

BUCKING TRADITION

A NEW LINCOLN PARK CONSTRUCTION UNDERGOES A REMARKABLE TRANSFORMATION AT THE HANDS OF ONE OF THE CITY'S BEST-LOVED DESIGNERS.

*By Kaitlin Madden
Photography by Josh Thornton*

Designer Summer Thornton gave the entire home a white backdrop, allowing accents such as a Jéhs+Laub lounge chair from Knoll, a Fiddle Leaf fig tree from Sprout Home and cushions in Quadrille's Bunga Print Green by Eli Wyn Upholstery to stand out.

When it comes to her interiors, Summer Thornton, owner of an eponymous Lincoln Park design firm, is known for being as vibrant as her name. “Personally, my work is usually bright and colorful, but one of the fun things about working with clients is that they push you to think beyond your natural aesthetic,” says the designer. And this is exactly what happened when her firm was approached by a young Chicago couple with contemporary West Coast style, a bit of a departure from Thornton’s own. “I knew it would be a stretch for me but also a lot of fun because it would give us a chance to expand our minds and go against natural tendencies.”

In fact, from start to finish, the project was a bit out of the ordinary, beginning with the way the homeowners found Thornton’s firm. “They contacted us after walking by an oral surgeon’s office that we designed, down the street from their place,” the designer remembers. During her first meeting with the homeowners, Thornton learned that they wanted to transform their traditional-style Lincoln Park single-family home—which, in true Chicago fashion, was sandwiched between two other lots, blocking natural light—into an airy space with modern appeal.

“The wife is from California, and she and her husband are both very young. They wanted this bright, fresh feel to it. They gravitated toward more Italian-modern furniture, so we were creating this light, organic, contemporary look in this very traditional Chicago house,” the designer says.



Clockwise from top: The bright and airy living room features the floral-shaped Albedo suspension lamp by FontanaArte and a statement chair by McGuire with a beautiful knot back. The B&B Italia sofa is upholstered in a ginger Loro Piana fabric, while the Arper chair is covered in Maharam’s Canvas by Kvadrat; Katonah brass hardware was mixed with custom brass pulls by Aaron Bladon in the kitchen; a niche in the family room is a nod to midcentury-modern style with a cabinet from Organic Modernism, a copper mirror and the Culloden table lamp from Circa Lighting.



The foyer features Christian Lacroix’s Bain De Minuit wallcovering from the Belles Rives collection, with an antique French faux bois tripod table, a Madeline Weinrib vintage Moroccan carpet, a beveled mirror from Restoration Hardware and the Luxe Fur Bench from Anthropologie.



The master bedroom features a custom mirror headboard by Aaron Bladon paired with bedding from Restoration Hardware, side tables from Blu Dot and vintage Robert Sonneman table lamps. Custom drapery panels were fabricated by DeZign Sewing in a Holly Hunt fabric.



A brass mirror mixed with polished-nickel fittings by Franz Viegner and Lee Jofa's Palm Jungle wallpaper add personality to the powder room.

DESIGN DETAILS

TYPE
Single-family home

LOCATION
Lincoln Park

INTERIOR DESIGN
Summer Thornton Design
summerthorntondesign.com

PAINTING
Paintcraft
paintcraft.net

RESOURCES

AARON BLADON
Custom coffee table and kitchen island cabinetry
aaronbladon.com

ARPER
Pastel chair in living room
arper.com

BENJAMIN MOORE
Snow White OC-66 throughout and Lemon Grove 363 in stairway
benjaminmoore.com

B&B ITALIA
Antonio Citterio sofa in living room
beitalia.com

CIRCA LIGHTING
Lamp in family room
circalighting.com

DESIGN WITHIN REACH
Leather swivel chairs
dwr.com

KRAVET
Rug in living room
kravet.com

LEE JOFA
Wallcovering in powder room
leejofa.com

MARINO HARDWOOD FLOORING INC.
Hardwood floors throughout
hardwoodflooringskokie.com

MONTAUK SOFA
White sofa in family room
montauksofa.com

RESTORATION HARDWARE
Rug in family room
restorationhardware.com

STARK
Rug in master bedroom
starkcarpet.com

WATERWORKS
Mirror and medicine cabinet in powder room
waterworks.com

For Thornton, rising to the challenge meant first reimagining her canvas. Luckily, since the home was a new construction, the changes were purely cosmetic. “The architecture in the home was a little more traditional than we wanted, so we needed to create a clean and modern shell for the rest of the design.” First up: brightening the floors, which were originally a deep stain that absorbed what natural light the home did get. “We took the dark hardwoods and bleached them all white so the light bounces off of the floor. It was one of the main things we did that changed the overall feel of the house,” she explains.

No area of the home was immune to the next big adjustment: a fresh coat of white paint was given from wall to wall and floor to ceiling. “We used the same shade of white [Snow White by Benjamin Moore] through the entire house; on the walls, the cabinets, the ceilings, the moldings, the trims, the doors—literally one color,” laughs Thornton.

The tweaks proved dramatic, however. “It’s amazing to me that a house that’s pinned on both sides can look this bright,” she says.

Once the bones of the house were in order, Thornton tackled the decor in a style she describes as clean but lighthearted. “It’s polished to a certain level but with a sense of playfulness,” she explains. “They wanted something that felt grown-up but not stuffy at all.”

Perhaps the best example of the playful vibe is a feature that also pays homage to Thornton’s signature use of color—a fluorescent yellow staircase (painted in Benjamin Moore’s Lemon Grove) that runs through the home and serves as one of the major focal points in the space. “The stairs are in this dark section in the middle of the house, so the bold yellow really brightens it up,” says Thornton, adding: “I give them a lot of credit. Not everyone is willing to paint their staircase yellow!”

In the end, both the couple and the designer were thrilled with the result. “We always try to emphasize our clients’ style, but I love the way [this project] turned out. It was something I never would have done on my own.” ■