

LATIN LOVE

The door to a classic New England house opens on a lively interior that celebrates the homeowners' South American roots in vivid style.

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Alive with urban energy, Sigfredo Chacón's installation *New York Drippings* frames an intimate dining area with a round table and upholstered chairs and lit by a vintage crystal chandelier. *Facing page:* Fronting on the Chacón painting, a leather bench and a multicolor rug by Nanimarquina form the centerpieces of the house's main entrance.



The classic Shingle-style house in the Cos Cob section of Greenwich looks conservative and contextual—right in keeping with the sturdy, no-nonsense Yankee architecture that has been favored in the neighborhood for generations.

But inside, this house pulsates to a Latin beat, the work of a Venezuelan couple who wanted their home to blend into the neighborhood while celebrating their South American roots through art and furnishings. “You never expect there to be such a difference inside,” says Adriana Gabaldón, who, though not trained as an interior designer, did the decorating herself. “We are proudly Venezuelan, and this is like having a little bit of our country in our house.”

Her husband, Gustavo, an executive who works in nearby Stamford, echoes the sentiment: “People see the outside and can’t imagine the inside. Once, the guy delivering pizza saw the entrance hall artwork and said, ‘What is that!’”

“That” is *New York Drippings*, a stunning twenty-seven-foot-long multi-panel painting by Venezuelan

artist Sigfredo Chacón. The vivid installation recalls the work of Jackson Pollock: an abstract urban scene dizzy with excitement and energy.

The entire interior of the house is designed as a rather muted backdrop for the couple’s art collection. The palette tends toward whites, grays and blacks, with five-inch-wide ebonized oak floorboards throughout—a neutral background against which the artwork can pop.

The Gabaldóns, who moved to Greenwich from Caracas in 2001, had lived for several years in a colonial-style house on the property. As their two daughters got older, and as more friends and relatives from Venezuela came to visit, it was time to expand into bigger quarters. “It seems we looked at a thousand houses,” says Gustavo, “but none of them had all the features we wanted, or the convenient location of Cos Cob, where you’re minutes from everywhere.”

It was teardown time. They interviewed six architects before choosing Greenwich-based Steven Mueller. For the exterior of the new house, they settled on what the architect calls New England coastal Shingle style. “The real challenge of the site was that



Artemide's Mercury ceiling lamp illuminates the fluid, cantilevered chairs and square table of the breakfast area. *Facing page, clockwise from left:* The double-height living room's neutral color palette serves as a backdrop to dramatic artwork, such as Carlos Blanco's large round painting of a Venezuelan *tepuy* and Rafael Barrios's seemingly weightless sculptures.



it was a hillside,” Mueller says. “But the Shingle style is especially suited to a sloping site.” The stonework seen so often on Shingle-style homes meant the house could be gently set into the landscape, appearing to rise from it organically.

Clever architectural decisions, like the large elliptical window set into a gable and surrounded by brackets on the house’s east side, help keep it from being “subsumed by the hillside,” Mueller explains.

The extensive paneling and wood trim throughout the house is “transitional,” Mueller says, congenial to the Shingle style while keeping the focus on his clients’ contemporary artwork.

That art includes a six-and-a-half-foot-diameter round painting of a *tepuy*, the tabletop mesa mountains found in the Guiana Highlands of south central Venezuela. Mueller designed an upstairs hallway that uses the painting, by Venezuelan Carlos Blanco, as a centerpiece, drawing the viewer toward the balcony overlooking the double-height living room. Works by Rafael Barrios, another Venezuelan—a hanging mobile and desktop stabile sculptures—play on the viewer’s sense of depth and perspective.

European pieces also figure into the couple’s collection. Two Plexiglas tables by French artist Yves Klein are filled with vivid blue and pink pigments. His countryman Arman conceived what appears to be a melting porcelain tea service. North American artists, including Jeff Koons and Robert Indiana, make the cut as well.

Lighting designer Amy Vitale of ALV Lighting Solutions in Stamford was brought in to assure that each piece would be visible and hold its own. “Much of the architectural lighting is meant to disappear and let the artwork glow,” says Vitale. “For example, in the living room, a low-voltage cable system with halogen lighting spans the room like a trapeze, but it’s hardly visible.”

Vitale credits Adriana with picking Artemide’s Mercury ceiling lamp to light the kitchen’s breakfast table. “I didn’t think it was going to work, and it looks spectacular,” she says.

Spectacular could also describe the kitchen itself. Designed by Deane, Inc., of Stamford and New Canaan, the space is a pure, clean white accented with minimalist stainless steel. A large custom

Clockwise from this page: Barcelona chairs and upholstered Midcentury benches add verve to a serene master bedroom. The master bath features a large oval tub by Oceania. A plush white rug grounds a daughter's colorful bedroom. A detail of *Red Balloon Dog*, by Jeff Koons, in the master bedroom.



stainless-steel ventilation hood seems to float above two kinds of stoves—an induction cooktop and a more conventional gas cooktop. It's all backed up by a wall of Calcutta marble. "We could be really bold with the marble," says Deane's Veronica Campbell. "This particular piece was chosen because of its dramatic veins."

The custom cabinets were kept clean and sleek by forgoing hardware in favor of a stainless-steel channel shaped like a J, which opens drawers and doors with an effortless tug. Two islands allow plenty of space for kitchen prep and casual family dining.

Adriana's love of geometry and symmetry informed the design of the landscaping.

"We strove for a clean modern aesthetic with the choice of plantings and materials," says James Doyle, principal of Doyle Herman Design Associates in Greenwich. "The plantings are linear with taller fastigate [narrowing as they rise] columnar horn-

beam trees, and we have a small palette of plants that are textural and sheared. We also used steel edging and gravel for a clean, modern look."

One of the Gabaldóns' greatest joys is seeing the pride their two teenagers have in their new home. Both girls agreed that the house should celebrate their roots. "The younger one, Corina, wanted to have something that reminded her of Cerro El Ávila, a famous mountain in Caracas. Adriana bought her a painting of it for her bedroom by Venezuelan artist Roberto de la Fuente," Gustavo says. Older daughter Isabella chose folk art as the basis for her room's decor.

It's a surprise, indeed, to open the doors of this genteel, traditional house to find so much color and excitement inside. But it's a happy surprise, and just right for a family looking for a pleasing blend of two worlds. •

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