

Makeover Magician

BARBARA EBERLEIN



Center City showplace combines 18th century design with modern romance

BY SUSAN PEVAROFF BERSCHLER
PHOTOS BY DAVID GEHOSKY

This is a story about a marriage.

It's about a wedding of the intuitive to the technical — the emotional to the intellectual. Joining these forces successfully is the ultimate goal of any creative design process, says Barbara Eberlein, of Eberlein Design Consultants Limited, in Center City. "If you've done all of the information gathering and you've been a scholar of the kinds of rooms that you want to recreate, then you can combine (the research) with an intuitive feeling about what you're after and produce beautiful environments that look like they've always been there."

And so it was that Eberlein teamed with architect Spence Kass of Kass and Associates, and transformed what she laughingly calls her clients' "empty concrete box of an apartment" into a magnificent Rittenhouse Square showplace. The final result is infused with historical references, painstaking architectural detail and a spirit she calls "unabashedly 18th century Continental."

Balancing Act

The home also turned out to be the perfect union of masculine and feminine, and a celebration of the combined tastes of the man and woman who live there. When asked if they wanted to share the design experience, both responded with a fervent “I do.” From the get-go it was he said, she said and Eberlein listened carefully. “As we moved through the house, I would do this for her, that for him. We were looking for balance, balance, balance,” says Eberlein. “That way you get a proper combination of both their spirits ... and you’re using forms in furniture that complement each other and make the aesthetic message more coherent.”

For example, in the dining room, the designer offset the very feminine 19th century Louis XV chandelier with a punchy color palette. “This would be a very different room in petal pink,” Eberlein points out.

In the living room, Eberlein indulged the masculine choice of a really bold striped sofa fabric. “I might not have picked that for her, but it was absolutely right for him, so we used it and put feminine touches around it,” she explains.

Comfortable Formality

The large, grand living room expresses a comfortable formality. Eberlein divided the oversized space into several cozy seating areas to better facilitate intimate gatherings. All the furniture is constructed for cushy comfort.

The stricter sense of 18th century formality was applied to the perimeter walls in the elaborate window treatments that surround the room. In this way, Eberlein says, “you imply the flavor of the space, but use comfortable seating. That’s how you get the blend that is the most appealing.”

Technical Artistry

The window treatments are a key example of the technical artistry that became critical to the process. Eberlein’s first hurdle was heating elements that popped out of the wall underneath each window and would interrupt any significant drapery design. Her solution: Build the entire wall forward. Instead of seeing heating units jutting out, you see recessed window boxes that mimic the look of a much older, grander building. This structural adaptation allowed Eberlein to pursue a more complex drapery design and inspired her to pull another rabbit out of her design hat. She combined pairs of windows and treated them as one. That way, she explains, “Instead of a lot of little individual messages, you get expansiveness that amplifies the magnificent views all around. Our goal was to increase the grandeur of the space by improving all of those proportions.”

The magic act continued as Eberlein waved her wand and turned “unhappy necessities” — concrete pillars — into graceful archways to create expressive punctuation between the living room and the foyer. Groin vaulting a 9-foot ceiling creates the illusion of much greater height and lends a palatial feel in the transitional space.

The idea came to Eberlein one sleepless night while she thumbed through a book about the great country houses of central Europe. She came across a gorgeous palace with a complex arched ceiling and thought, “Eureka, this is it! If only we could do something this beautiful and detailed.” She was entranced by the movement and romanticism of the concept — and undaunted by the fact that ceiling in the photograph was 14 feet high.

Opposite: A false wall creates recessed windows and camouflages heating elements. Elaborate window treatments gracefully frame fabulous views.



A vaulted ceiling overhead and classic marble design underfoot give the foyer a palatial feel.



Hand-woven Italian fabric adds romance to the oversized 18th-century American bed.

"This approach is reserved for enormous buildings with arches spanning huge spaces," points out Eberlein. "By modifying the concept for our lower ceiling, we could imply that the ceiling was incredibly important." When her clients came to Eberlein with a similar photograph, Eberlein knew they were on the same wavelength. Kass' vote made it unanimous, and inspiration became reality. "We had our fingers crossed ... but it worked." The classic marble designs underfoot reinforce the ceiling's carefully crafted detail.

You don't have to venture far into the apartment to find the flawless fusion of imagination and technology. In fact, you just have to step off the elevator. Faced with a front door/elevator door that opened almost directly into a wall — and a hallway that seemed like an endless bowling alley — Eberlein conceived another problem-solving design scheme. This time she carved out a visually exciting entryway by breaking up the hallway with a backlit fountain. It's a ruse that makes you feel like the outdoors is just on the other side — a pretty neat trick considering you're on an upper floor of a high rise. "It's a total lie, but it works," laughs Eberlein.

Romance Still Reigns

There are no illusions in the master suite, just romance pure and simple, from the hand-woven Italian fabric on the oversized 18th century American bed, to the taupe and rose marble master bath that boasts a magnificent city view from the tub.

This is actually the second joint décor adventure for Eberlein's clients. The first took place early in the couple's relationship. Eberlein's original client was halfway through decorating another apartment in the same building when he met his wife-to-be. While her arrival on the scene altered the outcome of the contemporary bachelor pad design, this time they were a team from start to finish. The goal was to create a glamorous yet inviting living space — a little "palace in the sky" that would welcome family and friends with its warmth and comfort.

It's a direct reflection of their personalities and a tangible expression of their love for each other.

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Susan Pevaroff Berschler is the editor of Home & Design.



Trick of the Trade

from Makeover Magician
Barbara Eberlein

Mirrors are one of my favorite things. People always ask me to mirror the walls so everything will look bigger, but it's not that simple.

First of all, try to give the mirror something to sit back into — some architecture in front of it.

Then study and test what the mirror is going to be reflecting. Don't put a mirror across from something that is inherently unattractive. The result will be doubly unattractive. Think about what you're going to see.

If you're going to put mirrors across from each other, use good-quality materials to eliminate the fun-house effect and think about that double message you're getting. If it's done properly it'll provide tremendous depth and the ability to make those walls disappear in a way that nothing else can.

Resources

- Interior Designer
Eberlein Design Consultants Limited
Center City
215-790-0300
- Dining Room
Table and Chairs: Trouvailles
Area Rug: Renaissance Carpet
- Foyer
Alcove and Entry Light: Greens Lighting
Demi Lunes: Antique Showcase
Sconces: Nesle



- Living Room
Sofa Frames: Avery Boardman
Sofa Fabric: Quadrille
Moldings: Decorator Supply
Mirrors: Friedman Bros.
Ottoman: Charlotte Moss
Fabric: Scalamandre
Cocktail Table: Collection Reproduction
- Master Bath
Marble: Norwegian Rose Marble
- Master Bedroom
Bedding Fabric with Trim: Scalamandre
Bench: Farges
- Master Sitting Room
Cocktail Table: Lewis Mittman
Lounge Chair: Baker
Sofa Fabric: Brunswick & Fils
Drapery Fabric: Old World Weavers

Entry-way fountain is back-lit to give the illusion that the outdoors is just on the other side.

