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For an art-collecting Houston couple, architect Allan Greenberg and designer Elissa Cullman craft a graceful Federal-style mansion that seamlessly blends European antiques and Abstract Expressionist paintings

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Ceramic pitchers by Picasso are displayed atop a Regency table in the entrance hall of Susanne and Bill Pritchard's Houston residence; the chandelier is 1830s French, and the 1820s German hall chairs are from Mallett. Beneath the stairs, a Richard Serra drawing surmounts a William IV cabinet from Galerie Sylvain Lévy-Alban. The home was designed by Allan Greenberg Architect, decorated by Cullman & Kravis, and landscaped by Deborah Nevins & Assoc.

Opposite: A Hans Hofmann painting hangs above a custom-made Jamb mantel in the double living room; Biedermeier armchairs from Karl Kemp Antiques stand on a circa-1920 Tabriz carpet from Galerie Shabab. For details see Sources.



Crowned with an octagonal cupola, Susanne and Bill Pritchard's redbrick residence is among hundreds of gracious homes

that burnish the reputation of River Oaks, the distinguished Houston enclave. From the fanlight over the front door to the triple-hung windows to a square-columned piazza recalling the one at Mount Vernon, the house seems like it has been standing on its two acres forever—which was intentional. Five years ago the couple bought an older dwelling and, after realizing it did not quite work for their needs, constructed one so sensitive to the River Oaks streetscape that it looks as if “could have been built in the 1930s,” says Bill. “A lot of people don’t realize this is not a restoration.”

The new home’s venerable character is courtesy of an expert design team: architect Allan Greenberg, admired for his suave historicism; interior decorator Elissa Cullman, known for her smart takes on tradition; and landscape guru Deborah Nevins, creator of sophisticated residential gardens for high-powered clients such as Rupert Murdoch and David Geffen. They spent more than three years designing and building the structure—which is ennobled with dynamic dentil moldings, handsome pilasters, and bold plaster ceiling medallions—and shaping the grounds. Adding to the challenge, the Pritchards were renovating, with Greenberg’s assistance, a handsome prewar apartment in New York City as well as an 1890s summer house at the Omni Homestead Resort in Virginia’s Allegheny Mountains while the Houston effort was under way. “It’s crazy that we had all those projects going on simultaneously,” admits Bill, a longtime petroleum geologist and the founder and CEO of Indigo Minerals, which owns and manages oil wells across the Gulf Coast.

The genteel appearance of the couple’s Houston place, their primary residence, reflects the port city’s stylistic heritage. “Houstonians have a wonderful

Two Anthony Lawrence-Belfair sofas clad in a Pollack silk furnish the other section of the living room, where Louis XVI-style gilt-bronze sconces from Florian Papp and a painting by Hofmann are installed above another Jamb mantel; the circa-1780 French fauteuils are from Bernd Goeckler Antiques.





Greenberg designed the kitchen cabinetry; the light fixtures are by Ann-Morris Antiques, the range is from EuroChef USA, the wall oven is by TurboChef, and the sink fittings are by Waterworks.

appearances, and there is a notable emphasis on female artists, especially, Susanne says, “under-appreciated Abstract Expressionists.” A Lee Krasner painting hangs above the dining room fireplace, and vibrant works by Krasner and Joan Mitchell are displayed in the master bedroom.

Westreich was counseling the Pritchards while the Houston house was still in the planning stages, so most of the pair’s growing collection was relegated to storage for years until the rooms were ready. Installing the works has been revelatory. “It’s a

little like seeing old friends,” Bill says. “You remember the experience—at Art Basel or in a gallery in New York or shopping an online auction. I think I could tell you where and when we acquired each piece of art.” He also remembers the ones that got away, among them a French Money canvas by Larry Rivers. “Dealer William Acquavella bought that one,” Bill says, “so we felt validated.”

Now that every treasure is in its proper place—curators from the Menil Collection, where Bill is a member of the board of trustees, dropped by to

offer strategic advice—the Pritchards are learning the real value of living with such major artistic achievements: It can be good for the soul.

“Before I go to bed,” Bill says, “I wander around and look at everything.” Susanne chimes in with a laugh, “He’s the spender. I’m the one who says, ‘Wait a minute—think about this. Is it really right for the house? Do we love it? Is it something that fits? Have we done our research?’” Room after sunlit room, it’s clear that those questions have been magnificently answered. □

Opposite, from top: In the living room, a Gerhard Richter work joins Biedermeier chairs from Karl Kemp Antiques. Paintings by Lee Krasner (left) and Richard Pousette-Dart overlook the dining room’s Regency mahogany table and circa-1880 Chippendale-style chairs.



A Joan Mitchell painting presides over the master bedroom; Cullman & Kravis designed the bed and bench, both of which are upholstered in a Kravet fabric. The curtains are of a Lee Jofa silk, the bed linens are by Matouk, the side table is circa-1920 Jansen, and the rug is by Beauvais Carpets. **Opposite, from top:** Susanne's bath features a chandelier from Remains Lighting, a Greenberg-designed shower, and a marble floor. Gracie wallpaper lines a powder room; the vanity was made from a Directoire commode.

The slate-roofed redbrick house is architect Allan Greenberg's essay on the Federal style of the early 1800s, from lean silhouette to double-height piazza.



appreciation for American classical architecture," Greenberg says. "River Oaks is one of the most remarkable neighborhoods I have seen in this country." As for the house he produced for the Pritchards, it harks back to the early 1800s, but don't call it Georgian. Greenberg describes it as "quintessentially American and not English. Federal is the word I would use."

For the main floor the architect planned a succession of dignified entertaining spaces warmed by strong southern light. The double living room—a P-shaped space illuminated by gilded 19th-century chandeliers and divided by Ionic columns—contains two custom-made marble mantels, one in each area; the mantels are set perpendicular to each other, ensuring that the furniture arrangements would be varied rather than repetitive.

Beyond the expansive living room is a cocktail party-ready gallery floored with hefty French-oak planks. A 19th-century Italian painted-and-gilded table centers the space and hosts a casual abundance of visual delights, from barley-twist brass candlesticks to a vase of delphiniums whose brilliant violet-blues echo the same shades dappled across a nearby 1970s abstract painting by the French artist Simon Hantai.

"Ellie does a wonderful job of mixing in lots of antiques," Susanne says of Cullman, "but the result doesn't look like your grandmother's house—it feels fresh and youthful." And memorable, too. "There is nothing brown and boring here," the interior designer avers, pointing out a sinewy Regency satinwood side table that was spotted at an auction and chosen for the living room. "Everything has a little something that makes it special."

Though the architecture and much of the furniture has one foot in the past, a transatlantic array of Abstract Expressionist and contemporary paintings, drawings, and collages serve as modern counterpoints. Selected with the help of prominent art adviser Thea Westreich, herself a well-known collector, the colorful creations burst like fireworks amid the peaceful color schemes of cream, biscuit, blue-gray, and blush. "The palette had to be calm because the art is so arresting," Cullman says.

Some of the most significant pieces in the house are a work on paper by Jackson Pollock, a monumental painting by Richard Pousette-Dart, and multiple canvases by Hans Hofmann, two of which brighten the living room. Ceramics by Picasso make

Opposite, clockwise from top left: The Pritchards pause in the entrance hall, before a Helen Frankenthaler painting. In the gallery, 1920s lanterns from Carlos de la Puente Antiques hover above a 19th-century Italian table; the large canvas is by Simon Hantai. Works by Sarah Morris (left) and Hofmann enliven the oak-paneled library. Paul Ferrante lanterns are suspended in the rotunda and upper hall; the inlaid compass rose embellishing the floor was designed by Greenberg, and the ink-and-photo collages displayed on the far wall are by Chris Ofili.

