

LIZ LEVIN

When Liz Levin moved into a Georgetown town house three years ago, the interior designer turned the 'in-between' home into a study in mixing modern and classic styles.



PHOTOS BY ANDREW HARRIS/EXAMINER



Georgetown 'starter' home showcases mix of hand-me-downs, modern splurges

By Katie Wilmeth
Special to The Examiner

Oh, the dilemmas of decorating a starter house.

You know the one. It's that house that falls in between your Ikea-clad apartment and your future, raise-a-family-and-retire-off-into-the-sunset-one-day house.

"It's our first house independent of apartment living, not our permanent dream house destination," interior designer Liz Levin said of her own Georgetown 'starter' town house. "I wanted to make it look pulled-together and nice, but also not overly invest in things that wouldn't necessarily translate to the next house."

Knowing the 2,000-square-foot Federal-style townhouse wasn't a "forever" home, Levin approached the project with a designer's eye — but also managed to keep the in-between home's budget in check.

That meant mixing old and new pieces and hand-me-downs with splurges. Or, as Levin modestly

puts it, the house is a "study in cobbling things together."

But Levin's version of "cobbling things together" is really anything but. That design method translated into a show-worthy space that mixes modern with classic and showcases Levin's designer instincts.

In the living room, for example, Levin — who cut her teeth as a designer at the decidedly modern Vastu on 14th Street — mixed a modern brown suede couch with white piping (from Vastu, naturally) with hand-me-down chairs from her great-grandmother's house. She reupholstered the chairs from their original "hideous rose, funky fabric" into a more subdued white fabric. A modern Brian Petro painting hangs over the couch, while a peony painted by a family friend hangs over the traditional mantel.

"We did put things together with the idea that we'd be moving again someday," Levin said. "It's sort of an eclectic modern. I like to mix time periods ... and I like the collected-over-time look."

The dining room also mixes old and new. The dark wood dining room table was donated by Levin's grandmother and mixed with inexpensive Parsons-style chairs. An antique Asian cabinet from QJ in Old Town and an old Tibetan window screen hanging on the wall give the room a hint of Asian influence.

But it's the custom window treatments — white with brown geometric shapes — that bring the room into this millennium. Levin said she chose those as opposed to the more traditional and expected "stuffy window treatments" to give the room a modern feel.

One thing Levin didn't change in the town house — the mirrored wall that was in the dining room when she and her husband moved in three years ago. The wall, despite its potential to throw the room back to the 1970s, gives the small space more depth. She offset the mirror with Alexandria Beige from Benjamin Moore paint on the remaining three walls, a marked improvement over the red walls that were

originally in the dining room. ("It looked like 'Boogie Nights,'" Levin recalled.)

Upstairs, Levin kept with her theme of classic meets modern. In the master bedroom, the focal point is a big bay window that has a view of the Potomac River and the Washington Monument. Levin had custom silk blue and brown satin panels made for the window ("One of my splurges," she said) and added blue pillows to the window seat.

The room is painted Palladian Blue from Benjamin Moore ("It's a good blue because it's light, but it doesn't look baby blue"), and a brown suede headboard from Vastu is paired with brown bedding from Bed, Bath & Beyond.

Levin used Lucite tables as nightstands that she plans to use as TV trays when the family finally does move into its "forever" house. And another hand-me-down, her mother's childhood dresser, also gives the room character.

A year ago, Levin and her husband welcomed a baby girl to their

starter house and turned the second bedroom into a baby's room. The room stays true to Levin's non-fussy classic-meets-modern style.

"I didn't want to go totally mod in here, but I also didn't want to go traditional nursery where it's just so sweet, sweet, sweet," Levin said. "That's not my style either."

The room is painted a soft yellow — a color chosen before the couple knew if they were having a boy or a girl. Custom window treatments — this time yellow with green trim — also give the room a punch. Levin used standard Pottery Barn Kids and Land of Nod furniture, but went with unique art on the walls, such as a retro print of a page from a Dick and Jane book, to give the room some personality.

For the time being, Levin has no immediate plans to trade up to more permanent house, though it is on her radar.

"This house has a lot more space than what we were used to [in an apartment]," Levin said. "But now we're feeling like 'Oh what's the next stage?'"

STYLE KEYS

LIZ LEVIN

Style philosophy: I like to have a unique element of surprise. I don't like the ready-made set effect. ... I like to mix textures and time periods. I also want it to be reflective of the person that lives in that space. I don't want it to look like Liz's living room.

Style secrets: In small spaces, use a glass coffee table or Lucite. It doesn't take up as much visual space.

Comfort or style: Probably style. But I think style can be comfortable.

Formal or family rooms: I like doing family rooms. With style though. I don't feel like it's an either-or.

Favorite color: I work with a lot of brown. My logo is green and brown. If I had to pick one color, I'd probably pick green.

Can't live without: Throw pillows.

I would never: I really don't like to do ready-made window treatments. [Ready-made] are never as nice. People tend to think window treatments are an afterthought. You absolutely need a sofa. But window treatments help most rooms, and the cheaply made ones — you might as well not do them.

Dream client: It would be fun to do the new White House, wouldn't it?

If you know ...

If you know of a beautiful home that should be a good fit for **AT HOME**, please e-mail us at athome@dcexaminer.com. Story suggestions from homeowners are welcome and designers are encouraged to submit projects they have worked on.



LONG GARAGES



\$325 OFF

Park Your Car in an Organized Garage!

800-708-5664

Junk Cars & Unwanted Vehicles

Towed away for

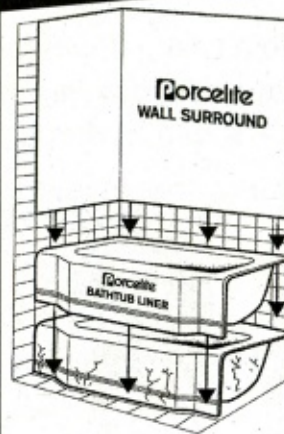
FREE!

**NO PARTS SOLD!
FAST & FRIENDLY SERVICE!**

- FAMILY OWNED
- 100% RECYCLED
- CASH FOR SOME
- SERVING MD, DC & VA

**CALL DAN TODAY!
703-307-6331**

We Bring New Life To Old Tubs & Tile Walls!



New Bathtub Liners & Wall Surrounds

- Custom molded to fit your bathtub
- Will not chip, stain, crack or discolor
- Non affected by mildew or bacteria
- Non-slip surface
- One day installation, use the next day!
- **Guaranteed lowest price!**

Bathtub & Tile Refinishing

- A formulated re-glazing process
- Matches any color
- Works on tile too!
- Makes old look new!

Visit our showroom at
10350 Southard Drive, Beltsville, MD

Porcelite
ENTERPRISES

Serving the Public since 1961



800-758-1099 • 301-595-9131
www.porceliteliner.com

MHC #50276