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The renovation, designed by Concetti of Detroit, that fearlessly embraces rich warmth, bold elegance, and century-old influences

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The Lake Erie Tudor Revisited

Text: R.J. Weick

Libby Palmieri Schwartz, lead designer and founder of House of L Designs in Cleveland, Ohio, loves a good metaphor. Every project is a blank page or a new chapter in a different font, and each client brings their own story and collection of what they love—details and anecdotes and objects, memories and things of sentiment collected over the years, waiting to be unearthed like precious stones in a moss-laden forest. She is a storyteller, an interior designer who recognizes the potential of space to reflect its users, to live and breathe with them, and that the home is far more than just a house. For Palmieri Schwartz, who has over 30 years of experience in the industry, interior design is truly an art form, one that requires a constant state of learning and curiosity, and as an avid listener and lead designer of the women-led design studio, the thread tying its portfolio together is its client-centric approach.

“I recently traveled to Japan, which was a dream of mine and my youngest son’s, and we went to this amazing sushi restaurant. The meticulousness with which the sushi chef created every piece of sushi just fascinated me, and so I asked him, ‘How long is the process of becoming what you would consider a master sushi chef?’ He looked at me and replied, ‘You never achieve complete mastery, because every day I learn something new and I try to be better at what I’m doing,’” Palmieri Schwartz said.

“To me, that is so relatable, because that is how I approach my work. I never feel like I’ve uncovered every stone, and everything is taken from a perspective of curiosity and interest and wanting to learn and explore different techniques and opportunities to introduce clients to something that they haven’t experienced before—or something I haven’t experienced before. I want to educate not only myself, but my clients through their journey of designing their home, so they optimize what they are getting as an end result based on their lifestyle, how they use their home, and who is living in the home,” Palmieri Schwartz added.





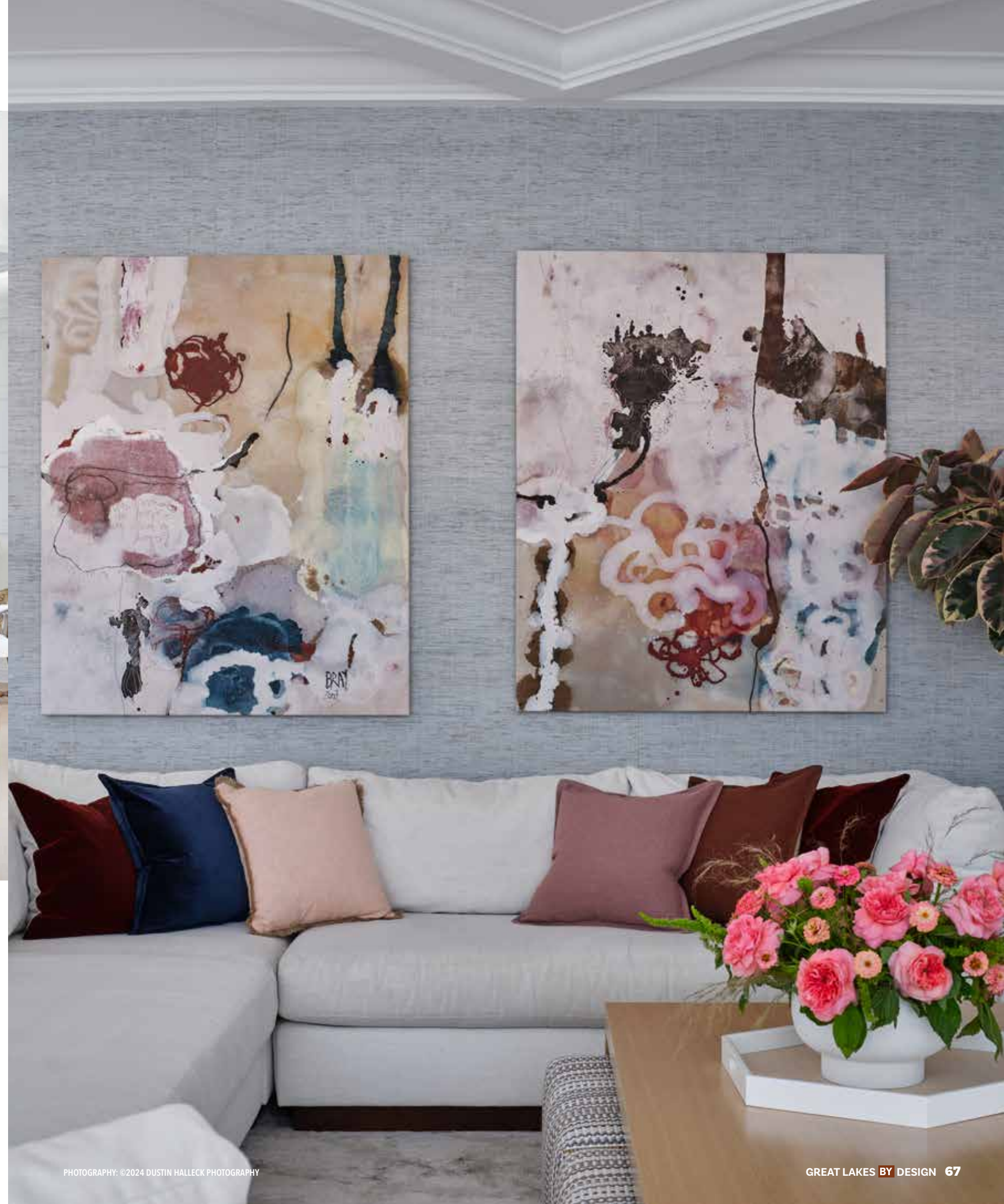
Founded in 2000, House of L is a full-service, women-led interior design studio specializing in high-end residential interiors and commercial work. The team takes a client-centered approach, working closely with project architects, builders, and trades throughout the design process as they help realize spaces that are reflective of each client and their story. It is about functionality and timeless design, regardless of style, bringing in color and materials in a manner that builds upon a strong understanding of space and form.

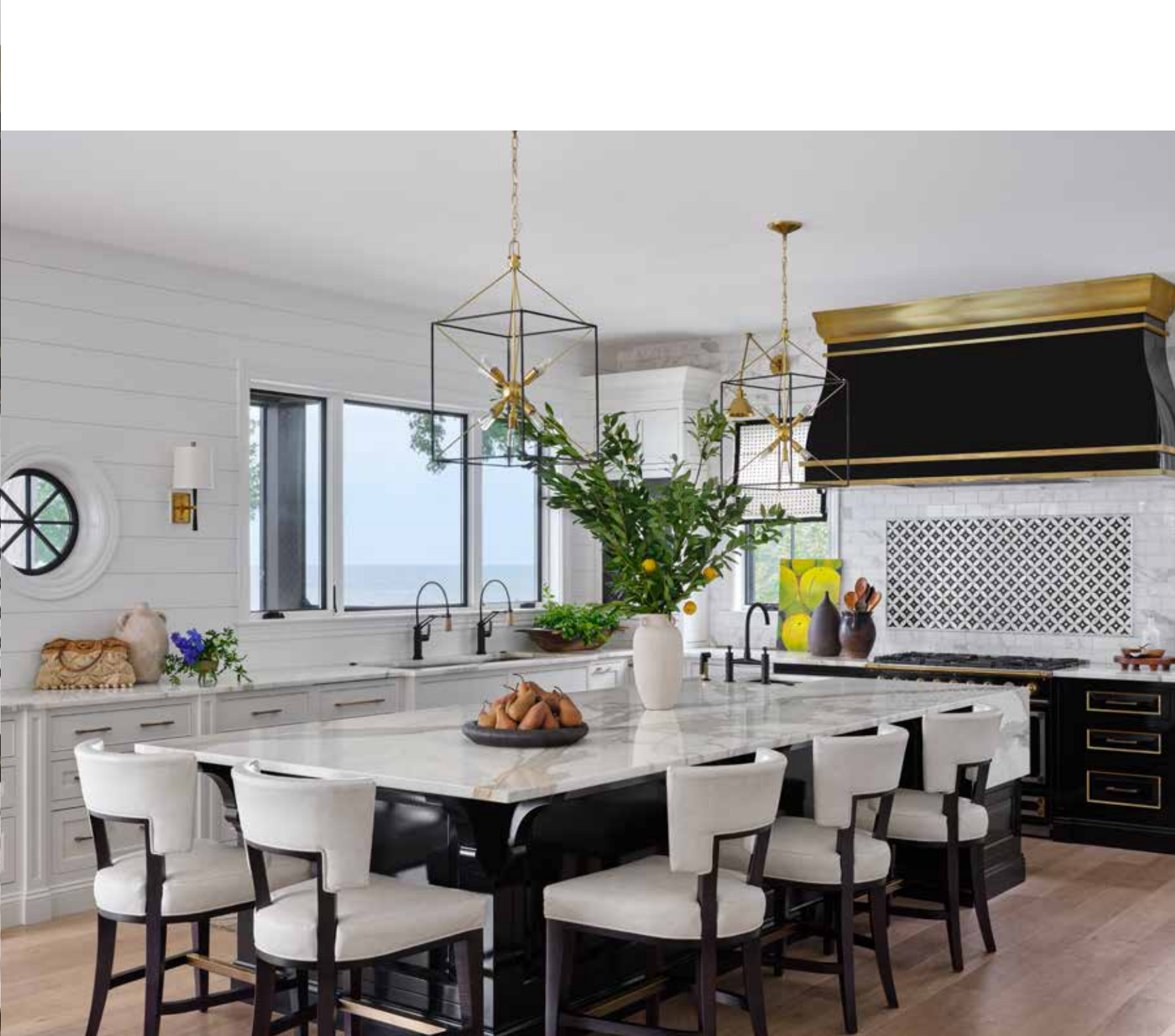
"It's about telling a story. I'm Greek and my culture revolves around storytelling that is meant to engage, so it's kind of innate in me

that I approach everything from a metaphorical standpoint. For me, it resonates so profoundly when I am able to sit down with a client for the first time and start gathering—I'm a forager of information—from them and once I feel like I'm tuning in and really relating to them, then I can take all of those elements and incorporate it into their home, translate it into their space," Palmieri Schwartz said. "Someone's home is close to one of the most intimate things to a person, so really being able to develop and understand what they want in presenting their home to themselves, to their family, to their friends, is pretty paramount for me in being able to design a space well."

Palmieri Schwartz's first foray—and forage—into interior design began with the design of her personal home in the late '90s, which quickly led to a proposal for working on an outside project with a client of her then husband, who was a builder. She admitted that while she was hesitant at first, once she had been convinced to take on the project, she hasn't really looked back since. She has built a boutique firm and team of four women based in Cleveland, Ohio with work that takes them across the country, helping to write—or, in the case of renovation and remodel work, rewrite—their clients' story in their own spaces.

"I think what has stayed constant is my love





for doing it and the passion of bringing in other people's stories into their home. That has always been a constant and a continuum throughout my career. Where it started and where it is now, is beyond what I had ever anticipated—it is pretty magical. We've been so fortunate, and it's been a great ride, and I feel like I'm just getting started even though it has been so long," Palmieri Schwartz said. "It's a never-ending adventure; every project is a blank slate."

Like any great storyteller, whose tools are the literary devices that help build worlds and allow stories to unfold in rich detail, Palmieri Schwartz and the House of L team begin with a foundation. It is through spatial arrangement

and the analysis of architectural prints, or build plans, to establish a strong sense of functionality throughout a home that good design can be elevated into something great for how a client—and their family—moves and lives. The details, the artwork, the collected objects and memories are then layered into the design to help bring it to life for the clients.

"Design is complicated, because there are so many different pieces to it. It's all about a layering process and those layers evolve into the final product, but it's not as simple as one thing that is going to make the house. Everything that pulls it together into the final product is such a process of immense detail—we're

looking through a magnifying glass at the little ladybug on the moss of the tree in a huge forest," Palmieri Schwartz said.

"It's a creation of so many pieces that we are pulling together and it's a lengthy and introspective process. It takes a lot of thoughtfulness and curation and having the ability to listen. It is about relating to people and telling their story; absorbing their life and mapping it in a three-dimensional space is probably my favorite part," Palmieri Schwartz added.

For the clients of this 6,500-square-foot home, it is a story that begins with its setting along the shores of Lake Erie in Cuyahoga County, Ohio. The clients had been looking for



a waterfront property in Rocky River—a suburb just west of Cleveland—and when they came across this particular lakefront site with an existing, early 1920s Tudor Revival house, they knew they had found the perfect little pocket to build their dream home. Though the original house was in a state of disrepair and ultimately was torn down, the new build realized by the architecture and build team of Steve Schill of Schill Architecture and Project Turnkey, was intentional about integrating elements that paid homage to the century-old structure while designing with modern efficiency in mind—and, equally as important, expanded the heart of the home to match their love of hosting and entertaining family and friends.

“Trying to renovate it would have been not only very aggressive, but I also don’t think the end result would have been compatible with their needs. We ended up tearing the house down and building new but honored the legacy of what was in a more modern, clean Tudor style. There are nods and winks to the architectural context of the house that had previously been there,” Palmieri Schwartz said.

“We used a plaster ceiling in the great room, which was very indicative of ceiling design of that time and important to translate that piece of it. I remember one of our trades at the time was like, ‘You can almost see the handprints on it,’ meaning the hands that touched it to make it, and I chuckled and

replied, ‘That’s part of the beauty of it, that is the whole point of it.’ It’s supposed to be perfectly imperfect, so that was a big detail that when you are in the foyer and have that lake view and the great room is directly ahead of you, that ceiling is one of the first things you capture walking in and was a great nod to the details that could be found in a historic home,” Palmieri Schwartz added.

Other elements that speak to the historic comprise the thematic black and white kitchen, complete with a black, white, and gold patterned backsplash; the gold-trimmed, custom metal hood for the La Cornue range; and wrought-iron doors incorporated throughout the home.

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— Libby Palmieri Schwartz, lead designer and founder of House of L Designs

“It harkened back to those architectural details, but they were done in a streamlined fashion. Those elements were, ‘Yes, it is here in spirit,’ but you don’t walk in and say, ‘It’s a Tudor,’ but there are little surprises that are there, and I feel acknowledge the original house,” Palmieri Schwartz said.

Traditionally, Tudor and Tudor Revival styles are known for central hallways, narrow footprints, multiple stories, prominent front gables, decorative half-timbering on the exterior, patterned brick or stone, grand stone fireplaces, and dark wood paneling and wainscoting, to name a few. In this Modern Tudor, its open floor plan embraces its lakefront setting, positioning the kitchen and dining and sitting area as the central hub of the home, designed for entertaining and hosting with views outward onto Lake Erie. The circulation pattern is intentionally very fluid and open, allowing family and friends to meander from the great room with its wainscot paneling fireplace surrounding and

to the kitchen with ease. There is also an additional sitting room and sunroom anchoring the lakeside of the home, while southern exposure on the front provides ample natural daylighting into the stone-and-stucco home.

“They have two boys who have a very large group of friends who were constantly over. The kitchen, as I feel in any home, is where everyone wants to be. Everyone is always in the kitchen, no matter how much you try to shoo them out into some other area, inevitably, everyone is always hanging around, so it was important for her to have six bar stools and make sure that they faced outward so you could still look out at the water,” Palmieri Schwartz said.

“The open feel really translated into a house based for entertainment and that is really what her goal was: She wanted her family’s home to be welcoming and comfortable for anyone that came over. At any given time, I would walk in and there would be 30 pairs of shoes at the front door. She was very casual about it, she was hap-

py to have everyone over—so the spirit of the home was just all-encompassing. ‘Everyone is welcome, any time you want, just stop on in,’” Palmieri Schwartz added.

Palmieri Schwartz also noted that the main floor canvas served as a palette of neutrality, drawing upon the transformative medium of the lake—shifting from hues of steely gray to bright blue depending on time of day and season of year—and complementing the creamy white backdrop with bold contrasts and pops of color that would create a sense of high energy, matching the dynamic nature of her client. The architectural details on the ceiling and the walls, and clerestory and bay windows, provide a layer of texture and depth to spaces on the main floor as the canvas comes to life through rich detail and artwork, sculptural line of lighting fixtures and intentional energetic contrasts of shape and form, and—in the case of the client’s front, southern-facing sitting room—jewel-toned emerald-green walls.



“She had some art of her own and then we brought some art in, but we used the walls as more or less our canvas to be able to add the color in the art. She was very receptive about bringing in some color with the furniture as well—she didn’t play it safe. She allowed some of the secondary and tertiary spaces to have bold colors, like the sitting room up in the front of the house that is a saturated emerald-green. Ultimately, this became her favorite room in the house, and it was just a special space tucked away that is an unexpected surprise,” Palmieri Schwartz said.

“There is such a fanciful quality to it. It has a very moody color, yet there are all these little details and good energy in it. When we picked the pendants that hang on either side of the window, there was a joke between us that she wanted to have a monocle of sorts to look out. Those pendants became her ‘looking glass’ and they catch the light and are beautifully prismatic. The captured light adds this magical glow to the room and that is really special—the ceiling is a high gloss, there is this incredible reflectivity going on in a very subtle way—it catches what you see on the water, the light dances on it and brings the lake into the room,” Palmieri Schwartz added.

There are textures like velvet and metal and glass and wood, hues of lavender and gold, a leafy frond-inspired mural in the powder room, and zebra print inspired wallpaper; details like pendants and rugs layered throughout, and colors and objects that evoke memories and personal sentiment—like the corals and pinks that speak to visits to the ocean shores of Florida and little treasures that contribute and translate authentically, meaningfully, powerfully, to the clients’ story as it continues to unfold in their home. But at the end of the day, this Modern Tudor is a home that welcomes family and friends and invites guests to immerse themselves in story and in connection.

“I want the client to feel their home’s connection to them,” Palmieri Schwartz said. “We strived for genuineness. Our team was able to tie back to a piece of history in one of the storied suburbs of Cleveland. This is a community where people grow up and come back to raise their families. They are lifers.”