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Joie de Vivre

DESIGNER MELANIE ELSTON CREATES
A DELIGHTFUL—AND BEIGE-FREE—HOME
FOR A CHICAGO FAMILY

BY LISA CREGAN
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Some homeowners hire a decorator to make a splash. Others for sophistication. Some just want their curtains to match their carpets. For Laura Kofoid, the only objective was “joy.”

“I want my eyes to light up every day. I want to smile and say ‘That’s awesome!’” proclaims Laura of her challenge to interior designer Melanie Elston. The task at hand was combining two adjacent apartments into a family home for Laura, husband David Ricci, and their children, Simon, 13, and C.J., 8. “I wanted vibrancy. I wanted cheerfulness. I wanted color,” says Laura.

Beige? Not an option.

“Actually, Laura said flat-out, ‘No beige allowed!’” laughs Elston, recalling the back and forth leading up to this glorious explosion of self-confident color. Take the traditional mahogany dining chairs in their orange leopard print, the canary yellow curtains in the otherwise black-and-white office, living room walls painted an exuberant peacock blue, or the family room swathed in a madcap shade Elston calls “pumpkin.” Then factor in that this apartment is located in a primly proper 1927 building on Chicago’s fashionable Lake Shore Drive. “It’s outrageous in some ways, but it’s also warm and enveloping,” says Elston, “Laura and David are very sensory. And they really don’t care what anyone else thinks!”

A family brush with serious illness might explain the devil-may-care design philosophy. David weathered two brain tumors soon after their marriage but has been cancer-free these last seven years (family shout-out to the Northwestern University Brain Tumor Institute). “It’s all intertwined—David’s recovery, our decorating, the



Family room Aiming for 100 percent kid-friendly, designer Melanie Elston started with a spill-proof purple rug from Savnik. “You could lose small children in there,” laughs homeowner Laura Kofoid. Emerald green vintage Italian lamps crown a mid-century Monteverdi Young cabinet. A Victoria Hagan wingback chair (opening page) is fashionably dressed in contrasting fabrics. **Preceding pages** In the living room, peacock-blue walls complement the vibrant orange in the adjacent family room.

“LAURA SAID FLAT-OUT, ‘NO BEIGE ALLOWED!’” —designer Melanie Elston



Living room instead of a sofa, swoop-back chairs from Dessin Fournir are arranged "like campers ringing a bonfire," says Elston. A custom-made banquette and an ottoman covered in Bergamo "Ball" silk create a cozy corner for David Ricci, Laura Kofoid, and their children, Simon and C.J.





way we live our life—everything,” says Laura. “I only have one prayer, and that’s for health. So many people don’t get it. If you like a leopard print rug, don’t be afraid to put one in your office! Rock on. Express yourself.”

Even the custom handbag company Laura co-owns expresses that joyful philosophy. It’s called *Laudi Vidni* (“individual” spelled backwards). “When someone stresses over a decision about a purse, I’ll say, ‘It’s a purse! It’s not the most important thing in your life,’” she exclaims. “Don’t stress. Enjoy! The same thing for a house; it should be fun.”

Elston, who collaborated on the project with Morgante-Wilson Architects, quickly fell under the Kofoid-Ricci’s cheery spell. “I felt so fortunate to have the opportunity to think outside the box,” she says. “For instance, we didn’t do a big sofa in the living room. It was all about keeping the room light. The chairs are a nice way to have a central group without being heavy and cumbersome.” Laura’s take on the arrangement is a little more to the point: “Things were starting to get too quiet. We needed to shake it up.” The living room now manages to provide a cool accompaniment to the spicy brew that’s served up in the family room.

Referencing the architecture of an elegant English library, the family room’s geometric paneling conceals a TV above the fireplace,

Dining room Traditional dining chairs are given a fresh spin with Colefax and Fowler’s leopard-print “Malabar” upholstery. **Entry hall** A stately grandfather clock and Zuber et Cie’s “Les Courses de Chevaux” amazing scenic wallpaper contribute to the home’s stunning first impression.





I WANTED VIBRANCY.

I WANTED CHEERFULNESS. I WANTED COLOR! —homeowner Laura Kofoid

Hall A white "Tulip" chair from Baker and an oversized 1960s enameled sconce pop against walls painted Farrow & Ball's "Hague Blue."
Billiards room A custom table, 1970s Lucite-and-brass bar stools, and Farrow & Ball "Silvergate" wallpaper create a glamorous corner.
Office Elston created a bold space with Glen Eden's "Out of Africa" rug and yellow curtains in Scalamandre's "Bamboo."
Game room Green leather upholstery on dining chairs from the '50s mixes with Ralph Lauren Regent Metallics "Summer Gold" paint. "The closest I could come to beige without being beige," laughs Elston.
Living room Elston mixes vibrant patterns—chair upholstery is "New Wave" from Old World Weavers, and the rug is from Patterson, Flynn & Martin.
Kitchen Stained cork floors create a graphic backdrop for the classic kitchen.





but it's a traditional recipe with a few jalapeños tossed in. "This room gets so much sunlight bouncing in off Lake Michigan that it can take a really intense color on the walls," explains Elston about the high-gloss orange envelope she chose for the space. "A flat finish would have been too dull for Laura and David." Apparently, *dull* is every bit as verboten as *beige*.

Most days, C.J. Simon, and friends liven up the place even further, tearing around the apartment's circular layout before collapsing ►

Master bedroom

A wall covering from Stark sets the stage for a lively mix of fabrics and patterns. The rug is from Michaelan & Kohlberg.



in momentary exhaustion into the pair of oversized wing chairs flanking the family room fireplace. "We did damask on the outside of those chairs and wide-wale corduroy on the inside for durability," notes Elston. The room's purple shag rug would be an equally sumptuous landing spot. "You could lose small children in there" says Laura delightedly. "When Elston showed this rug to us, David and I laughed out loud, so we said, 'It's perfect!' You can spill on it and no one would ever know. Plus, it's so comfy underfoot."

Not to be outdone in the wow department, the game room is actually painted in metallic gold. Though the room's sparkle is every bit a match for youthful exuberance, that isn't the reason for the glitter. "This gold is the closest I could come to beige without being beige!" laughs Elston. "It's actually a breathing space between the super-vibrant family room, the zebra rug in the office, and the billiards room with its intricate damask walls."

In a place with this much passion and stimulation, you might reasonably expect the master bedroom to be an oasis of Zen. Think again. "We don't do calm," admits Laura. Instead, a vibrant chinoiserie wallpaper echoes the Chinese ancestral paintings in the living room, vivid daily reminders of C.J.'s Chinese heritage and the joy her adoption brought to the family. "To think of her just makes us smile," explains Laura.

Objective met. This color-drenched home exudes a contagious happiness, just like the family who lives here. ■

Architect: Morgante-Wilson Architects **Interior designer:** Melanie Elston

For more information, see sources on page 146



Design Discourse

Designer Melanie Elston offers tips on decorating with color and pattern:

- To create a balanced room, offset large patterns with solids or patterns designed on a smaller scale.
- To use color successfully, continuity of tone and intensity from room to room is essential. When using bold colors, be bold everywhere.
- Create transition spaces when using a lot of pattern and color. A great runner and a focal point at a half's end are all you need.
- I nearly always use a solid on a sofa to anchor the room. I love to then offset that piece with a fun pattern on a shapely chair.
- Mix styles! The beauty is in the mix of modern patterns.

Master bath Stark's "Gridlock" wallpaper in pink slate and a vanity skirt made with Bergamo's "Saunter" fabric add flirty elements to the otherwise sleek and clean-lined space.