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For Art's Sake

A Vienna remodel fits its art collection like a glove.

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WHEN REFLECTING ON THE 2018-2019 REDESIGN OF their longtime Vienna house, homeowners Brock and Stuart Lending playfully ask: “Do you know the children’s book *If You Give a Moose a Muffin?*” For the couple, a pair of avid art collectors, the graphic visuals of the moose, who ended up with more than a muffin, proved irresistible. “That really is the best way to describe the project,” the Lendings say. “It all started with wanting to add an office/library over the garage, now that our kids are gone and living elsewhere. That led to ‘maybe we should move the laundry room upstairs, as we’re tearing up that space,’ and the next thing we knew we had an evolving list of ‘well, as long as everything is torn up anyway...’”

The Lendings have lived in the four-bedroom, 3,300-square-foot, Colonial-style house, circa 1985, for 25 years. They raised their two children here and accumulated much of their formidable art collection while in this home. It’s not surprising that they decided to redesign their house, rather than move, hoping to realize a new vision for their forever home.

“Once we decided to retire here, eventually, our focus was to create a space where we could relax, but also be able to host extended family holidays and weekend get-togethers,” say the Lendings. “We also wanted to be able to enjoy our artwork by having it naturally incorporated into our home versus having it be ‘displayed.’”

Falls Church-based architect Mark Coupard of Coupard Architects & Builders came on board in the summer of 2018. Groundbreaking was in the fall of that year, and Vienna-based interior designer Charlene Kennerknecht of Monarch Design was retained in early 2019 to help create



Brock and Stuart Lending. From left: Wall panels and art glass; food-themed works in the dining room.

a cohesive design and plan for placing the art.

“In this home, our clients’ love of art added a layer to everything we did,” says architect Coupard of the extensive remodel. The project included the office/library addition, redesigning the entire basement, adding a powder room, creating a laundry room, and transforming the once-dated brick fireplace into a more contemporary stone and wood one in the family room on the open main floor plan. “We also upgraded finishes and trim, and added built-in cabinetry and a lighting system to highlight the extensive art collection.” Coupard pauses and adds, “Ultimately, we enabled the homeowners to bring their art out of storage and enjoy it in a much more conducive setting.”

Meanwhile, interior designer Charlene Kennerknecht saw her role as “helping the homeowners with the myriad of decisions given to them by the architect and builder; most important was to help them rehang and display their 193-piece collection of art, which includes paintings and sculptures.”

“We did learn an important lesson, which is if you’re going to have multiple teams involved, they should all be involved from the start,” say the Lendings, sharing hard-learned lessons. “We were initially so focused on the ‘big picture’ that we didn’t consider the interior design aspects until the project was well underway. Bringing in a new voice and vision did cause some redesign and reworking, with added time and cost, but of course, we loved every feature that Charlene added to the project. We’d just have brought her in sooner if we’d understood the process better.”

Kennerknecht designed a beautiful, serene home setting to showcase the art. “Our palette was neutral with a thread of blue throughout,” she says of selecting a fitting backdrop for both artworks and traditional, yet unfussy, furnishings.

“The library became a special space, where I worked with the architect to cre-





ate wall-to-wall built-ins to properly house and display the homeowners' collections of books and artifacts from around the world," she adds.

Tucked beneath eaves, the library features a cozy window seat, a comfortable sofa for lounging and watching TV, and a desk for working at home. It also takes full advantage of its elevated site with large windows overlooking Clarks Crossing Park's woodland views, which extend out from the back of the house located on what Coupard calls a "pipe-stem" lot.

The parklands are a big attraction for the Lendings, who are avid bird-watchers. According to Kennerknecht, "There are more than 30 birdfeeders scattered about their property and in the adjacent woods." She adds, "The home is all about their art and birdwatching, and gatherings with friends and family for board games and dinner parties."

When designing the public living spaces, Kennerknecht divided the family room into three distinct areas based on the Lendings' favorite activities. "I created a bird watching area with a pair of armed spindle chairs on castors, perfect for looking into the backyard but able to turn into the seating area for larger gatherings," she says. "The comfy sofa is angled toward the new fireplace, and there is also a game table in the front part of the house. All three areas have easy-to-move chairs and ottomans for maximum flexibility."

Never shy to designate experts as needed, Kennerknecht brought in art design consultant Taffy Millar to help sort through and purposefully hang the Lendings' art collection, which had been waiting in storage during the remodel.

"When Charlene mentioned my name, of course, the Lendings knew me, as they had been longtime customers of my now-closed frame shop," says Millar. She suggested reframing some pieces to either better fit with the home's fresh décor or coordinate more smoothly with surrounding art. "The Lendings' collection is eclectic, consisting largely of contemporary and modern pieces. They also have some favorite artists whose works are featured more extensively in the collection," she adds.

Even to the untrained eye, the art in the home flows smoothly and logically. The dining room and kitchen feature works relevant to food and drink, while the elegant formal living room contains more traditional pieces, with respect to subject matter and picture framing. In the family room, there are lively bursts of color and form.

"Most important was to help the Lendings rehang and display their 193-piece collection of art, which includes paintings and sculptures."

—Interior designer Charlene Kennerknecht





Clockwise from top left: Built-in bookshelves in the library; the living room is home to more formal works; the fireplace was rebuilt in a modern style; a neutral palette allows the art to shine; food-themed works hang in the breakfast nook; library.



“In general, we grouped paintings by the same artist together, with similar if not identical framing,” says Millar. “Since artists often stick to the same palette or style, this is both logical and pleasing to the eye. Much of the collection also has a consistency in style and color, so unifying the overall look was not difficult once we got going. For the standalone pieces, we found spots on landings or in alcoves. There is no wasted wall space in this house!”

The house and its art came together piece by piece and frame by frame. Creating order from the chaos of artworks laid out on the floor or propped on the walls was rewarding for both Kennerknecht and the Lendings. “The house is now not just lovely, but it is comfortable and inviting. With all of the art, the house could be intimidating or feel forced; instead it just draws you in,” say the Lendings. “Having our art in storage for a year was rough for us. Having everything back up in their new locations with proper lighting in such a beautiful setting is like seeing them fresh for the first time.”



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