

# A Tale of Four Cities



Harrison uses the back patio and garden as another room in the warmer months, she says, inviting friends for cocktails and nibbles whenever she can. She's glad she didn't conform to the developer's original plan of planting grass and arborvitae trees here. "Then I'd have to mow the lawn, and where would I stow the mower?" she says. "Now there's something always in bloom in this garden, and it's so inviting. I'm always sitting out here enjoying the peace."



This addition to a colonial artist's alcove  
ADOPTS A MODERN VIBE  
for its 21st century owner.

By Annie Sherman ♦ Photography by Jan Armor

SINCE BOSTON, NEW YORK AND WICKFORD HAVE ALL been her home, and with her family's Danish roots, Rhode Island-born Ellie Harrison was accustomed to moving around. She had upsized and downsized and collected all the nice things that make a house a home, including children and a loving husband whom she adored. But the former Citibank and Fidelity Investments manager wanted to settle down for a bit and focus her attentions toward living and working in one state.

This was two years ago, when she was working in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and her late husband Joe, a former bank CEO, was building custom homes. They had renovated an 18th century fixer-upper in Wickford, before a job change to New York led to a longer

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ELLIE HARRISON



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commute for Harrison. It didn't change their affection for Newport, where Joe worked and which they knew well, so it was only a matter of time before the City by the Sea lured them in for good. "I grew up sailing, and my father was head of URI's Sea Grant Program, so we have an affinity for this area," she says. "We found this condo, in the middle of being built – the kitchen wasn't installed, it wasn't even on the market yet. The developer agreed to show us and we knew it was perfect. Joe said he'd always wanted to build me a house, then I saw this fabric swatch in a magazine and we just went for it."

The 2200-square-foot, three-story townhouse in the city's Historic Hill neighborhood is a charming addition to a 19th-century artist's estate. British portrait painter Richard Stagg lived and painted in the main Italianate villa fronting Pelham Street from the 1830s until his death 50 years later. So when

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Harrison spotted this pearl, tucked into a secluded backyard nook just a short jaunt to the waterfront, she and Joe felt they finally had their diamond in the rough. "This is such a gem for downtown Newport," she says, pouring a glass of wine in her sparkling kitchen, the French patio doors open with not a hint of summer traffic noise wafting in. "To be basically new construction, near the harbor and downtown, there are so many benefits. I walk everywhere. This is really where I want to be."

With Harrison commuting every week, it was Joe who communicated with the developer to customize the two-bedroom condo, and local interior designer Ludi Goodenberger shaped it into a home. "We wanted to make this a very nice, inviting space, but also keep it functional because it was so small," Goodenberger says. "One of the biggest issues of a small space is that you don't want to walk in and immediately feel cramped. So scale and proportion are so important. That's why the furniture here is understated."

While 2200 square feet might seem like a lot of space, each floor is less than 750 square feet, so Goodenberger put every inch to use with smaller custom furnishings in the living area and built-in cabinets for Harrison's books, artwork and family heirlooms. High cabinets also hide the vents for the custom gas fireplace. Transparent wire lamps allow light to shine from the back patio to the front door, and conversely allow the line of sight to continue front to back. "I really wanted to maximize natural light here – to see through to the garden from the front door was a goal," Harrison says. A dining table features folding wings that allow it to be pushed against the wall when not in active use, and pulled out full size when Harrison entertains – which she does often. "This has become a magnet for friends in Boston and New York," she jokes. A full-size guest bedroom upstairs, adjacent to her master suite, along with a finished basement complete with living space and Murphy bed welcome guests whenever they grace her door.

The fabric swatch Harrison found in a magazine inspired the blue and white color palette for the entire home, including ikat pattern custom upholstery on two Billy Baldwin armless chairs and the French chairs she relocated from her New York City apartment and painted blue, as well as the draperies leading to the back patio. Working with Harrison on design

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## Contractors/Resources

- ◆ Hill Realty Co
- ◆ Ludi Goodenberger Interiors
- ◆ Rene & Son Carpet and Flooring
- ◆ California Closets
- ◆ Jutras Woodworking
- ◆ Betty Hubbard Landscape Design
- ◆ Tom Willett Hardscape
- ◆ Newport Lamp & Shade Company



The living room almost bleeds into the backyard, with Brunswick • Filikat custom upholstery adding a pop of whimsy.



The bright kitchen is in constant motion, especially when guests arrive from out of town. The French oak flooring and granite counters add texture and warmth to the space, and two entries to the room allow easy movement in and out.

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elements for her former Wickford home, Goodenberger knew her style was relatively traditional, with a modern twist. “We kept the color scheme very simple and high contrast — everything blue and white. That can make things appear more spacious and doesn’t become too busy,” Goodenberger says. “We also kept the clean lines of existing furniture but added this modern Brunswick & Fils drapery that determined so much, with whimsical blue and white leopard print throughout.”

With family heirlooms and artwork so vital to Harrison’s style and sense of place, she ensured they added affection and memories to every room here. The large antique Audubon Society pelican print in the stairs reminds her of her late father, an active sailor. He was captivated by the large-billed shore bird, and would point them out to her when she was a young girl while sailing the Intracoastal Waterway in Florida. Photos of family sailing adventures, aboard their boat “Pelican,” also line the walls. Her grandfather’s tools for carving furniture, which he did professionally in Denmark, grace her living room shelves. Other pieces of special artwork have prominent placement, including paintings by local artist John Mecray and a series of Dutch Delft tiles collected by Joe’s late mother that Harrison found in a storage box and framed for display in the entry foyer. “I was doing so much commuting, that I needed a space to feel safe,” Harrison explains. “Joe and I spent so much time in Newport, so we came here. He died within the year, so I know he would want me to be here.”

Indeed she has made this house they bought together into a welcoming retreat, full of happy memories, which she will continue in his stead. “It’s a very comforting environment here, and gives me great content,” she says. “It was the right place at the right time.”