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After a devastating fire, Tom Stringer was forced to redesign his house, but the kitchen, which was largely spared, only needed new appliances and countertops. "It was the least damaged part of the house, and we really didn't have any qualms with the layout," Stringer says. Opposite page: The home's welcoming living room showcases Stringer's highly curated collection of antiques.



Home Coming

TOP CHICAGO DESIGNER
TOM STRINGER'S
BEAUTIFUL GRAYSTONE
WAS HIS HAVEN. HE
WOULDN'T HAVE
CHANGED A THING—
UNTIL HE HAD TO
CHANGE EVERYTHING.

BY ANDREA MILLS
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JORGE GERA



No one wishes for a disaster, but some might see a house fire as a blessing in disguise and welcome the opportunity to start over. But when you are a highly esteemed designer who got it right the first time, that is not the case. Tom Stringer and his husband, Scott Waller, faced this situation when their beautiful home in Lakeview fell victim to the highly unlikely event of a malfunctioning LED lamp in a recessed fixture with a thermocouple that also malfunctioned. "I'm certainly not opposed to renovations or gutting a house," Stringer says, "but when you are forced to against your will, it changes your perspective." Having completely renovated 10 years prior, he wasn't looking for an opportunity to refresh. "If it were just me, maybe I would have been open to changing everything, but the reality is, I have a husband who is not in design and he doesn't always embrace change," Stringer explains.

Known for his highly curated, sophisticated interiors with a generous mix of antiques and authentic objects, it's no surprise that Stringer's home matches that aesthetic. The couple are committed to traveling to exotic locations and over their 25-plus years together have amassed an impressive collection. All of the things that cannot be replaced—art, family photos, mementoes from around the world—were miraculously saved. "The firemen who fought our fire were extraordinary in that they seemed to understand it was a highly collected, curated environment," says Stringer. "We were able to salvage so much because they took time to tarp antiques and put art in rooms that weren't on fire. Their understanding and respect was incredible." Because he was able to work with so much of what they had, the project was initially about putting it back together. "Had it gone differently, we couldn't have gone home, so we decided we wanted it to feel like we were going back," says Stringer. "When you're suddenly homeless, you start to cling to stuff that's familiar."

The layout of the main floor remains the same and much of the kitchen was intact, so the only changes were adding half-height pocket doors to keep the dogs in the back, updating the surfaces and replacing outdated appliances. An aboriginal painting they brought back from Australia years ago was re-





An additional arched passageway through the dining room creates better flow. The walls were also thickened, and custom storage cabinets that hold entertaining essentials are concealed behind touch panels. The dramatic silver-leaf wallcovering is by Phillip Jeffries.



stretched and restored, and still hangs in the keeping room over a new plush gray channel-back sofa. This time around, the silver leaf that wraps the dining room walls is real, and he added a second archway for symmetry and better flow. The walls between the dining room and living room were thickened, and touch panels conceal storage closets that were specified to hold china, linens, silverware, candles and table leaves. It's all at hand but out of sight. "It's so much easier to live and entertain elegantly when you have all the storage you need," Stringer says.

The original Versailles parquet flooring was destroyed, and the couple opted for parquet again but with a large-scale chevron that looks like it could be old or new. An antiqued mirror wall in the entry—"totally ripped off from Coco Chanel's apartment in Paris," says Stringer—also looks like it could have always been there.

When it came to the second level, they flipped the layout and moved a gym that was next to the master bedroom to the basement where a media room used to be. "We originally thought a media room would be better for resale, but it was a giant waste," Stringer says. "This time was for ourselves instead of the real estate agent who will follow someday." A library with a fireplace is now at the front, while the master bedroom faces the back, with French doors that open to a view of the lush backyard. They also expanded

the footprint of the master en suite and created more exposure to the east so that they wake up to a sunny bathroom. "It has been extraordinarily satisfying to wake up to the sounds of birds and falling water from the backyard instead of the street," Stringer says.

The yard had been landscaped 10 years ago by Doug Hoerr of Hoerr Schaudt, who came on board to evolve the space. "It's just like an interior," says Stringer. "You can't go a decade without examining it, or it will look dated." The approach was the same as the interiors—the couple did what makes them happy, which was adding heaps of hydrangeas and irises. "I think we were feeling nostalgic in a stronger way than we would have otherwise," he notes.

The third floor is a mini Four Seasons—all guest suites with a common area set up for coffee and reading. "Entertaining is a huge part of our lifestyle, and we love the ability to be generous with our space," he says.

"In the end, all of these beautiful things that are the tools of my trade are just stuff," says the designer. He appreciates the press and attention he has received from both the original home and this second time around, but is more concerned with how comfortable and welcoming it is. "For me, that far outweighs it being a showplace for my talents," Stringer says. "I'm most interested in calling it home." ■

From left: The original master bedroom was one of Houzz's bedrooms of the year. "There was a point where I realized that, metaphorically, hundreds of people have been through my bedroom," Stringer says. "Perhaps that's why we moved it." Now at the back of the house, it has French doors that overlook the lush backyard; the footprint of the master bath was expanded to create a spa-like retreat. A textural wallcovering by Phillip Jeffries creates a focal point, while a modern chandelier from Visual Comfort adds clean-lined sophistication.



DESIGN DETAILS

TYPE

Single-Family Home

LOCATION

Lakeview

INTERIOR DESIGN

Tom Stringer Design Partners
tomstringer.com

AV AND HOME AUTOMATION

Premiere Systems
premieresystems.com

FIRE RESTORATION

Perfection Property Restoration
perfectionpropertyrestoration.com

MILLWORK

Black Wolf Design
blackwolfdesign.com

PAINT AND PLASTERWORK

Smith Painting & Decorating
smithpaintingchicago.com

RESOURCES

ARTERIORS

Light fixtures in foyer and guest bedroom sitting area
arteriorshome.com

A. RUDIN

Swivel counter stools in kitchen
arudin.com

DESSIN FOURNIR

Dining room table
dessinfournir.com

GREAT PLAINS

Fabric for window treatments in the library and master bath, fabric for living room sofa, master bedroom lounge chairs and bed
hollyhunt.com

HOLLY HUNT

Living room sofa and bench
hollyhunt.com

OSCAR ISBERIAN

Rug runners on second and third floors
isberian.com

PHILLIP JEFFRIES

Wallcovering throughout house
phillipjeffries.com

VISUAL COMFORT

Library sconces and pendant
visualcomfortlightinglights.com

WATSON SMITH

Carpet in master bedroom, dressing room and stairs
watsonsmith.com