

SIZE 4,800 sq. ft.
TYPE Single-family home
LOCATION Lincoln Square

Black, White, Euro All Over

A designer's century-old graystone evokes her childhood in Vienna and her adulthood in the here and now
by **Monica Ginsburg**



Walking into Stephanie Wirth's home in Lincoln Square, it's hard to believe the interior designer ever described herself as "not a house person." Every tassel, crest, café chair, and flea-market find she collected over the years has found a place in the century-old graystone she moved into in 2006 with her husband, Mark Rasmussen, a Chicago attorney, and their son, now six. They previously lived in a sleek Bucktown loft, which was the perfect backdrop for her vintage pieces, she says, but lacked the extra living space and backyard the family wanted.

"This house was magic from the moment we walked in," says Wirth. "There just seemed to be the exact space for everything I had."

Still, some changes were in order if she was going to realize her vision of creating a casual but elegant home reminiscent of her upbringing in Vienna. Her goals: Mix the old with the new; make big impact with small changes; and use rooms, like the traditional dining room, in different ways.

First, hardwood floors, some original to the home, were stained a glossy black. The process required four coats of stain but was worth it for the bold look that re-



TOP Wirth uses her dining room as a library; when she has formal dinner parties she pulls in a farm table from the kitchen. **ABOVE** A charmingly roughed-up vintage Parisian garden chair gives the minimalist foyer a down-to-earth touch.

PHOTOGRAPHY TATE GUNNERSON

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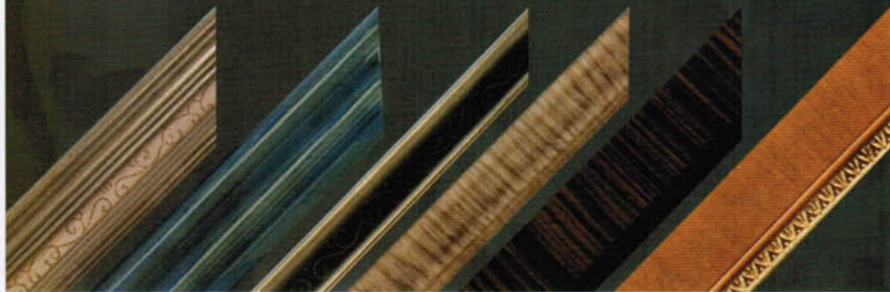
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IDEAFILE

Stain your floors black

Wirth is a huge proponent of ebony-stained wood floors. Not painted. "That's a fun look, but paint chips," she says. Her turn-to floor professional, George Borek of **Edward & George Flooring** (773-745-0727, egflooring.com), power sands

with two grades of paper and then applies water "to absorb the stain better," he says. This is followed by at least three coats of stain (each needs 12 hours to dry) and two coats of varnish. He used Glitsa Gold Seal Stains' Sable Black on Wirth's floors.

sulted. The dramatic flooring is balanced by airy custom-made ivory silk window treatments and white walls trimmed to match the original detailing in the entranceway. "I've always loved the contrast of black and white," says Wirth. "I think it gives a modern look to an old home."

In the living room, a straight-lined antique settee was painted white and reupholstered in black velvet. The facing



settee, which once belonged to her design partner's great-aunt, was also painted white and reupholstered. Functional accent pieces include three 1860s Louis Philippe wall mirrors, a silver-plated standing lamp tucked in the corner, and black metal plant stands repurposed as coffee tables. Black velveteen ball pillows are grouped on the floor for a touch of whimsy. "I like to add something unexpected to a room," she says.

In the adjacent seating area, an Italian silver-plated bar cart on wheels takes center stage as a coffee table and a Maria Theresa-style antique crystal chandelier keeps the glamour going. A small antique settee and coordinating chair, both on casters and covered in ivory linen, complete the space.

A library created in what was once a traditional dining room anchors the home. Wirth and her husband entertain friends there, often rolling in a painted farm table from the

kitchen to accommodate dinner guests.

Built-in bookcases are filled with treasures—a collection of Demels and Altmann & Kühne chocolate boxes and Wiener Konzerthaus programs that remind Wirth of her Austrian childhood; her mother's magazine-shaped purse from the 1970s; an 1880s box, resembling leather-bound books, with a crystal decanter and liquor glasses inside; vintage Playboy highball glassware; and assorted art books and family photographs.

In an inspired mix of old and new, a Christian Liaigre lacquered black table is surrounded by four Italian iron and patent leather chairs from the 1960s. A vintage silver apple-shaped ice bucket is perched on top. "I like to incorporate something old and something personal," she says. "It adds a unique touch and it draws people in."

Not all is black and white. Wirth's downstairs office is painted carriage red. Her son's upstairs playroom is washed in fire-



ABOVE The black-walled library peeks into the kitchen's white dining area, where vintage Parisian café chairs—patiently collected over the years—surround a rustic farm table.

TOP Stainless steel appliances and accessories gleam in the kitchen.

LEFT Instead of using a rug or conventional coffee table to anchor the living room, Wirth opts for drama and surprise, choosing a few pieces and letting them shine.



engine red and stocked with vintage red furniture. An adjacent reading room is sunny yellow.

The designer loved the concrete countertops and exposed-brick wall in the kitchen, but the rest of the room needed some work. She upgraded the appliances, painted the wood cabinets black, and added new hardware for a fresh look ("Paint is one of the easiest ways to transform a room without gutting and starting anew," Wirth says).

It's the details that shine here, such as a vintage standing menu from a café in the south of France and Wirth's collection of white dishes and tabletop accessories, housed in an 1880s French armoire. Shutters on the windows offer privacy and add charm.

Tucked into the sunroom off the kitchen, a white Philippe Starck sofa is the perfect place to read the newspaper on weekends. The piece mixes easily with Wirth's favorite bistro table and chairs. "I tell my clients to buy what you love and you can always find a place for it," she says. "I truly love everything in our house." ■

RESOURCES: SEE BUY GUIDE ON PAGE 98.

LEFT Old World references make this home romantic. The dressing room, with its curvy 18th-century-style French chair and free-standing antique wardrobe, is a throwback to a time before built-in closets were the norm. **BELOW** Red, gold, and tassels make the office feel regal, but real life and its clutter have a place there, too.



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