

SOPHISTICATED LIVING



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CURIOUS COLLECTORS



Rich paneling surrounds the stone mantel in the living room. Behind the barrel chair on the left is a spiraled Narwhal tusk, the sight of which inspired the legend of the unicorn in ancient times. Next to the armchair on the right is a large piece of petrified wood. Over the mantel is a painting by Paul Gauguin.

Fine antiques, interesting antiquities and contemporary art invigorate an historic home in North Avondale

Brian and Jennifer Gibson were casually shopping the local real estate market a decade ago when a friend suggested they take a look at a 1920s Tudor-style stucco home on a heavily wooded lot near Xavier University that appears in the *American Field Guide to Architecture*. After just a quick peek, they were smitten. Lovely period details, such as intricately carved arched doors, wrought iron railings and detailed moldings, were all intact. Outside of a major kitchen renovation and reconfiguration, and thanks to TLC from the prior owners (just two before the Gibsons'), only minor cosmetic changes were needed. Devoid of the decorative half-timbering that typically defines homes of this style, the façade nonetheless possesses a number of charming features that make the home a timeless statement of good taste. A blue Lutynens bench and matching planters provide bright jolts of color to an otherwise monochromatic exterior palette.

It takes a carefully trained eye to design interiors within the Tudor framework, lest the home appear too much as a period museum. A quick glance at the Gibsons' CV certainly evidences them to possess ample knowledge for the undertaking. Brian is the director of interior design for DIGS in Hyde Park, a one-of-a-kind firm that offers real estate representation, interior design services, landscape architecture, and construction and renovation services under one roof. While the core of their work is focused locally, they have also completed projects in Michigan, Rhode Island, Florida, North Carolina, Colorado and New Jersey. Due in large part to his involvement with the firm, DIGS is a silver sponsor of the 2008 Cincinnati Antiques Festival, scheduled for October 16 to 18.

Brian's path to his current position at DIGS included stints as a professional basketball player in Europe, an associate in the Ohio attorney general's office and an investment banker in New York City. Lingering in the background throughout these varied experiences was a passion for antiques and antiquities. When he was in New York, he found himself frequently taking friends and clients abroad on buying trips. "My hobby became more enjoyable than my career, so I decided that it was time to make a switch," said Brian. With a stack of degrees in law, economics and design from the likes of Northwestern University, the University of Cincinnati, the London School of Economics and the Parsons School of Design, Brian has a voracious appetite for knowledge, which translates into a calculated, academic style of collecting.

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Centered in the foyer is a massive Chinese root table with a burlwood top. The iron chandelier was selected by the homeowners as a replacement to the original crystal one.



While one is quick to take note of the many fine antique pieces throughout the home, Brian is quick to point out that "the walls are Jennifer's domain." She combines the trained eye of someone who has a fine arts degree with an equal measure of good taste in her procurement of contemporary art that balances the more serious antiques and antiquities.

The homeowner's passion as collectors of the highest order becomes evident as soon as one crosses the threshold. Centered in the foyer is a massive Chinese root table with a burlwood top. Staring at the base is reminiscent of seeking out images in clouds; if you look long enough you can make out the deliberate forms of dragons shaping the supports. Pieces from the Far East are found in nearly every room, from commanding ones, such as the table, to small archaeological fragments. Overhead is an iron chandelier that looks as though it was made to complement the elaborate iron rail of the stairway and landing; however, it was found by the homeowners as a replacement to the original crystal one. Arranged together at the base of the stairs is a trio of paintings by renowned Cincinnati artists Jens Jensen, Paul Chidlaw and Jack Meanwell.

To the right of the foyer is a grand living room with seating configurations that allow for a variety of uses and make the room seem comfortable for two or 20. Rich paneling surrounds the stone mantel. To one side a large Shiva Lingam - ceremoniously gathered once a year from the muddy banks of the Narmada River, one of the seven sacred places of pilgrimage in India - sits on a base in front of a spiraled Narwhal tusk, the sight of which inspired the legend of the unicorn in ancient times. Brian has a great affinity for mixing natural specimens with antiques. "It takes the serious edge off," he said.



The homeowners used a bit of ingenuity to cover a contemporary square table with an antique rug and finished it with large brass nailheads. The painting over the sofa is by Michael Pearson.



Most of the furnishings in the living room are early English reinterpreted, a style preferred by the homeowners because it appears less formal than other styles and carries the rich patina of age.



To the right of the foyer is a grand living room with seating configurations that allow for a variety of uses and make the room very comfortable for two or 20. The painting behind the sofa is by Cincinnati artist Frank Herrmann.

Brian purposefully downplayed the upholstery and window treatments, using solid, neutral colors in order to let the craftsmanship of each piece take center stage. Jennifer curated the room's eclectic artwork. Behind the sofa is a painting by Frank Hermann.





The physical space of the kitchen was reconfigured to accommodate family meals at the large farmhouse table. The majority of the cabinetry were salvaged during the renovation and given a hand-painted finish that allows them to seamlessly integrate with the newly added ones. The floor is cork.

As an example, he pointed to a sawfish snout placed on a fine gateleg table.

Most of the furnishings in the room are early English continental, a style preferred by the homeowners because it appears less formal than other styles and carries the rich patina of age. "These pieces have been nicked and worn through hundreds of years of use, so we have no worries about using them as part of our every day lives," said Brian. He purposefully downplayed the upholstery and window treatments, using solid, neutral colors in order to let the craftsmanship of each piece take center stage.

The long, narrow dining room along the back of the house has doors that open onto a spacious covered terrace. Lining the walls is an assortment of antique drawings. According to Brian, "They are all things you can get up close to."

Because nearly every piece of furniture in the home is antique, the homeowners faced a dilemma when it came time to find a sofa table for the family room. "There simply are no antique coffee table forms," said Brian. So the homeowners used a bit of ingenuity to cover a contempo-

rary square table with an antique rug and finished it with large brass nailheads. The television is housed in a Chinese armoire. Adorning the walls are vintage photographs of American Indians.

All of the bedrooms are located on the second and third floors. Resembling the office of an anthropology dean, Brian's library is a true "Cabinet of Natural Curiosities." It is home to an impressive collection of antiquities, along with field guides and archaeological journals he has pored over to educate himself as a collector. Packed into the small room are dinosaur bones, mammoth teeth, a cane made from a shark's backbone, Mississippi Indian artifacts, pebble-sized Indian shiva stones, Danish flint and Bronze Age relics, among others, items.

Having put down roots for nearly a decade, the homeowners are quite content with the welcoming abode they have created, which serves as a splendid showplace of Brian's interior design prowess. His clients will undoubtedly benefit from his unique perspective that all rooms should be made for living, including (and especially) those that encompass one's personal passions. ■