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Playful Pied-à-Terre

Kelley Proxmire decorates
a Watergate retreat with
a thoughtful mix of
color and collectibles

BY SHARON JAFFE DAN
PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANGIE SECKINGER



Kelley
Proxmire



A circular foyer (opposite, left) leads to rooms that fan out to a terrace overlooking the Potomac River (opposite, top). The scenery inspired Proxmire's color palette in the dining room (this page) and library (opposite, right).



One day last year, a long-time client left a cryptic phone message for designer Kelley Proxmire, saying “I’ve got something exciting for you.” She and her husband had just purchased a pied-à-terre in the Watergate complex and immediately asked Proxmire to decorate the interiors.

The stars were aligned on this project from the get-go. Since Proxmire had designed the couple’s farmhouse near Middleburg, Virginia, they trusted her eye. Even more fortunate was the fact that just a few years earlier, the previous owners of the apartment had completely gutted and renovated it with help from DC architect Outerbridge Horsey of Outerbridge Horsey Associates. His refined, carefully planned design provided Proxmire with the perfect starting point. “It had already been very well done,” the designer says. “The architect oriented all of the public rooms along the river, which really set the flow.”

Guests enter the fan-shaped apartment through a central corridor that leads to the living room, library, dining room, kitchen and family room—all of which offer sweeping views of the Potomac River and Washington Harbour. Meanwhile, the master suite and a guest room overlook the Watergate’s inner courtyard—an equally famous, if less dramatic, vista.

Armed with an intuitive understanding of her clients’ aesthetic and a few gorgeous fabric samples up her sleeve, Proxmire was able to complete the project in record time. She proposed a color

INTERIOR DESIGN: KELLEY PROXMIRE, Kelley Interior Design, Bethesda, Maryland.

scheme of muted blues and greens, taking inspiration from the surrounding water, foliage and sky. The owners loved the palette, which was a departure from the primary colors prevalent in their main house.

A Schumacher paisley that Proxmire had been saving for the right project was an ideal selection for a pair of chairs in the living room. It complements existing blue-painted millwork in the adjacent library that the homeowners chose to keep. The living room walls are painted a soft gray, with a vintage landscape painting and fabrics providing just the right measure of color. “The emphasis is on mixing finishes in the room,” Proxmire explains. “The gray wash, the silvery finish on the furniture, the darker finish on the floors. It’s all a mix, but a thoughtful mix.”

Though most of the furnishings are newly purchased, Proxmire added vintage pieces and antiques, along with art and accessories, to lend the interiors an authentic, collected-over-time look.

Unexpected finds lend a playful touch to the apartment. Proxmire and her client combed galleries and antiques shops in DC and in Atlanta’s Buckhead district, searching for art, lamps, furniture and accessories. “These one-of-a-kind, older pieces are what help make a room,” the designer proclaims. An antique barometer

A blue Schumacher paisley sets the tone in the living room (these pages). Kelley Proxmire mixed modern furnishings with vintage finds, including an antique barometer from Marston Luce, hung above a mirrored chest from Hollis & Knight.





The dining room (top, left) leads to the open kitchen (top, right); a seating area with a custom loveseat (left) and a breakfast table with a view (opposite) make the space ideal for lounging and entertaining. The kitchen opens to the family room (above), where the palette shifts from blue to green.





hangs above a chest in the living room. And a miniature desk—probably a furniture maker’s model—holds court in the library between two leather armchairs.

In the dining room, Proxmire kept things light and airy with a glass-topped table on pedestals and pale animal-print wallcovering by Schumacher. Whimsical mirrors framed with weathered wooden slats add a touch of whimsy. “They’re not the expected mirrors,” she says. “I just loved the rustic look.”

The dining room is a study in contrasts, with light and dark wood chairs and solid and print fabrics creating a visual interplay. Dress-maker details—from the antique nailhead trim on the chairs to the braided edge on the wool drapes—finish the space with style.

The dining room opens to a kitchen complete with seating and breakfast areas. Proxmire pulled another fabric—a Vervain floral—from her favorite fabric file for the drapes. Chippendale-style chairs, selected for their architectural profile, have seats covered in faux leather with a reptilian pattern for another unexpected touch. From the breakfast table, the owners can survey the Potomac River all the way to Key Bridge. “I told them, ‘I wouldn’t do much here if I were you,’” Proxmire jokes. “You can just look out and watch the crew teams go by.”

The blue palette shifts to green in the family room, where a sleep sofa is covered in apple green Jane Churchill fabric to complement the existing grass cloth on the walls. Wood carvings from Atlanta and a large, round mirror complete the space. The family room and a guest room—both with their own full baths—can accommodate the couple’s two college-age children on visits to DC.

An expert at threading color schemes and fabric motifs throughout a home in way that’s cohesive and never jarring, Proxmire modestly explains her process. “As we were putting it together, I closed my eyes and could see it all in my head—the balancing of the colors, the balancing of the textures, the scale, the finishes. That’s



Walls in sage green create a soothing backdrop in the master suite (opposite and top), where the owners retained the existing carpet and armoire. The master bath designed by architect Outerbridge Horsey (above) features a spa-like shower clad in green-glass tiles.

why we’re the designers, right? These clients trusted me.”

The master suite was in such good shape that the new owners kept the existing wall-to-wall Wilton carpet and armoire in place. Soothing, sage-green walls create a calming effect. The room opens to a terrace overlooking the Watergate courtyard.

Proxmire set out to make this second home both pretty and practical. “If it’s pretty and not practical, forget it. And if it’s practical and not pretty, forget it,” she quips. “The two have to go together—and in this home, they do.” ♦

Photographer Angie Seckinger splits her time between Potomac, Maryland, and Spain.

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—KELLEY PROXMIRE

