



# Social Study



In the Chicago suburbs, a convivial family home is **reimagined with intoxicating color**, wild florals, and a sweeping two-story library—secret doors included.

INTERIOR DESIGN BY **SUMMER THORNTON** • ARCHITECTURE BY **HEIDI LIGHTNER ARCHITECTS**  
LANDSCAPE DESIGN BY **CRAIG BERGMANN LANDSCAPE DESIGN** • PHOTOGRAPHY BY **THOMAS LOOF**  
STYLING BY **MIEKE TEN HAVE** • WRITTEN BY **CELIA BARBOUR**



**PREVIOUS SPREAD, FROM LEFT:** Nearly 2,000 books, curated by bookseller Kinsey Marable, line the shelves of the hand-cerused European white oak-paneled library. ♦ Black-and-honey rattan chairs (Paolo Moschino) and “peanut-butter-and-jelly” zellige floor tiles (Mosaic Factory) lend a playful spirit to the breakfast conservatory. **BELOW, FROM LEFT:** A foliage-laden mudroom hall offers a verdant welcome. Mirror, Michael-Cleary. ♦ Andy Warhol’s *Sitting Bull*, a nod to the homeowner’s American Indian heritage, presides over the library’s neoclassical cabinet. **OPPOSITE:** Hammered metal sconces (Soane) ascend the stair hall’s botanical de Gournay wallpaper.



## Every new house comes with surprises, traditions tweaked, leaps of faith.

In the case of a new suburban residence outside of Chicago, the first twist was the owners’ decision to build it at all. They’d initially contacted designer Summer Thornton to help plan an addition to their existing home. “They wanted to freshen things up,” Thornton says of the clients she had worked with on prior projects. However, the addition they had in mind was an ambitious two-story library—something the husband had longed for since childhood. “It looked odd to tack the library on to the existing house,” says architect Heidi Lightner, whose firm was hired to draw up the plan. So she approached the

clients with a proposal: “If you really want to do this right,” she told them, “you should design a new house around the library.” They said, “OK, let’s do it!”

Yet their lot was fairly small, and they didn’t want to move. The wife had grown up in Chicago, and most of her relatives still live nearby; her twin sister’s backyard even abuts hers. “I have a huge, close-knit family,” she says. “Eight siblings, lots of nieces and nephews, three grown kids.” Last year for Thanksgiving, she hosted 52 people for dinner.

Turns out the couple’s next-door neighbor was happy to sell. So they merged the two properties and disassembled

ANDY WARHOL, *SITTING BULL*, 1986. © 2024 THE ANDY WARHOL FOUNDATION FOR THE VISUAL ARTS, INC./LICENSED BY ARTIST’S RIGHTS SOCIETY (ARS), NEW YORK.







OPPOSITE: SALVADOR DALLI, ANACARDIUM RECORDANS, 1960s; © 2024 SALVADOR DALLI, FUNDACIÓ GALA-SALVADOR DALLI, ARTISTS RIGHTS SOCIETY; ROBERT RICHTER, GARDEN OF EDEN, 2010, COURTESY OF THE DAVID BARNETT GALLERY, MILWAUKEE, WI.



### Patterns at Play

**ABOVE, FROM LEFT:** A sitting room's olive lacquered walls become an electrifying backdrop for blood orange mohair (fabric, Holly Hunt), a skirted banquette (fabric, Décors Barbares), and a 1960s Salvador Dalí lithograph. • Brunswick & Fils' Menars II sets the primary bedroom abloom in soft apricot and spring green. When the evening light shines through the bed's diaphanous silk curtains, "they take on an ethereal, golden-hour vibe," says Thornton. Antique Swedish chests serve as bedside tables. **BELOW:** In the knotty pine-wrapped family room, cranberry red stripes, a vintage zebra stool, and a late 18th-century Ukrainian needlepoint rug converse around an ebony-finished oak coffee table (Dowel), "with a shelf underneath to hold all the books," adds Thornton. Chandelier, The Urban Electric Co. Artwork (right), Robert Richter. **OPPOSITE:** In the wife's study, pink plaid walls recall Gloria Vanderbilt's Southampton bedroom from 1972, while the hand-painted trim replicates a Bloomsbury design from the group's 1910s English farmhouse. Desk chair, Niermann Weeks







the houses stud by stud, reusing almost every element and donating the kitchens to Habitat for Humanity.

The new house was laid out to support the unique requirements of the clients' lives: Both husband and wife have demanding careers, traveling nearly one-third of the year, in addition to family and social commitments. Its aesthetics, meanwhile, addressed their different sensibilities. "The husband is quite formal and bold, the wife more casual and cozy," says Thornton, "so we wanted to create this grand shell and then interject color, pattern, and softness."

Lightner drew up plans for an oversize, skylit stair hall, for example, that could double as space for entertaining. "A dining room large enough to seat 50 people would look ridiculous in a house," says Thornton. Instead, tables can be set up in the hall for large gatherings. The space's sweeping staircase, herringbone floors, and dramatic marble door casings satisfy the husband's wish for grandeur, while the oversize de Gournay botanical-print wallpaper reflects the wife's more whimsical sensibility. "It's slightly tongue-in-cheek," says Thornton of the paper. "You'd typically see that kind of print in a sunroom or garden room. In the hall, it becomes a foil to the formality."

Meanwhile, the dining room was free to become an intimate, romantic space, with delicate floral-print wall-covering and upholstery, a grand piano, a Rococo console, and a handsome fireplace. Also defying convention



Portuguese tiles frame windows above the kitchen's sea green quartzite backsplash and counter. Cooking island and hood, Officine Gullo. Stools, Soane. LEFT: A rainbow of porcelain and glassware collections shines in the aptly named Great Hall of China. Lantern, Vaughan





“WE WANTED TO CREATE THIS GRAND SHELL AND THEN INTERJECT COLOR, PATTERN, AND SOFTNESS.”

—INTERIOR DESIGNER SUMMER THORNTON

is the home’s lack of a proper living room. “We never used ours when I was growing up,” says the wife. Rather, a spacious family room sits between the kitchen and the wife’s office so she can stay connected to family comings and goings even while at her desk working.

As for the library, the spark that ignited this whole project, it’s the realization of a lifelong dream for the husband. “I’ve loved reading from a very early age,” he says. “And I’m a tactile guy; I prefer books to a screen.” Lightner’s team reviewed more than 300 shop drawings related to detail and coordination to design the complexities of the space, which features not only hand-turned banisters, a custom-crafted colored-glass laylight, and pivoting bookcase secret doors but also a state-of-the-art ventilation system that allows the client and his friends to smoke cigars to their hearts’ content without so much as a whiff of odor escaping.

Thornton eschewed traditional brown-leather furnishings in this room, instead introducing a magnificent orange

mohair velvet sofa edged in bouillon and fringe, then flanking it with a pair of plum-leather chairs. Armchairs by the desk are done in a floral cut-pile velvet. None are typical “library” design choices, but the client doesn’t mind. “Florals and color lift your soul,” he says. Adds Thornton, “He’s really joyful when it comes to decorating.” A Warhol print of *Sitting Bull* is a nod to his American Indian ancestry; his great-great-grandmother was pure Cherokee.

In a city known for its punishing weather, maybe the house’s most defiant gesture is its embrace of the outdoors, with large casement windows and steel-and-glass doors in nearly every room overlooking the lush surrounding gardens, designed by Craig Bergmann Landscape Design. In warm months, flowers explode from every bed. But the clients often find the cold, stormy seasons just as beguiling. “We moved in in winter,” recalls the wife. “That first night, I woke up, came downstairs, and sat in the dark conservatory. Icy rain was beating on the ceiling, yet my feet were on the warm floor. It was magical.” ♦



## Flourishing Escapes

**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:** A spirited mélange of patterns, from the bed’s ochre check to the walls’ 18th-century-inspired flowering vines (both by Pierre Frey), meets in a guest bedroom. ♦ Cane-paneled evergreen cabinetry (painted Benjamin Moore’s Martha’s Vineyard) wraps the receiving room. ♦ An alabaster chandelier (Charles Edwards) hangs above a copper soaking tub in the primary bathroom. Runner, Chairish. ♦ The garden’s riot of colorful blooms alludes to the palette awaiting inside. **OPPOSITE:** A tented lounge’s velvet banquette (fabric, Liberty), under the eye of Slim Aarons’s *Dali’s Party* photograph, is an enticing perch for a nightcap.