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Presiding over the bucolic back lawn of a Philadelphia-area home decorated by Jayne Design Studio is *Vice-Versa*, a majestic weatherproof-steel sculpture by Richard Serra. For details see Sources.





# Bold Strokes

On Philadelphia's Main Line, a couple enlist designer  
Thomas Jayne to transform their historic home into a showcase  
for a singular trove of postwar art

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**W**hen a Philadelphia couple bought a historic house on a verdant winding road on the city's suburban Main Line, it was, the wife says, "in extreme disrepair." The previous owner had converted the original 1889 Victorian to its current Georgian style in the 1920s, then lived there until her death 70 years later without doing much else to it. The new owners thought they had a perfect plan: re-create the graceful property as an English country house, pairing top-notch antique furniture with sporting pictures—hunting scenes, paintings of dogs by George Stubbs, and the like.

The problem was, once the swag curtains, fringed valances, and the rest of the traditional decor had been installed, the couple had a change of heart. What they really wanted to live with was postwar art, especially museum-caliber Abstract Expressionist, Pop, and Minimalist works. Their first purchase, a classic Roy Lichtenstein comic-book-style painting of a dog barking "Arrrrrrff!," was about as close to Stubbs as the two would get. As other acquisitions followed—one of Donald Judd's first "Progression" wall sculptures, an early Robert Rauschenberg combine, and one of the few Clyfford Still canvases in private hands—it became clear the collection wasn't going to feel at home in that setting.

Enter New York interior designer Thomas Jayne. After admiring a residence he'd done in Palm Beach, Florida, the couple met Jayne at a benefit and later invited him to consult on their predicament. It must have been kismet, because it turned out Jayne had already fallen in love with their house, having visited it with another client when it was on the market. "I thought the place was so magical—overgrown and untouched," he recalls. "Then I didn't see it again until I met them. It's like the house was delivered back to me."

Jayne began what he calls a "gradual retooling" of the seven-bedroom dwelling, paring down and opening up

The homeowners commissioned *Schuylkill River Line*, a 430-foot red-slate work by Richard Long, for the backyard; the landscape design is by Gale Nurseries. **Above left:** In the entrance hall, works by Andy Warhol, Ed Ruscha, and Jasper Johns surround an Empire-style table topped by a Roy Lichtenstein sculpture; the walls are clad in a Schumacher linen. Molly (left) and Puppy are rescue dogs.





**Above:** A Vija Celmins painting overlooks sculptures by Henry Moore and Lichtenstein in the living room; the armchairs and gueridon are all Empire, and the floor lamp is by Jacques Adnet. **Below:** The sunroom displays works by Lichtenstein, Warhol, Robert Wilson, and Jeff Koons, whose sculpture *Yorkshire Terriers* sits atop a Regency table at the center; the armchair at left and the sofas in the foreground are by McGuire.





Designer Thomas Jayne convinced the couple to line the living room walls in a chocolate-brown Holland & Sherry cotton, providing a distinctive backdrop for the large Chuck Close portrait *Bill* and other artworks, including a tabletop sculpture by Tony Smith; the sofa is upholstered in a Rogers & Goffigon fabric, and the pillows are covered in a Clarence House silk.



**Above:** A Cy Twombly "Blackboard" painting and a small geometric Franz Kline play off the hand-painted Gracie scenic wallpaper in the dining room; surrounding the late-Georgian dining table is a suite of Empire chairs. **Below:** The kitchen, with mahogany cabinetry inspired by 18th-century models, is outfitted with Miele ovens, a Viking cooktop, and Rohl sinks with Dornbracht fittings.







**Above, from left:** A classic Kline abstraction makes a strong statement paired with a Regency table and a Han-dynasty ceramic bull. An Alexander Calder mobile hangs above a Saarinen table by Knoll and Bielecky Brothers dining chairs in the kitchen. **Below:** The den, wrapped in a jute wall covering by Stark, features a large Twombly, a Regency side cabinet and slipper chair, and a Michaelian & Kohlberg rug.





spaces visually. He started with the sunroom, which the owners had added to the back of the house, with expansive views of the bucolic property. Removing cumbersome window treatments and jungle-print upholstery, the decorator splashed the room with bold shades of green, breaking down the divide between inside and out.

In the living room Jayne streamlined the mantel-pieces, replaced wall-to-wall sea grass with simple wool rugs, and introduced solid, neutral upholsteries to avoid competing with the art. “The couple prefers a finite palette, which we honored,” he says.

Jayne occasionally pushed them into more daring territory. Most dramatically, he covered the living room walls in chocolate-brown cotton, swapping out the old beige-and-mauve-striped taffeta. “That was radical,” the designer says, noting that the husband took some convincing. The idea was to give the art—including a prodigious Chuck Close portrait—a distinctly domestic backdrop. “It’s not what people are used to showing contemporary artwork on,” admits Jayne, who initially trained as a museum curator. “I like it because it sets off the pictures well. It makes them much more dynamic.”

His strategic simplification did not mean getting rid of the clients’ trove of antiques. “The reason it works is partly because the pieces are sculptural but also because of their quality,” says the designer, who feels the furniture holds its own against the art. “I liked the parity.” An Empire armchair sits beside a chromatic Gerhard

Richter; a Regency table topped with a Han-dynasty ceramic bull is paired with a graphic Franz Kline.

The clients have retained a healthy sense of humor about their art. As the wife uses one of her shiny black heels to slide an errant zinc tile back into position in a Carl Andre floor grid stationed in the hall outside her daughter’s bath, she jokes that her husband calls it “the world’s most expensive bath mat.” She also laughs at the memory of the famously exacting Richard Serra sizing up their 19-acre property when the couple purchased his monumental sculpture *Vice-Versa*. “Richard usually insists on having a say in the placement of his work,” she explains. “He wants it to talk to architecture.”

The homeowners acceded to Serra’s wishes, and the two curving steel slabs now stand in the backyard, to one side of the swimming pool. On the other, a 430-foot pathway of red slate by Richard Long, which the couple commissioned, snakes along a gentle slope. The view from the far end, back up the lush lawn, fittingly echoes Richter’s *Villa*, a painting of a tree-flanked house that hangs above the bespoke bed in the master bedroom.

Jayne decorated that room with a rich mix of textures—silk wall covering, cotton headboard, wool rug—all in pale, soothing tones, which plays well off the thickly impastoed surface of the Robert Ryman white monochrome facing the bed. “We wanted a room that was just serene,” the wife says. “And that’s exactly what we got.” □

**Above, from left:** Rising beneath the front-hall staircase is an early Sol LeWitt “Wall Floor” sculpture. One of On Kawara’s signature black-and-white date paintings is displayed in the upstairs hallway, which is lined with 100 Zinc Square, a Carl Andre floor piece.



**Above:** The daughter's bedroom is furnished with an antique chaise; the artworks include a plywood wall sculpture by Donald Judd, a fluorescent-light piece by Dan Flavin, and one of Bernd and Hilla Becher's "Typology" photographic grids. **Below:** In the master bedroom, matching custom-made slipper chairs, covered in a Claremont fabric, flank an all-white Robert Ryman canvas over the fireplace, while an early John Baldessari work hangs above a Dutch neoclassical chest; the rug is from Patterson, Flynn & Martin.

