

WRITTEN BY SALLY FINDER WEEPIE  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY WITTEFINI

# True Romance

HEARTS CAN'T HELP BUT FLUTTER IN THE PRESENCE OF A CHICAGO ROWHOUSE BRIMMING WITH CLASSIC GRACE AND FRESH BEAUTY





ROMANCE AND ELEGANCE  
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SONGS RUNNING THROUGH  
THIS HOUSE.”

—designer Tom Stringer

**C**onsider it the Coco Chanel of rowhouses. Tailored on the outside, chic and feminine on the inside, this new three-story house in Chicago’s Lincoln Park—home to Jeff and Stephanie Applebaum and their two young children—exudes enviable style.

“Romance and elegance are the twin theme songs running through this house,” designer Tom Stringer says. “The decorating was informed very much by Stephanie. She has incredible fashion sense. And she’s not intimidated by traditional interiors. She wanted her children to grow up with nice things so they appreciate nice things and understand how to care for them.”

**Foyer** Designer Tom Stringer achieves an enviable balance of new and old, dark and light, brawny and svelte from the first step inside. **Exterior** The newly built Chicago home has the look of an old London rowhouse. **Curtain detail** Tassel-trimmed draperies are among homeowner Stephanie Applebaum’s favorite things. **Previous pages** Columns frame views of graceful Louis XVI chairs in the living area.





They're a young family, though, so Stringer took traditional in a fresh direction suited to them. "It's a blend of new and old," the designer says. "Stephanie loves English and French furniture, neoclassical pieces. We call it a 'Franglish' blend—that also includes some Asian pieces. It's always timely; it always works."

An 18th-century paw-foot center table extends a formal welcome in the checkerboard-tiled foyer. "We spent a lot of time to get the scale of the checkerboard just right," Stringer says. "And we stressed over the finishes here and throughout the house. We wanted the marble to have a soft patina that looks like it's been walked on for a hundred years."

Wood floors that transition from the marble entry to the living area are hand-scraped walnut, wide plank on the main level and narrower in the upper levels for a historical feel. Artisanal pale plaster walls have subtle variations of color. "Kind of a gesso finish," Stringer says. "These subtle gestures make you wonder if the house is new or old. I love that duality."

Old and new mingle in the living room, which pairs contemporary city furniture with 19th-century French neoclassical pieces—all set against a light, simple palette without a lot of


pattern. "I wanted to include something that projects the room backward in time—the French chairs—and something that projects it forward in time—the youthful midcentury Italian chandeliers. It's about layers of time."

The designer insists, though, that his creative approach is not pioneering. "With classic interiors, you're never really inventing anything completely new," Stringer says. "Instead, you think about reinvention. In the living room, the mirrored fireplace is a direct quote from Coco Chanel. It adds a lightness of being to the room."

Stephanie appreciates that mood. "The living room is my favorite place in the house," she says. "We like to entertain here, and both of our children play the piano, so we love to sit in here as a family during their lessons."

Formal entertaining continues in the dining room, wrapped in a refined chinoiserie wallpaper. "We worked on the back-

**Kitchen** Brass accents on counter stools and pendants match the glimmer of the banded range hood. A marble-and-limestone backsplash gives the botanical feel of chinoiserie. **Dining room** Gracie wallpaper lends a classic background for meals around a custom table ringed by ribbon-back chairs. Lighting echoes the paper's hits of playful coral.



Family room Soft greens and blues play to the airy palette and feel good against a garden backdrop viewed through a series of tall French doors.



ground to get old-world charm but not have it feel overwhelming,” Stringer says. “It’s subdued enough that if the right art comes along, it can host a painting at some point.”

A reproduction table and chairs, 1920s Directoire buffet, contemporary pedestals, and colorful Chinese ceramics finish the space, along with a new glass chandelier. “I love the idea of a chandelier that’s contemporary but reflective of significant craft,” Stringer says. “I also like how, as an Italian piece, it visually links to the snowball fixtures in the living room.”

A more relaxed attitude takes hold in the kitchen. Expansive islands divide the room into two zones, one for prep and cooking, another for cleanup and gathering. A butler’s pantry provides storage and hides hardworking elements, allowing the

**Master bedroom** Beautiful afternoon light fills this space, appointed with a gilded four-poster. The feminine curve of the headboard repeats in Stringer’s choices for the adjoining sitting area. **Bar** Tucked in a nook off the family room, the bar is convenient to both interior gathering spaces and the backyard pool terrace. **Staircase** Rich architectural detail defines the stairwell, which is capped by a skylight. “It becomes a lantern for the house and provides a quality of light missing in most rowhouses,” Stringer says. **Homeowners** Jeff and Stephanie Applebaum with children Coco and Levi and dog Teddy.



SUBTLE GESTURES MAKE YOU WONDER IF THE HOUSE IS NEW OR OLD.”

—designer Tom Stringer



kitchen to put a priority on clean lines and good looks. “It’s a showy kitchen with some serious backup around the corner,” Stringer says.

Right behind the kitchen, the family room—the Applebaums’ favorite hangout space—overlooks a bloom-filled terrace that steps down to a pool and comfortable lounge area. “You see garden out the window rather than the pool, which I think is pretty,” Stringer says. “The pool doesn’t dominate the landscape.”

Above the communal space, the upper-level master suite also overlooks the garden. A restrained palette lends a soft, romantic mood to the light-filled sanctuary. “I love that there’s an entire floor devoted to Jeff and me,” Stephanie says. “It feels like an apartment. You can get away to read a book for a while and then can come back together as a family.”

When warm weather arrives, family time often means time on the backyard pool terrace. “We designed the back of the house to give them outdoor space,” Stringer says. “It’s very unusual to have a pool in Lincoln Park.”

Stringer and architect Steve Rugo got creative to make the urban play space possible. “The backyard is kind of like a giant

container garden,” Stringer says. “We lifted it up about 4 or 5 feet, which lets the terrace open to the second floor. It’s a city house you don’t feel trapped in—it’s like a mini resort.”

The home celebrates youth—without surrendering its classic elegance or its timeless character.

“Building a new home with character— isn’t that the trick?” Stringer says. “Jeff was very wedded to the idea of London row-houses that they had admired. Incorporating those elements gives the home a traditional look, but it’s still fresh—a home for a young family.”

“Building the house was a labor of love,” Stephanie says. And this romance is far from fleeting.

“We couldn’t be happier,” she says. “It feels like it’s been our home forever, and we want it to be our forever home.”

**Interior designer:** Tom Stringer **Architect:** Steve Rugo

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**Pool terrace** “Coming from the suburbs, we didn’t want to give up having a pool,” Stephanie says. “We love having friends over when we’re not in a pandemic. Our backyard is a special place.” **Master bath** A double shower, enclosed in glass, opens to a freestanding tub and vanity areas perched on an expanse of marble.



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