

# New England HOME

Celebrating Fine Design, Architecture, and Building

## Winter Magic

High style in ski country



In the living room, the color palette of the *Slinky* print by artist Tara Donovan inspired Pauline Curtiss's hand-painted ombre treatment of the fireplace. "I wanted to take that blackness of the hearth and stone surround and fade it up to the bright white of the molding and ceiling," says Curtiss.

# Gallery TALK

Charlotte Zawel crafts a bold modern design that dialogues seamlessly with an extensive contemporary art collection.

Text by LISA H. SPEIDEL | Photography by MICHAEL J. LEE



**ABOVE:** In the dining room, a piece by Kehinde Wiley—now famous for painting President Barack Obama's portrait—accompanies a sculpture by Adam Parker Smith. **LEFT:** Two large-scale photographs by Marilyn Minter dominate the living room. "I love them because they reflect female empowerment and choice, a message the artist always conveys in her work," says homeowner and designer Charlotte Zavel. **FACING PAGE:** Tasked with the two-story mural in the foyer, Curtiss says she jumped on the scaffolding and improvised. "I didn't even do a sketch," she admits.



Sometimes when you collect art, you get lucky. Sometimes you get *really* lucky. Lucky as in you now have a piece hanging in your dining room by Kehinde Wiley, the renowned New York-based artist who painted an official portrait of President Barack Obama.

Such was the case for Charlotte and Marc Zavel. The interior designer and her husband began collecting works by contemporary emerging and blue-chip artists in earnest a decade ago. Their involvement with the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, the Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston, and the deCordova Sculp-



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—Interior designer Charlotte Zawel

**LEFT:** A piece by Colombian-born artist Gonzalo Fuenmayor hangs above a bar cart in the dining room. **BELOW:** In the butler’s pantry, Zawel paired a wallcovering from Designers Guild with a sculpture by Adam Parker Smith and a neon piece by Jason REVOK. **FACING PAGE, TOP TO BOTTOM:** Zawel gave the kitchen a light facelift, which included painting the island and incorporating new lights and backsplash tile; the custom stools are by Boston-based Jeff Woods. The breakfast area’s ombré dining table and sideboard are by Aronson Woodworks, and the artwork is by Alex Katz.

ture Park and Museum, not to mention countless art fairs, galleries, and auction houses, has enabled them to line the walls of their Wellesley home.

The Zawels scored Wiley’s *After Pontormo’s “Two Men with a Passage”* from Cicero’s *“On Friendship”* at auction in 2016—two years before Obama’s portrait debuted. “He was an artist we were interested in,” remembers Charlotte. “He was getting a lot of buzz, so we were very lucky to get it.”

While luck played a role in securing the winning bid, the Zawels’ approach to collecting is focused and purposeful. As they’ve morphed their 7,000-square-foot spec home into a gallery of sorts—“We’ve almost run out of wall space,” admits the designer—they’ve amassed primarily prints and photography with a focus on artists of color and female artists.

The pieces are thought provoking and provocative. Two large-scale photographs by Marilyn Minter, whose images frequently blur the line between commercial and fine art, dominate the living room. Above the bar cart in the dining room hangs a piece by Gonzalo Fuenmayor that depicts a crystal chandelier intertwined with bananas; “It’s a critique on colonialism and the exploitation of



Latin America’s natural resources,” says Zawel.

While museums or galleries typically favor a neutral palette, this is where the Zawels differ. Their art collection is mixed with furnishings, fixtures, and textiles that tell their own bold story. “Color, pattern, textures, layers—that’s how I love to design,” says Zawel. “If you want a black and white house, I’m probably not your girl.” In terms of design inspiration, Zawel conjures the likes of designers Sister Parish and Albert Hadley as she deftly mixes colors, patterns, styles, and materials. Thankfully, she says, her husband is also along for the ride: “He is into my crazy wallpaper and textiles. He’s definitely an advocate, which is fun, and a sounding board.”

Travel also factors heavily into Zawel’s vision, as far-flung finds shape the aesthetic. In the living room, for example, she discovered the throw pillow fabric in Barcelona. It was the jumping off point for the space, which sports Farrow & Ball Peony wallpaper, ombré fabric on the chairs, and a contemporary coffee table from M-Geough. And in the foyer, she spotted the Saturn-shaped rug in Paris,



which she paired with an Oomph console table and the pièce de résistance: a two-story hand-painted mural by Pauline Curtiss of Lincoln, Massachusetts-based Patina Designs.

Curtiss's work is sprinkled throughout the house, from the foyer—a playful improvisation that the artist refers to as “Matisse graffiti”—to the ombré mantel and fireplace surround in the living room to the basket-weave-patterned gold-leaf ceiling in the dining room. “This was one of my favorite jobs of my career,” says Curtiss. “Charlotte and Marc are edgy, open, and they trust artists.”

And it is exactly that trust in the voice of contemporary artists that has led the Zawels to create a colorful, provocative, and, above all, personal space that is distinctly their own.

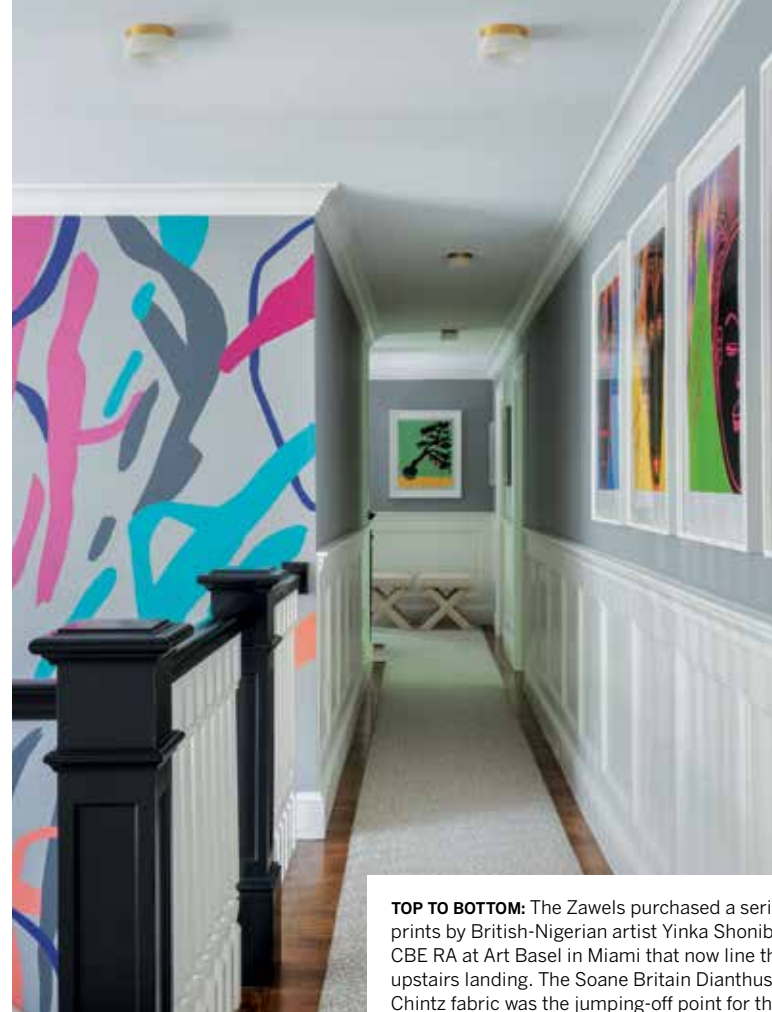
**EDITOR'S NOTE:** For details, see Resources.

**INTERIOR DESIGN:** Charlotte Zavel Design

**BUILDER:** Dalfior Development

**RENOVATION CONTRACTOR:** The Bogart Finish

**LANDSCAPE DESIGN:** a Blade of Grass



**TOP TO BOTTOM:** The Zawels purchased a series of prints by British-Nigerian artist Yinka Shonibare CBE RA at Art Basel in Miami that now line their upstairs landing. The Soane Britain Dianthus Chintz fabric was the jumping-off point for the main bedroom; “It took on a British meets the tropics vibe, with the vintage Maison Jansen palm tree lamp completing the look,” says Zavel. **FACING PAGE:** The bedroom reading nook features a rattan console by Sharland England; the artwork is by Lorna Simpson and the vase was a score from Avant-Scène in Paris.

