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# (habitat)



## Spatial Elegance

A Berwyn-based designer makes downsizing an art form. *By Tara Behan*

Interior designer Allison Forbes relishes a challenge. So when her clients decided to leave their spacious 7,500-square-foot house in Bryn Mawr for a much cozier 4,600-square-foot carriage home in the Hermitage community, they called on the president of Forbes Design Consultants in Berwyn to assist in the transition. Forbes had already established a great rapport with the couple over the last several years, so she gladly accepted her twofold mission—to renovate the 19-year-old space in

a way that would suit her clients' lifestyle while highlighting their extensive collection of art and antiques.

It was no easy undertaking. Given the dramatic reduction in square footage, it was virtually impossible to fit everything the couple owned into the new space. They had to prioritize. Forbes cataloged all the art and antiques, many of them acquired during years of worldwide travel. The only rule for inclusion in the new home: Both clients *continued on page 58*

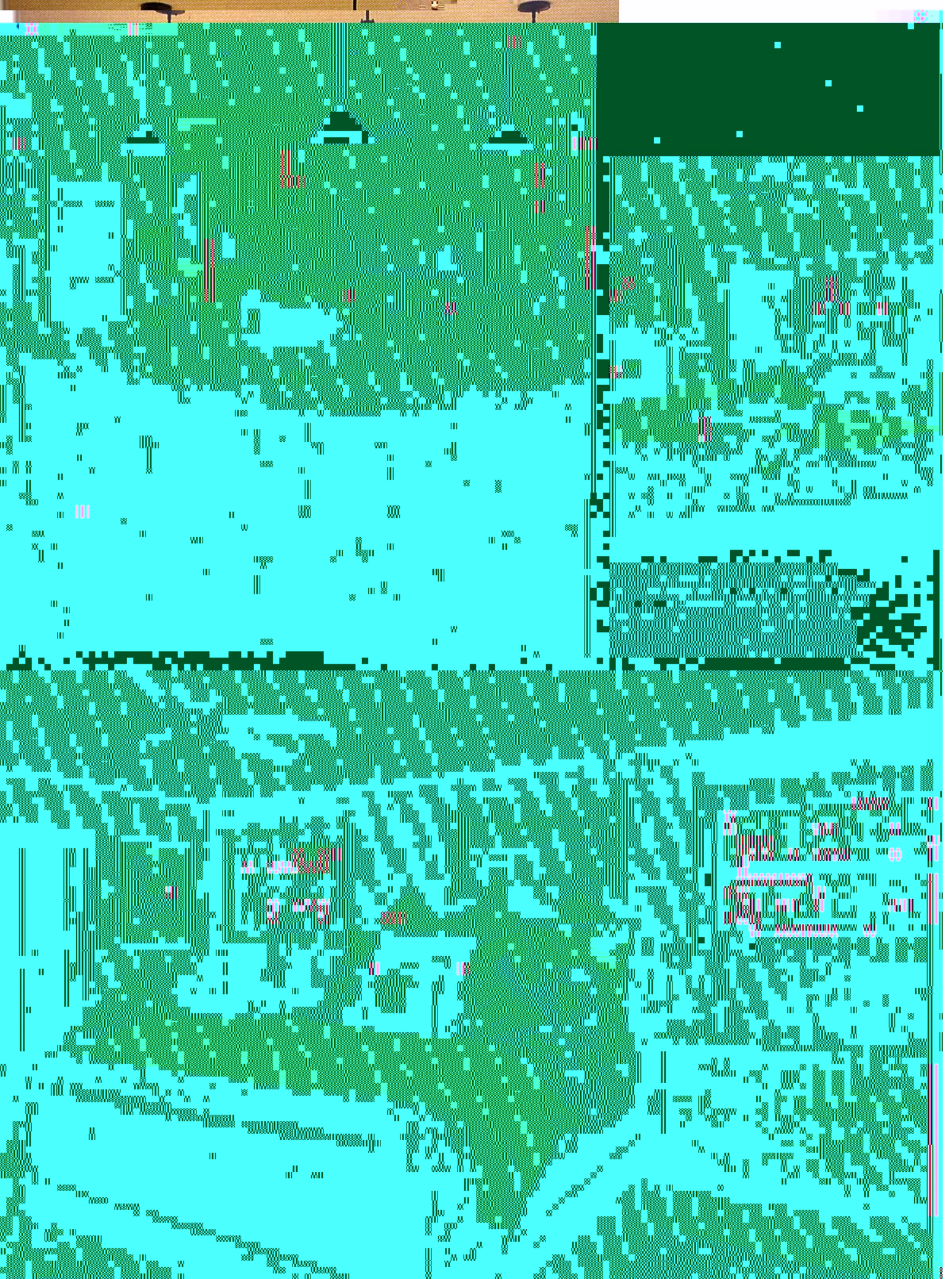
## (resources)

**interior designer** Allison Forbes,  
Forbes Design Consultants,  
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**builder** William Thornton General  
Contractors, 1229 Fairview Ave.,  
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**antiques** from the homeowners'  
personal collection







habitat continued from page 54

had to love it. "Their collection is incredible," says Forbes. "The placement of artwork was critical."

As Forbes mapped out the collection and lighting plan, she made sure the homeowners' top picks were featured prominently. She also had to decide what pieces worked best grouped together and which were better on their own.

"It's trial and error laying out a collection like this," Forbes says. "Some of the pieces were very important, so they had to take priority in certain rooms. There was a lot of different ways to come up with the layout."

After some last-minute tweaks, the collection came together with amazing results. Upon entering the home's front door, one is greeted by a serigraph of Renoir's *Les Enfants*. Step into the living room, and resting on an antique easel is one of Jamie Wyeth's famed portraits of Russian dancer Rudolf Nureyev, not far from a Michael Kessler reproduction of a Frank Lloyd Wright glass table. Across the hall in the study, a piece by geometric abstract artist Victor Vasarely joins prints

from Nelda Pieper and Mary Cassatt, and a paper relief of a nude by Frank Gallo has prominent placement on a kitchen wall.

The homeowners wanted the Renoir as the main focal point, so Forbes chose a spot close to the most popular room in the house—the kitchen. The location is also at the head of a 50-foot-long gallery leading to the master bedroom. "The hallway gallery was the most difficult to put together," Forbes confides.

Her goal was to assemble related pieces (a series of sketches by British artist Lynn Chadwick) on one side and display unrelated work (such as Edward Manet's *Mistress*) on the other. As an unexpected touch, Forbes used cobbled limestone on the floor to give the sensation of strolling through a European gallery. At the end of the hall, a leaded-glass door (another Kessler creation) conceals an oversized dumbwaiter used mostly to transport clothes from the first-floor master bedroom to the upstairs storage area. "Anything can go in the dumbwaiter—except for grandchildren and dogs," jokes one of the homeowners.

### SERIOUS CREDENTIALS

Forbes' reach as an interior designer goes beyond the Main Line. In February of this year, her work on the 40th-floor penthouse at The Setai hotel in Miami's South Beach earned her acclaim in the international interior design magazine *Wallpaper*, which named it the best suite in the world. The space belongs to one of Forbes' Main Line clients. She designed the 6,500-square-foot interior of the penthouse—which also includes a 3,000-square-foot rooftop terrace with infinity pool—in an Asian-influenced, contemporary style.

The ultra-luxurious suite commands a nightly rate of \$25,000, making it one of the most expensive hotel rooms in the United States. Attracting such Hollywood superstars as Beyoncé and Jamie Foxx, it was also the scene for numerous parties at 2005's MTV Video Music Awards. "This was definitely a dream project," says Forbes, who admits she hasn't stayed there herself. "I have an open invite; I just haven't had the time to get down there."

Back in Bryn Mawr, Forbes had plenty to keep her busy. Remodeling the dated carriage home for contemporary living was a necessity, and extensive water damage lent urgency to the project. Since adding onto the home was against com-

munity covenants, she had to work with the existing space. The original kitchen had three separate rooms; Forbes made it one large space. "We had to accommodate a lot of different functions and needs with this kitchen," says Forbes.

Now it's also a place for eating and entertaining, as the home has no formal dining room. Appliances are hidden behind cream cabinetry finished with a soft yellow glaze—subtle colors that complement the rich Santos mahogany floor. A massive granite-topped island infused with yellow, gray and black doubles as a seating area for informal dinners and a buffet during parties. "People gravitate to the island when they're in the kitchen," Forbes says.

A handmade, 19th-century five-leaf table designates the dining portion of the kitchen. A floor-to-ceiling display case doubles as a china cabinet; the homeowners stumbled upon it during a visit to the University of Pennsylvania, rescuing it from the trash. Inside is a whimsical collection of MacKenzie-Childs china, along with an impressive array of hand-painted antique Quimper pottery from France.

Steps lead from the kitchen to an additional culinary nook on the lower level. Adding another kitchen was a last-minute decision made by the homeowners, who wanted the freedom to cook just for their grandchildren at family dinners. The deep cherry-wood tones of the mission-style cabinetry give the second kitchen a different feel from its Old World counterpart upstairs. Black granite tops the counters, and colorful tiles from Portugal and Doylestown's Mercer Museum frame the space between the cabinets and the counters. An antique knotty-pine farm table from the early 1800s is used for prepping food, and wide plank cherry floors provide warmth.

A gorgeous African rosewood dining table is surrounded by chairs handmade in a Frank Lloyd Wright style from the same material by a craftsman from the University of Pennsylvania. An antique library card catalog is the perfect divider between the kitchen/dining area and the lower-level living area—wide enough to separate the spaces yet short enough to allow unobstructed views of either space.

### PRICELESS SOUVENIRS

The carriage home's lower-level living area is filled with pieces amassed by the home-





**MEGA-MIAMI:** Allison Forbes' work on the extravagant penthouse in The Setai hotel (above) earned the Berwyn interior designer international acclaim.

owners. A material cradle from Turkey acts as a table cover; camel bags from India are draped as throws over the leather sectional; and an antique farm scale from the 1800s serves as a coffee table.

The décor in the master-bedroom suite revolves around a majestic Ralph Lauren sleigh bed with leather headboard and footboard and a massive mirrored Louie

XIV armoire from 18th-century France. Framed American Indian rugs hang on either side of the bed.

Forbes reconfigured a nearby sunroom into a dressing area and used the space left over to enlarge the adjoining master bathroom. The deep woods in the bedroom inspired Forbes' use of mahogany cabinetry in the bathroom. "We wanted a

masculine feel with the darker wood," she says. "A lot of the details—like the leopard rug—are more feminine."

While much of the carriage home's transformation might seem like Forbes' doing, she encouraged her clients to get involved—and they rose to the challenge. "I wanted the house to be a representation of them," she says. **MLT**