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HOME LIFE

REAL ESTATE NEWS

INSIDE HOMES IN THE WASHINGTON

Vissi D'arte, Vissi D'amore

George and Kristen Lund's grand home for opera fêtes.

BY DARA KLATT
PHOTOS BY TONY POWELL



Last month at the Washington National Opera (WNO), Giacomo Puccini's sumptuous drama "Tosca" with its renowned "Vissi d'arte" aria and elegant sets depicting grand Roman scenes returned. Perhaps befitting the captivating drama is the impressive home that plays host to many WNO philanthropic events: the Beaux-Arts Kalorama mansion belonging to George and Kristen Lund.

Ascend the marble staircase to the second floor and into the soaring entryway of their reception hall with its 10-foot windows and 14-foot ceilings, and you can appreciate the owners' fondness for grand opera-like scenes. The living room on the left and dining room on the right are arranged like a soft, beautiful melody.

Kristen Lund, a trustee of the WNO since 2013, who is also leading the effort to form a National Board of Trustees for the organization and is set to chair the 2020 gala, says the opera is a "labor of love." "What I love about the opera is the artistic direction, the set design, fashion in the costumes, music in the orchestra ... and the glamour of it."

Certainly elegance and glamour are reflected throughout the couple's 1918 home, which was designed by Clarke Waggaman and George N. Ray, famed architects who were known for their prolific work in early 20th-century Washington; and decorated in 2015 by Kelley Proxmire of Kelley Proxmire Inc.

"It's very special," says George Lund, who serves as CEO and chairman of Torch Hill Investment Partners LLC.





DINING ROOM: Dining table & sideboard: Nancy Corzine. Dining chairs and gilt mirror over fireplace: owner's collection. Dining chair fabric & draperies: Pierre Frey. Drapery trim: Samuel & Sons. Drapery fabricator: JK Drapery, Inc.; Chandeliers: Niermann Weeks. Wall covering: Gracie Studio. Rugs: Galleria Carpets & Rugs.

ENTRY: Balustrade lamp by Chapman through Circa. Table from 1st Dibs.

LIVING ROOM: Wallcovering: Phillip Jeffries. Rug: Galleria Carpets & Rugs. Secretary, gilt-framed chairs and twin coffee tables: owners' collection. Fabric on Gilt-framed chairs: Manuel Canovas. Striped draperies: Calvin Fabrics. Drapery fabricator: JK Drapery. White sofa: Hickory Chair. Sofa Fabric: Nobilis. Glass-topped oval coffee table, side tables flanking white sofa, gilt armchairs and mirror above fireplace are the owners' collection. Gilt armchair fabric: Cowtan & Tout. Marble-based lamps: visualcomfortlightinglights.com. Art above loveseat, white sofa, console and bust on console: Clients' collection. Tufted ottoman: custom frame by JK Drapery. Ottoman fabric: Jane Churchill. Trim: Samuel & Sons.

"Everyone who comes here, I think, feels lifted up by it." The couple says that they host philanthropic events about once per month, usually evening cocktail parties with as many as 75 to 100 guests. The fêtes play well to the house, which he says was built with night-time in mind, with large-scale windows that subtly shine light without being overpowering. "A lot goes into all this stuff to get it right," he says.

Getting it right as a formal hosting space started with the embroidered-silk floral fabric from Pierre Frey that Proxmire used on accent pillows in the living room. The fabric inspired the palette in the dining and living rooms of cream, tan and gray, while the design scheme was developed around the "classic glam feeling of Gracie wall covering," says Proxmire, who adopted silver/gray and beige/gold for materials in the living room and the foyer wallpaper.

A mixture of furnishings from the Lunds' collection was rearranged or reupholstered for the hall. One of the most stately pieces is a genuine pianoforte that stands confidently in the living area, specifically brought in for opera singers who perform at their receptions. Now, with limited notice, Kristen Lund can host a lavish event. "We have a flow," she says. "The hardest part is inviting people ... giving them enough notice [and] thinking about whom I'm inviting."

However, it's not all without slight hiccups. The couple realized after hosting two events that the skeleton key from the reception hall bathroom was missing (likely due to playful mischief of their two young children, ages 6 and 3). With a pinch of chagrin, she notes that "we had no idea that nobody could lock the bathroom door, so [guests] must have been holding it shut!" Fortunately, the "skeleton key incident" didn't yield any pink-faced surprises. For most events, the children sleep soundly despite any boisterousness below. "It's a big ol' house," George Lund points out.

While ample events in the couple's house are



centered on the WNO, they do play host to many other philanthropic activities both in and outside their home in which they are involved, including the National Museum of Women in the Arts, the French-American Cultural Foundation, Explore! Children's Museum, National Council for the White House Historical Association, Free Yezidi Foundation, Mayo Clinic Leadership Council for Washington DC and the Atlantic Council.

"Somebody said to me, 'when is it going to be enough? When do you decide you have enough money? When do you decide you're involved in enough things?'" Kristen Lund says. Her response? "You keep saying, 'yes, yes, yes' and you just hope that you're improving lives and the greater good as a whole."

For Lund, who has been a fan of the opera since she was twelve, the "greater good" starts with "heart and love for the art" of opera. "Whatever they ask me to do, I do it with every part of me." **WL**