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REAL ESTATE | DESIGN

How a Colorful Fur Jacket Inspired a Boston Brownstone's Decor

Interior designer Liz Caan's client gave her a challenging brief: Create a cozy home based on a crazy jacket. The question: How literally to interpret that jumping-off point?



VERY FOXY In a Boston townhouse's library, designer Liz Caan captured some of the irreverence of the homeowner's harlequin-hued jacket in the scale shift of the club chair's upholstery. Grey-painted woodwork and brown herringbone wallpaper calm things down. PHOTO: BOB O'CONNOR FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

By Catherine Romano

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THE PERSON WHO wears this jacket doesn't live in this house as it stands." So concluded Liz Caan and her associate Cooper Herrlinger when their client showed them the multicolored pieced-fur jacket she hoped would inspire the interiors of her historic Boston brownstone. The house that would be home to her, her husband and two college-age children was "very stately and dark and expected," said Ms. Caan. Its library, for example, originally held two hulking partners' desks at which no fan of a harlequin-hued fox-fur jacket would willingly sit. The designers paired a smaller-scale desk with a comfly enveloping, dramatic chair—"the opposite of what we usually get in a library." And "because the coat is a little bit rock 'n' roll," the designers further padded the chair with a pillow that depicts the Rolling Stones's tongue-and-lips logo in leather and linen.

"The jacket gave us insight into who she is and how she wanted her house to feel," said the designer, based in Newton, Mass. "This person likes to have fun, and this house should reflect that." Here, the myriad ways the designers translated the slightly irreverent coat into an equally irreverent library.



Spirit Guide: The Jacket PHOTO: F. MARTIN RAMIN/ THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

A Color Infusion—Up to a Point

The wing-backed desk chair is the only truly multicolored element in the room. Its upholstery, a Christopher Farr linen, features stripes of fuchsia, yellow, pink, blue-green and a purer green on a red background. “We realized we couldn’t pull into this space all the colors found in the jacket without turning it into a playroom,” said Ms. Caan. The team narrowed the palette to toned-down shades of red, pink and orange. But only so much control was called for. To convey the jacket’s wilder side, they relied on slightly jarring variations in scale when it came to patterns. A large, bold Manuel Canovas print wraps the outside of the club chairs, while a smaller pattern sits demurely inside.

Ms. Caan flicked at the jacket’s blue with the azure-bound books shelved to the left of the fireplace. “I usually corral books by color to make them look more organized,” she said. “This grouping helped us reinforce the little blobs of color that make up the jacket, and to break up the red, orange and pink in the decorating.”

To offset the fabrics’ exuberance and instill a bit of the seriousness a brownstone deserves, the team painted the room’s woodwork a deep gray and clad the walls in brown herringbone raffia from Schumacher. Ms. Caan feels the overall message is: “We’re fun and a little crazy, but we’re not inappropriate.”

Honored: The Softness of Fur

The coat’s untailed blobbiness and irregular patches of fluff informed Ms. Caan’s furnishing choices. “Everything is soft,” she said. The ottoman as well as the club chairs, so frequently boxy and macho, preach the gospel of curves. Even the right-angled arms of the [Restoration Hardware](#) globed chandelier are gently rounded.

Steering clear of strict linear patterns for the rug, the designers chose a faux woodgrain number from Stark. “It’s a little out there,” said Ms. Caan. The black hair-on hide that anchors the seating by the fireplace not only alludes to the animal fur of the coat, its amoeboid shape adheres to the organic theme.

“This jacket is not overly uptight and it’s not over-constructed, and neither is this room,” said Ms. Caan. To wit: In front of a painting, in the far right corner, stand two unusually angled African vases. “There’s nothing structured or straight to them. They have this weird posture, like they’re dancing.”

An Unnatural Take on Nature

There's nothing purely natural about this room. After all, the garment that shaped its aesthetic is fox fur that's been dyed, chopped up and sewn back together. Ms. Caan allows that she may have unconsciously gravitated to "heavily manipulated natural materials" such as the woven-raffia wall covering and the upholstery of the ottoman, from Lance Woven Leather in Norwalk, Conn. The poof's Italian leather has been cut into strips, died coral and bronze, and manipulated into a fine weave. "It is over the top, but you have to get close to understand what it is."

The drapes, too, combine nature and artifice. They're sewn from another Christopher Farr fabric that began life as undyed linen then was theatricalized with a pattern of orange, pink and lime green. "They're like the jacket: 'I am a natural material, but I've got these neon colors all over me,'" said Ms. Caan.

Of the sconces that flank the mirror—pared-down versions of hurricane lamps—Ms. Caan said, "They're a modern take on a classic, which is what this is all about. Little fur jackets have been around forever, but they haven't always been treated this way."