

# TASTE IS RELATIVE



Designed for mother by daughter, this Plymouth interior epitomizes the upside of nepotism.

BY JENNIFER SPERRY

PHOTOGRAPHY BY TOM SOBOLIK

Interior designer Carole Freehauf is accustomed to performing for clients: selecting colors and textures, designing custom furniture, and shopping for just the right accessory. In agreeing to supervise the interior of her mother's new townhouse, however, she attempted a different kind of performance—a uniquely personal and, ultimately, more rewarding one.

Freehauf's mother decided to move back to Massachusetts two years ago: Florida was just not the right fit. She considered the Cambridge/Lexington area where she had once lived, but eventually shifted her focus to Plymouth after reading about the Pinehills in a magazine. In late 2005, she purchased her chosen location—"It was nothing more than a foundation; I just bought a hole in the ground," she says—within the community, then flew south to sell her house while her future residence took shape.

Carole Freehauf chose a palette of muted blues for her mother's bedroom. ABOVE: A sitting area is decorated in neutral sand and cream tones with accents of blue and white.



The living room is decorated in soothing greens and light wood tones. OPPOSITE, FROM LEFT: A black and white photo takes center stage over the simple white mantel. Freehauf mixed a dark wood table with cream colored chairs upholstered in pale green for the dining room.



Although the structure, designed and built by the Green Company, presented Freehauf with a blank slate, she was aware that executing its interior scheme meant assessing the antiques and furniture her mother already owned. "Some of the pieces were bought specifically for the Florida home, so I had to think about them in a different vernacular," she says.

While her mother concentrated on moving, Freehauf focused on creating a distinct personality for the townhouse, one that would echo her mother's tastes and complement the Plymouth setting. "We wanted to start fresh with a color palette that was soft, muted, and a bit refined," says the designer, who segued into interior design seven years ago after working as a creative director for ad agencies and branding firms in both New York and Boston. "I've always been a designer, but in a different capacity," she says, "and I still employ the same methodology."

Fittingly enough, Freehauf discovered an inspirational starting point for color in a family heirloom: a Florentine print. A fixture over the mantel in her grandparents' house before being passed down to her mother, the print steered Freehauf into the realm of greens, blues, and teals. "There is sea and sky in the palette, but it is not meant to be beachy or overly summery," she says.

After establishing a color scheme, the designer selected fabrics and furnishings, mostly from New York showrooms, and then mailed

samples (or emailed pictures) to Florida for her mother's input. They selected more basic structural elements, such as flooring, cabinets, carpets, and bath fixtures, from a design center within the Pinehills.

Freehauf encouraged the home's clean architectural lines to shine: "To me, this project was about open, expansive architecture. I didn't want to conceal that." She cleverly carved two distinct "rooms"—a living room and a formal dining area—out of a continuous ground-floor space, all the while maintaining a natural flow of texture and color between the two.

Considering its square footage, the living room is not overly large; however, a cathedral ceiling adds vertical expansiveness and two skylights shed light onto its soft white walls. The sofa and love seat, both in a khaki Richard Thompson fabric, are subdued, while Fortuni accent pillows donate serene green and blue tones. Further defining the space is a hand-woven oriental rug, purchased by Freehauf's mother in Florida.

Open to the living room yet tucked underneath the upstairs loft is the formal dining area; its lower ceiling creates a more intimate setting. The absence of a rug is purposeful: Freehauf prefers that the space feel sparse and elegant. The table and sideboard by Grange and the blue-and-white custom Louis XIV chairs are a conscious nod to French and Swedish country style. Overhead, the area's centerpiece

is a Fortuni lamp made in Venice, swathed in hand-painted silk and topped by a hand-blown glass orb.

"The interior looks twice as large as it is; that's something Carole does," comments her mother. Freehauf's spatial talent benefited a variety of challenging areas, including the breakfast room off the kitchen. Here, she grouped a Pottery Barn table surrounded by Hitchcock chairs, a Hitchcock table for a television and stereo, and a custom sofa. She also designed a solo ottoman, upholstered in durable leather, to act as a footrest and tray table in one. "My objective was to not overcrowd," Freehauf says, "I scaled the furnishings so that they wouldn't encroach on the path to the laundry room and garage."

Her passion for creative, multifunctional items is also evident in the first-floor master bedroom, where a chest doubles as a storage unit and sitting bench. To accompany an antique marble-topped tea table, English armchairs, and a TV cabinet, Freehauf selected a custom upholstered headboard and cream-colored nightstands—limiting the amount of exposed wood. Pushing the envelope of her mother's color sensibilities, Freehauf chose a soft blue to predominate.

Overall the townhouse contains a laundry room, kitchen, breakfast area, three bedrooms (two on the first floor and one on the second), loft space, and three bathrooms. In furnishing the entire interior, Freehauf struck a balance between statement-making pieces

and practical retail purchases, like the loft's teenager friendly furniture from Crate & Barrel. "It's important to prioritize where you want to invest," she advises.

When Freehauf's mother first purchased her "hole in the ground" in autumn 2005, her goal was to avoid another hot summer in Florida. And she did: The townhouse was completed in less than a year. She moved in May 6, 2006, and, thanks to constant communication between mother and daughter, much of the interior was already solidified. "I certainly was grateful I didn't have to move here and then go through all of this," she admits. "Lots of people downsize and start over. It's not easy. But this was a great experience."

"It was rewarding," says Freehauf of the finished project. "My mother has lived in a number of houses, and I wanted this one to reflect her on an emotional level. Now that she's back in New England, this one finally feels like home."

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