



"I never thought I'd live in a brick house," jokes interior designer Michael Booth as he leans in the front doorway of his recently renovated home on Providence's East Side. **FACING PAGE:** In the foyer, a pair of orange crackle-glaze lamps from Guinevere in London sit atop an antique Chinese elm farm table; hanging above the Venetian mirror by S.A.L.I.R. is an Italian Renaissance wall panel found in Providence.



# HOME AGAIN

Designer Michael Booth returns to his roots while rehabbing a stately Federal-style house in Providence.

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**F**or San Francisco-based designer Michael Booth, the move to Providence was a homecoming of sorts. The Rhode Island native's Providence roots run deep: his grandfather went to Rhode Island School of Design (as did he), his parents both attended Brown University, and his father was a longtime teacher at a local private school. Years of memorable summer vacations on the East Coast only solidified the move.



**ABOVE:** The oft-lit living room fireplace, the largest of four throughout the house, takes the chill off during winter months; an art deco French ottoman discovered in Paris sits in front of a Louis XVI chair from Axel Vervoordt, both of which are covered in Fortuny fabrics. **LEFT:** A nook in the entryway houses an eighteenth-century Italian cabinet from David Neligan Antiques in Essex, Massachusetts, and a floor lamp from Venetia Studium in Venice. **FACING PAGE:** Epure black burlap wallcovering by Élitis in the foyer and on the three-story stair hall makes for a dramatic entrance.

“We didn’t close our eyes and throw a dart at the map,” jokes Booth, cofounder of the design firm BAMO (which now has a Providence outpost).

And then there was the architecture. “Providence had the highest per capita income in the U.S. from something like 1880 to 1910,” explains Booth. “And the houses show it.” In fact, the listing that caught the attention of Booth and his husband, Mike Oliva, was a handsome Federal-style brick house on the East Side built in 1911.

The only problem? It hadn’t been renovated since the ‘80s. Though for a

The grand sofa by Hutton Collections anchors the seating group, which includes an eighteenth-century American wing chair from David Neligan Antiques. The abstract watercolor is by Booth's longtime friend, San Francisco-based artist Andrew Belschner, while the boldly colorful area rug, which ties the room together, was purchased closer to home at Luminous Rug Gallery in Providence.





**LEFT:** "We have great appreciation for the history and craftsmanship of old buildings," notes SR Fine Home Builders' Nick Vanasse when discussing the perks and challenges of rehabbing an older home like this. **BELOW:** The dry bar reinterprets the home's original cabinetry, and an antique Seguso lantern found in London also nods to the past. **FACING PAGE:** In the dining room, "Italian Panoramic wallcovering by Iksel Decorative Arts brings the outdoors in," says Booth, "like a fantasy version of our East Side neighborhood."



"I really admire Michael for his dramatic sense of displaying things."

—Architect Mary Dorsey Brewster

designer, that presented more of an opportunity than an issue. Armed with a ton of ideas ("As an interior designer sometimes you can't make up your own mind," Booth admits with a laugh) and an able team—architect Mary Dorsey Brewster and SR Fine Home Builders—Booth set out to quickly transform the house from dowdy to divine.

First, there were some larger tasks to tackle, including reconfiguring the pantry "dry bar," enlarging the kitchen by bumping out the exterior wall six feet, moving the first-floor powder room,

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—Builder Nick Vanasse



**ABOVE:** The new kitchen features Urban Electric Co. pendants, honed Vermont Danby stone, and counter stools by Sawkille Co.; “the rare Paul Philp vase, which sits out of harm’s way above the refrigerator,” says Booth, “is by my favorite ceramicist and found in my favorite city, London.” **LEFT:** Clè tile gives the rebuilt sunroom a graphic punch; the Jensen Furniture sofa is a popular spot for the (extended) family to lounge, and here, Mike Oliva holds Clyde while Jenny relaxes with Booth.

combining two bedrooms to create a primary suite, and adding another full bath upstairs for proper guest quarters. “It was a substantial renovation,” says Nick Vanasse of SR Fine Home Builders. “It’s a challenge to go into an old house like this and bring it up to date while simultaneously paying homage to its origin.”

Booth eliminated doors (“We threw away twenty-seven,” he recalls) and, in many cases, enlarged door openings throughout the first

floor, lending a more open feel. New seven-inch white-oak flooring and a coat of Benjamin Moore Simply White gave the designer a neutral canvas to work with. Gesturing around the living room, he says, “Everything you see is from storage in San Francisco; it’s a collection of stuff acquired over time.” Only the piano (teenage twins Grace and Gabriel both play), coffee table, and rug are new.

And all those pieces, which are so skillfully

**CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT:** The shelves in the second-floor landing showcase family photos and the latest LEGO projects; the oversized glass bell jar lantern is by Formations. Architect Mary Dorsey Brewster skillfully converted a family room and a warren of closets into en suite guest quarters; the handmade bed is from The Country Bed Shop in Ashby, Massachusetts. The third-floor guest room displays a lively collection of illustrations by Charley Harper.



and artfully arranged, come with a story: there's the bookshelf in the main bedroom that's from London, the Jansen Furniture sofa in the sunroom that was discovered at a Paris flea market, and the antique wing chair in the living room found at David Neligan Antiques in Essex, Massachusetts. Not to mention all the watercolors and etchings deftly scattered about that hail from both sides of the family. "I really admire Michael for his dramatic sense of displaying things," says Brewster.

A sense of the dramatic is imbued throughout the house, from the panoramic wallcovering by Iksel Decorative Arts in the dining room to the geometric Clé tile in the sunroom, to the black stairwell in the foyer. "I had never worked on a project with a black stairwell before," remembers Brewster. "I had my doubts, but it is wonderful." Much the same way any doubts about a cross-country move were erased as the thoughtful new family home came to fruition.

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** For details, see Resources.

**ARCHITECTURE:**  
Brewster Thornton  
Group Architects  
**INTERIOR DESIGN:**  
Michael Booth,  
BAMO  
**BUILDER:** SR Fine  
Home Builders