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## The Unbreakable Abode

How one family successfully mixed fine art, exceptional design, and four rowdy boys—without losing their minds. BY ERIN FEHER

“I just want to be clear with you that someone is going to pee on this.” That was Nadine Burke Harris’s response when the first interior designer she consulted with suggested a pair of pricey white sofas by a vaunted French designer. “We have four boys,” Burke Harris says drily. “I’m not worried about wine, I’m worried about bodily fluids.”

But that didn’t mean that Burke Harris, a pediatrician, the founder of the Center for Youth Wellness, and a newly minted author—her book, *The Deepest Well: Healing the Long-Term Effects of Childhood Adversity*, which explores the connection between childhood trauma and physical health, comes out January 23—didn’t want a well-designed home. For some time, she and her husband, Arno Harris, a clean power and transportation entrepreneur, had been working with architect Andrew Mann to reconfigure and modernize the 1910s Lake District Edwardian they’d bought in 2011. Looking to transform the interiors, they were on the hunt for a designer with a

PHOTOGRAPHS BY PAUL DYER

RENOVATION

colorful and playful aesthetic—as well as someone who truly understood the meaning of “family-friendly.” “Once we started talking to Martha Angus and Katie McCaffrey,” Burke Harris says, “I was like, done and done.”

The feeling was mutual. Angus was immediately impressed with the artwork the Harrises had in their burgeoning collection, especially a neon piece by Tim Etchells in their kitchen that reads, “Please come back I am sorry about what happened before.” (“Every married couple needs to have a sign like this,” Burke Harris says. “We can just turn it on and say, ‘We’re good, right?’”)

“When I saw that, my head flew off,” Angus remembers. McCaffrey adds, “That’s what made us identify with them right off the bat. Everything was gutsy and cheeky.” It didn’t hurt that Angus and her firm had worked closely and harmoniously with Mann on numerous projects over the years.

**SO WITH THE DREAM** team in place and baby boy number four on the way, they got to work. Mann, who had completed the couple’s top-floor master bedroom renovation a few years back, now turned his attention to the primary living spaces on the main floor and a dark, low-ceilinged basement level that could be accessed only via a squirrelly set of stairs.

“We wanted to respect the traditional forms of the architecture while inserting some modern, contemporary elements,” says Mann, who feels that the changes they made, such as the revamped fireplace and built-ins in the living room, “look inevitable.” The most dramatic transformations



Above: The sofas in the living room are upholstered in Perennials fabric to withstand even the biggest of messes.

Left: Arno Harris, Nadine Burke Harris, and their two youngest sons.

Right: Neon artwork by Tim Etchells doubles as a marital mea culpa.



FAR LEFT: CHRISTOPHER MICHEL

**Right:** Designer Martha Angus offered the couple her prized real-life rocket, originally scored at a flea market in France.

**Below left:** Wallpaper in the bathroom depicts Brooklyn icons including the Notorious B.I.G., roller coasters, and pigeons.

**Below right:** The playroom utilizes a color palette of bright purples, oranges, and grays inspired by artwork from Adam Springer.



happened downstairs. The foundation was dug out to give some extra height to a rarely used space, and a mix of new windows and ingenious lighting made the previously dank room downright cheerful.

"He is a magician. What Andrew did with the LEDs in that room—it feels like we added a whole other story to our house," Burke Harris says. The space now features a full guest bedroom and bath, as well as a lively hangout room that the older boys have commandeered for video game sessions.

Angus and McCaffrey took the cheery vibe and ran with it, devising a color scheme of purples, oranges, and grays inspired by a comic-book-esque painting the couple had scored from Oakland artist Adam Springer. The coup de grâce is a bright-orange rocket—an actual American rocket that Angus found at a flea market in the South of France more than 10 years ago and used in her own Napa house for years until deciding she had found its next rightful owners. "Thousands of people have asked to buy that rocket," Angus says. "A lot of people get jealous when they see that they got it."

But Angus thinks the couple earned it, proving their wit through their art choices and being game for cheekier design touches—such as Brooklyn-themed toile wallpaper in the powder room featuring the Notorious B.I.G., Coney Island roller coasters, pigeons, and even stroller-pushing moms. "It com-



pletely expresses who we are," Burke Harris says. "Here we have this beautifully decorated home with this lovely, ornate mirror in the powder room, and if you don't look closely, you really won't notice, like...is that Biggie Smalls?"

As for the couch conundrum, Angus and McCaffrey solved it with their signature style: reality-based chic. They covered a sturdy model that the family had come to love in Perennials indoor-outdoor fabric. "You can unzip the pillow covers and wash them—they're super durable and very stain resistant," McCaffrey says. They also made sure the main spaces were free of anything that could be knocked over, like floor lamps. "And," McCaffrey adds, "the side tables double as stools, so the kids can literally climb all over them." Mission accomplished. ■

