



Creative Spaces: A Masterful Modern Reno in Historic Georgetown, Washington D.C.

Posted by Guest Blogger Tuesday, March 15, 2011 11:12 AM

An internationally renowned surgeon and her diplomat husband transform a landmark Federal-style townhouse into a spacious, light-filled showcase for their world class collection of modern art.



By: *Rana Florida*, [Creative Class Group](#); [Special Contributor to HGTV.ca](#)

Photography by [Stacy Zarin Goldberg](#)

Who: Dr. Tina Alster is an internationally renowned dermatologist and laser surgeon in Washington, DC. She is the Director of the Washington Institute of Dermatologic Laser Surgery and Professor of Dermatology at Georgetown University School of Medicine. **Paul Frazer** is a career diplomat and former Canadian Ambassador to the Czech and Slovak Republics. He is currently a political affairs consultant in Washington, DC.



What: A landmark 1811 Federal-style townhouse, which happens to be the namesake corner home in historic 'Smith's Row'. The entire row is landmarked because it is a pristine example of federal architecture and is protected by the Georgetown Fine Arts Commission. The 6,000 sq ft home has 5 stories, including 4 bedrooms, 6 baths, pool and 3-car garage.

Where: Georgetown, Washington DC, a neighborhood of historic townhouses and beautiful tree-lined streets.

Why: A pristine, historic exterior reveals a light-filled modern interior, complete with a world class collection of modern art.

Rana Florida: *You decided to go completely modern rather than traditional. It's a great juxtaposition with the traditional exterior. Tell us about your design sense.*

Tina Alster: Because there was very little of the original interior to preserve (no antique floors or venerable hearths), we could be creative in our attempt to add space and light. We wanted a house with a historic presence, but one on which we could place our mark.



Living room

We have been collecting fine and decorative arts for a couple of decades that span a range of periods -- from Art Deco to modernism to contemporary. We wanted a clean and open space to display our collection. The end result is a striking mix of old (exterior) and new (interior).



Living room; “San Titre Bleu- Blue Nuit” 1979

RF: *Tell us about the renovation. What did you keep? What did you change?*

Tina: We ended up rebuilding most of the house. A termite-ridden sunroom which was a later addition to the rear of the original brick house was removed. The house’s concrete foundation was re-poured and the first floor was lowered in order to provide more headroom in the kitchen and dining room. The entire brick façade was re-pointed and the roof replaced. The backyard was terraced and a pool was installed over a geothermal heating system which serves to heat and cool the entire house. The interior staircase was rebuilt with open risers and a sculptural glass railing. Even the exterior limestone front steps were replaced. Original pattern books were used to replicate period pocket windows and exterior trim.



Library

RF: *What was the biggest challenge you overcame during renovation?*

Tina: The biggest challenge was the time it took to complete the renovation. We had originally budgeted for 18 months of renovation, but it took twice that long (and nearly twice the original budget as well). In essence, when one thing was altered, that often led to another alteration such that the total renovation was more than we had originally anticipated.



Library

RF: *Who was your designer and architect and how did you decide on the team?*

Paul: The architects were Hugh Newell Jacobsen and his son, Simon Jacobsen, of Jacobsen Architecture. Tina had worked with Hugh Newell Jacobsen in the preceding years to design her office and a retail space, so knew that there was a shared design aesthetic.

RF: *Do you and your husband share the same design aesthetic?*

Tina: Absolutely! We often go into a museum, gallery, or store and come out being impressed by exactly the same pieces even though we would have viewed them individually (and in different orders).



Kitchen

RF: Your furniture is so unique, where did you source it?

Tina & Paul: Over the past several years, we have collected furniture, decorative and fine art from a number of sources. Our taste has progressed such that we now mix and match pieces from a number of different periods. We don't buy pieces to match, but think that good design (regardless of style) always goes well together. We do not use an interior designer or professional buyer, but often make purchases when we travel. For example, we purchased Weiner Werkstatte pieces in Berlin and Art Deco furniture in Paris. Most of our modernist pieces were found in Philadelphia and Chicago.



Obama image: "The New Idea" by Casey Ryder

RF: *Tell us about your amazing art collection, especially about the Obama piece.*

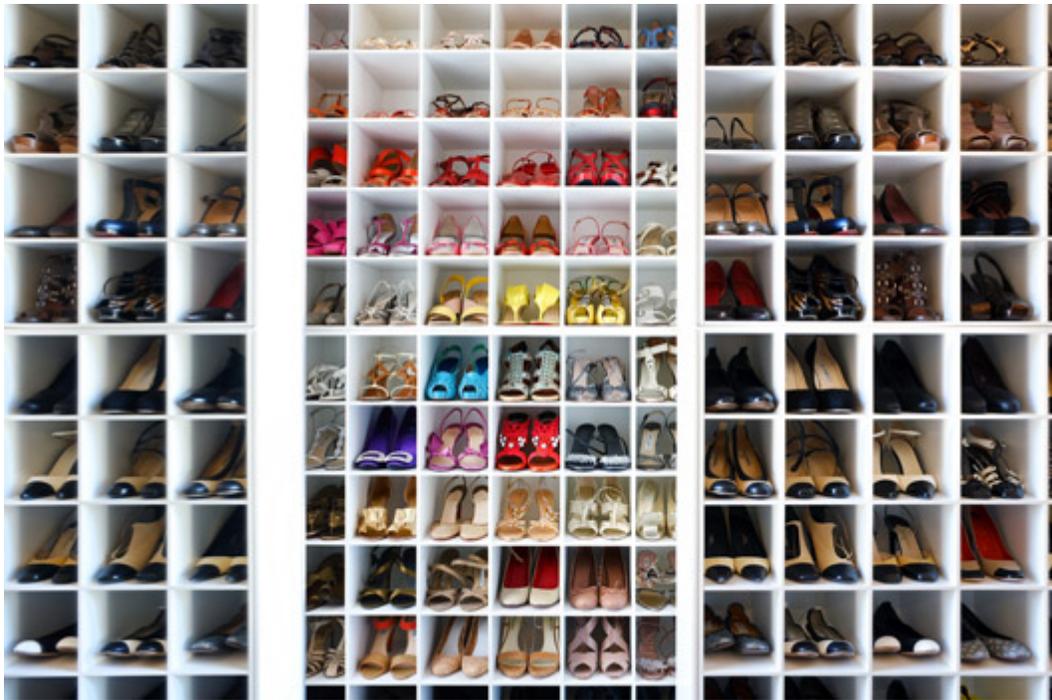
Tina & Paul: Despite the many German Expressionist woodcuts and cubist etchings, most of our fine art is contemporary Canadian and American. We have wonderful pieces by Canadian artists Louis Comtois, Bettie Goodwin, Roland Poulin and Melvin Charney (most obtained in Montreal at Rene Blouin's gallery). American artists in our collection include Ellsworth Kelly, Sol Lewitt, and Jim Sanborn. The Obama image, "The New Idea" by Casey Ryder, was the winning image at the 2009 Presidential Inauguration art show. We have a tabletop and exterior sculpture as well as a mobile by George Rickey of which we are particularly fond.



Master bedroom

RF: *The bookshelves are such a striking and unique feature, did you design your space around them?*

Tina: The “egg crate” bookshelves are a typical design feature seen in all of Hugh Newell Jacobsen’s interiors. We have always had libraries in our homes, but find this one to be the most efficient because of the immense number of books the shelves can store. In addition, they become “wall sculpture” in and of themselves!



Master closet detail

RF: *The shoe closet is the envy of every woman. How many shoes does this wall of candy hold?*

Tina: The double bank of rolling egg crate shoe cubbies hold a few hundred pairs of shoes. The lower cubbies on the front wall are taller in order to hold boots. An adjacent wall contains additional cubbies of varying sizes to store purses, clutches and evening bags. And yet another wall has hooks for belts and necklaces. I love having these accessories on display so that I can make appropriate choices for outfits without having to open boxes, drawers or closet doors.



Master bath

RF: What is your favorite room in the house?

Tina & Paul: Our favorite room is whatever one we happen to be in. The rooms are comfortable with excellent lighting such that they are great for relaxing, reading or entertaining. Each room displays treasures from our travels and reminds us of past and present happy times.

Photo Details

Living Room:

1. Sofa and armchairs by Alfred Porteneuve c. 1939
2. Glass and Brazilian rosewood coffee table by Jacques Adnet c. 1932
3. Pair, ebonized armchairs by Kammerer 1940
4. Pair, ebonized stools by Josef Hoffman 1930
5. B&B Lens étagère by Patricia Urquiola
6. Christolfe silver and black patinated vases on console c. 1925
7. George Rickey hanging sculpture “Eight Rectangles Eight Squares Folded” 1994
8. Ellsworth Kelly “Untitled” 1979 (above fireplace)
9. Louis Comtois “San Titre Bleu- Blue Nuit” 1979
10. Sol Lewitt “Four Geometric Figures” and “Six Geometric Figures” 1979

Library:

1. Sofa & armchairs by Gio Ponti c. 1960 (commissioned for the Parco Principi Hotel in Rome).
2. Piano (Pleyel) with Brazilian rosewood and sycamore casing by Jacques Adnet, c.1930.
3. Desk and chair in satinwood and ebonized wood by Maurice Dufrene, c. 1920.
4. Ebonized beechwood chairs (on either side of fireplace) by Josef Hoffman c. 1905
5. Ligne Roset coffee and cigarette tables
6. William Kentridge's "The General" 1993 (over fireplace) and "Casspirs Full of Love" 1989 (between windows).
7. Group of 4 vintage German Expressionist woodcuts c. 1912-1918 (above piano) by Conrad Felixmuller, Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, Emile Nolde, and Max Kaus. Adjacent wall with self portrait by Max Beckmann c. 1920.

Master Bedroom:

1. Bed and mounted side tables by Hugh Newell Jacobsen
2. Lady armchairs by Marco Zanuso c. 1950-60
3. Louis Sognot wood and glass coffee table c. 1950
4. Bentwood writing desk by Josef Hoffman c. 1905
5. Bent solid beech chair by Thonet c. 1905
6. Bettie Goodwin (3 pieces) "Untitled- Nerves" 1993, "Beyond Chaos #4 1998, Beyond Chaos #9 1998

