

# SOPHISTICATED LIVING

{Chicago's Finest}



# Great Expectations

The unlikely mix of feng shui and farmhouse gives balance to a family home in Lincolnshire.

*By Amalie Drury*

*Photography by Anthony Tahlier*

Only twice in his 30-year career has Chicago interior designer Anthony Michael wanted to cry. “Once was the first time I sat in the driveway and looked at this house,” says Michael of the remodel he recently completed on a large, quasi-Georgian home in suburban Lincolnshire. Built in 1991, the hulking white structure was what Michael describes as the “ugly stepchild” in a leafy enclave of gracious, traditional Normandy- and Country French-style homes. Spoiler alert: “Now it’s the star of the neighborhood,” he says.

The homeowners, a chemist and a medical device inventor with a teenage son, were moving to Lincolnshire for the top-rated schools. Of Chinese descent, they intended to house three generations in the home—including the wife’s parents, who are in their 80s—and entertain on a large scale, inviting between 20 to 40 family members and friends over at a time. “What this house did have going for it was volume,” says Michael, “so it had the potential to be a gem.”

Soon after his cringe-worthy first impression of the 5,400-square-foot house, Michael rose to the challenge. “I thought maybe it would be cool with a new roof,” he says. So he tore off the faded old shingles in favor of a standing-seam steel roof in lead-coated copper. “All of the sudden we had character—it started to take on the look of a modern farmhouse.” Playing up the scale of the house worked in its favor, too—huge planters filled with colorful blooms and a large motor court helped balance the home’s tendency to appear out of place in its surroundings.

When it came to the interior, the homeowners came to the table with several specific ideas. “It was very dated, so we wanted to bring it up to current trend,” says the wife. “We especially wanted to open up the floor plan, do something more interesting with the plain fireplace and knock out the drywall that encased the curved staircase.” Additional priorities: a kitchen big enough for everyone to cook together, a spa-like master bath and a place for their son to entertain friends—all to be achieved with particular attention paid to the safety of products used in the renovation.



In the grand foyer, Anthony Michael Interior Design's custom staircase was fabricated by Iron & Wire using both polished and brushed steel.





Above the stacked soapstone fireplace, Anthony Michael commissioned a three-dimensional piece of art in the style of American sculptor Louise Nevelson.



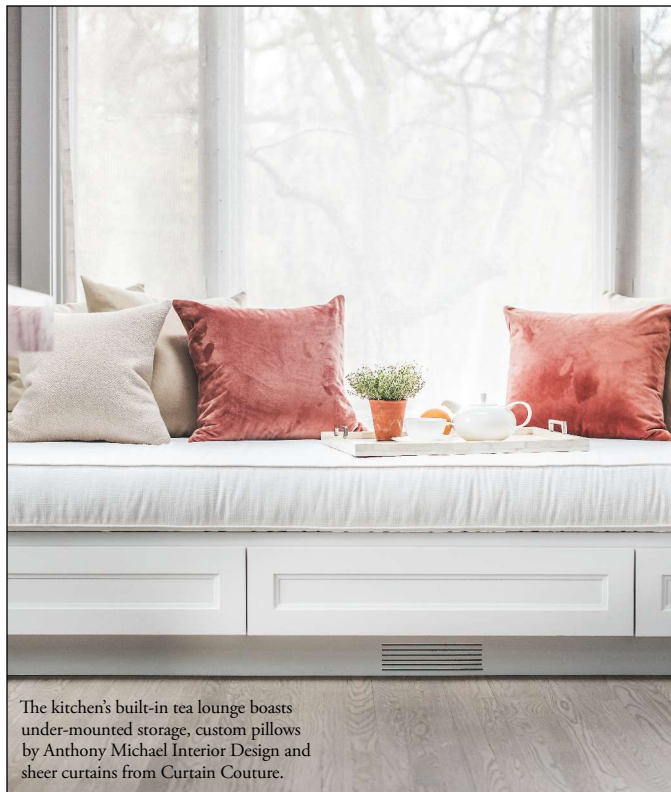
The first-floor powder room features a mirror by Arteriors, wall covering by Maya Romanoff, a custom floating vanity by Anthony Michael Interior Design and an onyx sink with GRAFF fixture.



“The wife, as a chemist, was very much aware that she wanted to avoid anything that implied safety or allergen concerns,” says Michael. And with no polyurethane, VOCs or radiation-attracting agents allowed, he stumbled upon one of the project’s biggest breakthroughs. In search of a way to achieve a warm gray finish for the oak floors, Michael read about a technique he’d never tried before: French fumé, which involves using a natural solvent that causes the tannins in the wood to change color. Michael found a Chicago-based European craftsman through C&C Hardwood Flooring who specializes in the process. “You couldn’t have asked for a nicer, more natural finish,” Michael says. “The beauty of the wood really shines through, and you don’t have any of that yellow cast you sometimes get when you try to do gray floors.”

The modern, light-filled kitchen was another particular triumph of the project. Two sets of Dornbracht faucets were installed to help accommodate up to four cooks at a time, Sub-Zero and Wolf appliances were carefully positioned, and the new white Calacatta marble island is so vast “you could land a plane on it,” Michael says. Since Chinese cuisine often involves chopping many ingredients and high-heat cooking, the homeowners were focused on easy cleanup, so Michael steered clear of tile and grout and instead opted for a single, seamless piece of glass as the backsplash. Delicate cherry blossom branches were painted on the backside of the glass behind the stove as a nod to Chinese culture, with the added bonus of adding an element of unexpected visual interest to the sleek space. By the breakfast nook, texture was added in the form of a grass wall covering from Maya Romanoff and sheer curtains courtesy of Curtain Couture.







The white Calacatta marble island is so large "you could land a plane on it," says interior designer Anthony Michael. Custom sink by Abbaka, faucets by Dornbracht





Cookie, the family's Goldendoodle, taking a break on a sheepskin rug in the master bedroom. Commissioned artwork by Steven Hettrich, French fumé-treated oak floors by C&C Hardwood Flooring



A sliding shoji screen reveals a tea service station in the master (think Sub-Zero refrigerated drawers, glass mosaic tiles and free-floating shelves).




Also for the master, Anthony Michael commingled a writing desk, draperies in a silvery brocade, a custom floor-to-ceiling headboard and large-scale photographic art.





An initial directive from the homeowners for a super modern, all-white interior was steered by Michael toward an aesthetic that incorporates a range of neutral tones to help warm up the look and provide a sense of contrast. To that end, Chicago artist Steven Hettrich was commissioned to create three original artworks to add further color and dimension to the home: a large Impressionistic-style painting for the dining room, a Cubist-style painting for the library and a massive, three-dimensional piece to anchor the wall over the living-room fireplace. And Michael took special care to arrange the statement-making furniture and accessories, the majority of which are custom, in the fashion of feng shui, the Chinese philosophical system of harmonizing one's environment.

The centerpiece of the house, the curved staircase formerly enclosed by drywall, is now open and airy with its new stainless-steel railing. An upstairs catwalk, previously a hallway enclosed by even more drywall, now overlooks the dramatic double-height living room and offers an additional vantage point for views of the back terrace and protected wetlands that extend beyond the home's backyard. And the couple's son got his hangout space and then some: The basement boasts heated tile floors, a billiards table, a tricked-out wet bar and a home gym.

Now comfortably installed in their reimagined space, the owners profess they're thrilled with the transformation. "We love everything about it," says the wife. "Anthony really understands us." And according to Michael, the rest of the neighborhood has taken notice, too. "People who live on the street have stopped me to say, 'Wow, what a difference.'" 

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