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## SACRED GROUND

JamesThomas crafts a home in lakeview fit for family—lots of family!—and full of spirituality.

By Katie Anne Orr  
Photography by Scott Shigley

When Suzanne Muchin talks about her home, it's obvious that her affection extends far beyond its construction and interiors. With a genuine smile, her eyes drift to the side, recalling moments. To Muchin, this is a place full of history and happiness. A naturally warm hostess, she's also a radio talk show host, mother to five children ages 13 to 24, avid marathoner and respectful follower of her Jewish faith. Her home is the sacred epicenter of it all, and she loves opening it up to others. "I always wanted to have a home that was a hub, where everyone wanted to come," she says. "I live a very public life, but I'm a homebody at heart."

When Muchin and husband David Brown moved out of their spacious second-floor Lakeview condominium and into the third- and fourth-floor duplex above, they called upon architectural firm JamesThomas to undertake a meaningful redesign of the space. Old memories remained after the former upstairs neighbors—their very close friends—had left. But this was a new chapter. "We started from scratch and tried to completely reimagine the space for their lifestyle," says James Dolenc, who co-founded JamesThomas alongside partner Tom Riker in 2003. "We had seen the space before and it was

**PERFECTLY APPOINTED**  
A custom red Murano glass chandelier by Borovik & Toso pulls together the great room's mixed chair arrangement by Baker, Westcott Design and Inoué Co. JamesThomas wanted it to be "relaxed and easy to move around for when social gatherings," says Dolenc.

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**DESIGN PAIR**  
 (Clockwise from right) Designers Dolenc and Riker "traced to take a little dose here and there, and do lots of light, muted colors—purples, lemons, pale blues, silvers," says Dolenc; the living room boasts espresso bars and a colorful art display; in the show kitchen, the custom-designed walnut table enjoys conversation with surrounding chairs of floral fabric by Bergamini. "Love that fabric! It was the inspiration and drove the whole color palette in the kitchen, great room and living room," says Dolenc.



CONTINUED... lovely, so it's always hard to dismantle something that you know and can appreciate," says Riker. "But, while it was a visually beautiful home, it wasn't reflective of our client."

Every Friday evening, Michlin and Brown transform their home into a gathering space for Shabbat dinner, honoring the weekly Jewish day of rest, and they needed a space which would accommodate 25 dining guests and separate prep areas to keep kosher. While a simple concept, from an architectural standpoint, this was no small feat. "We had to basically incorporate two kitchens into a city apartment that is already tapped for space," says Riker. So he and Dolenc tamed the original kitchen into a tucked-away usable preparatory area with sliding doors to shut it off from guests. They input two separate sinks and dishwashers, along with plenty of cabinetry to house separate dishes and silver, pots and pans. They opened up the dining area to flow into the living area, and created a show kitchen, complete with a cooking range and ornate white hood. But most noteworthy is the enormous walnut table custom built by James Thomas. Through mechanical ingenuity, using several extensions and leaves, two different dining and living room tables unfold and meet in the middle—connecting rooms and facilitating fellowship.

The rest of the residence is peppered with a fresh aesthetic presence. Plants and foliage are incorporated throughout—living things that add energy. Colors are prevalent but not primary, with plenty of purples, pale blues and silver. "We get a lot of clients who love gray—shades of gray, I call it," says Dolenc. "So it was very liberating for Tom and me to work with color—outside the

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CONTINUED... box." An eclectic series of light fixtures by Barvier & Toso, Bella Figura and Boyd illuminate the residence, layering it with different patterns of light.

Beneath the fresh redesign is a home that tells a tale of devotion to history and faith. A 48-by-82-inch time-lapse photograph of Israel hangs majestically in the living room's adjoining great room—Muschis's personal "window into Jerusalem," she says. Every doorpost is affixed with a mezuzah, and the upstairs hallway is lined with framed black-and-white images—four generations of family overseeing the home. Even the design relationship itself holds history, as James Thomas completed the original second-floor space in 2003. "I adore Suzanne," says Dolere. "While we had some projects on the drawing board 10 years ago, we had just started out, and she took a gamble on us. So to come back and do this 10 years later was very meaningful." ■

#### BIG MOMS

From top: In the daughter's room, the bed's upholstered head, custom designed by James Thomas, "helps make the small room feel like a hotel suite," says Dolere. Keeping the design sophisticated and clean with a minimal color palette, the "overall effect is cohesive and calming while still being approachable for a teenage girl," he says; in the foyer, the team used "sculptural, architectural-inspired foliage to help define and define a room... and bring the outdoors in," says Dolere.

