for the walls and floor of the meditation room. Bleached ash-framed built-ins house various objects intentional to yoga practice and the extra-deep bottom cubby stores mats.

Below: Smoky gray limestone tiles line the spa, while specialty Belgian plaster by Polart Group lends subtle texture to the ceiling. Across from the custom wood vanity featuring a limestone sink, designer Lukas Machnik's monument chair brings the right amount of visual weight to the minimalist sanctuary.



“DESIGN CAN BE QUIET
AND STILL BE POWERFUL.”

—LISA FRIEDMAN

With such a panoramic view of the Long Island Sound, Friedman was mindful of keeping outdoor furnishings low key, evidenced by this quartet of Michael Taylor chaises interspersed with McKinnon & Harris side tables. A pair of classical urns from Michael Taylor anchor the edge of the pool.

