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GOLD LIST EDITION

# hidden gem

THE UNIQUE LOCATION OF THIS LINCOLN PARK HOME INSPIRED ITS OWNER TO CREATE A WHIMSICAL SPACE WITH BOLD TOUCHES AND A NOD TO HISTORY.

WRITTEN BY **KIMBERLY OLSON** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **TONY SOLURI**



**ARCHITECTURE** R. Michael Graham, Liederbach and Graham, Architects

**INTERIOR DESIGN** Bruce Fox, Bruce Fox, Inc.

**HOME BUILDER** John Novak, Novak Construction Company

**LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE** Craig Bergmann, Craig Bergmann Landscape Design, Inc.

**BEDROOMS** 5 | **BATHROOMS** 7 | **SQUARE FEET** 8,475



The ground-floor spaces in this Lincoln Park home open up to the courtyard fashioned by landscape architect Craig Bergmann. The path is made of an 18<sup>th</sup>-century sidewalk from a town in Maine; the steel trellis features a decorative pattern first used by French architect Henri Labrouste. *Right:* The home was originally designed as a three-part composition, comprising the main house, the coach house and John Henry's blue *Chevron* sculpture, which was eventually removed.



Hoping to reduce his long commute from the suburbs, Chicago-based general contractor John Novak began house hunting in the city, but to no avail. It wasn't until during a routine errand that he found inspiration. "I was at a floral shop downtown, and behind it was a courtyard and coach house," he remembers. "I said, 'Wow, this is exactly what I want.'" The blend of exposed brick and industrial metalwork inspired Novak to build his own house with a look similar to the coach house, but on a larger scale, and he asked his friend and architect R. Michael Graham to design it.

Novak found a choice lot in Lincoln Park, just steps away from trendy restaurants and city-centric shopping. Sitting upon it was a long-condemned single-family home, a six-flat apartment building made of Chicago common brick masonry and an empty space that was the former site of the neighborhood butcher shop. Novak reconfigured the parcel and ultimately razed the apartment building and existing



The spacious living room showcases work from homeowner and general contractor John Novak's eclectic art collection, such as a piece by Donald Baechler above the fireplace. Furnishings include a sofa covered in a Clarence House fabric, tufted ottomans, and club chairs upholstered in black shearling—all conceived by designer Bruce Fox.



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home, using most of the vintage brick to build his dream house. Graham then aimed to design a space that would embody his friend's vibrant personality, which he says is tinged with "a little spark of madness; part of that character arises from his enthusiasm for collecting bold art."

Novak's collection includes a vast assortment of large-scale paintings and sculptures, so Graham—who has designed gallery-style lofts in New York—created large spaces that allow the art to breathe while keeping the rooms well-proportioned. "I can have a party with 75 people on the first floor, and it won't seem crowded," Novak says. "Or when I'm with just a few family members watching a football game, it still feels cozy."

The relaxed feeling of the home mainly stems from the natural materials found throughout. "We used exposed brick and recycled wood, and white-oak wall paneling that was laid in a horizontal pattern to minimize the vertical scale," Graham says. "Also, the floor is made of select reclaimed barn

Novak loves to gather with family and friends for meals at the dining table, where wing chairs from Hickory Chair covered in Osborne & Little fabric join Soane Britain guest chairs in a Pierre Frey textile. A chandelier by Jonathan Browning hangs from the ceiling, while Ron Gorchoff's colorful *Tau Seti* work creates interest in the background.



The kitchen includes an island with a broad stone top—which features a line of poetry from Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself"—set on rugged steel supports. Countertops fabricated by Exotic Marble & Tile contrast with cabinetry conceived by architect R. Michael Graham. Colorful stools, designed by Fox, allow for casual dining.



The conservatory provides a cozy spot for intimate chats in front of a fireplace inspired by a Michael Graves drawing. Interior Dynamics reupholstered three of the Hans Wegner armchairs using fabrics from Maharam and Holland & Sherry. A Christian Liaigre side table adds depth, and the large painting by Lester Johnson hangs above a console from Briggs House Antiques in New York.



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wood.” Those earthy textures are punctuated by steel, as in the staircase that separates the kitchen from the dining and living rooms. “The handrail is a reference to the staircase that Mies van der Rohe did for The Arts Club of Chicago,” Graham says. “And the home’s decorative steel components were emulated from a pattern by Henri Labrouste, who worked on the Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève in Paris.”

To outfit the home’s interiors, Novak hired designer Bruce Fox, with whom he had previously partnered to create a vacation compound in Wisconsin. “What I did with that home was give it more of a laid-back style, mixed with a collection from different eras,” Fox says. “However, John wanted an urban version of that for his new home.” Fox’s rich multi-hued palette was partially inspired by Novak’s existing Donald Baechler collage in the living room, which features layers of separate drawings with a horse painted on it. “I actually saw the rooms as collage-like, which is similar to the piece,” Fox says. “Plus, I wanted to use color to create as much energy as John has. When you walk into his house, it just feels like the party has already started.”

A steel staircase bisects the ground floor, separating the living room from the dining room and kitchen, where a large, colorful Niki de Saint Phalle sculpture resides near the conservatory. Lynn Chadwick’s bronze *Sitting Figures* overlook the area from above.



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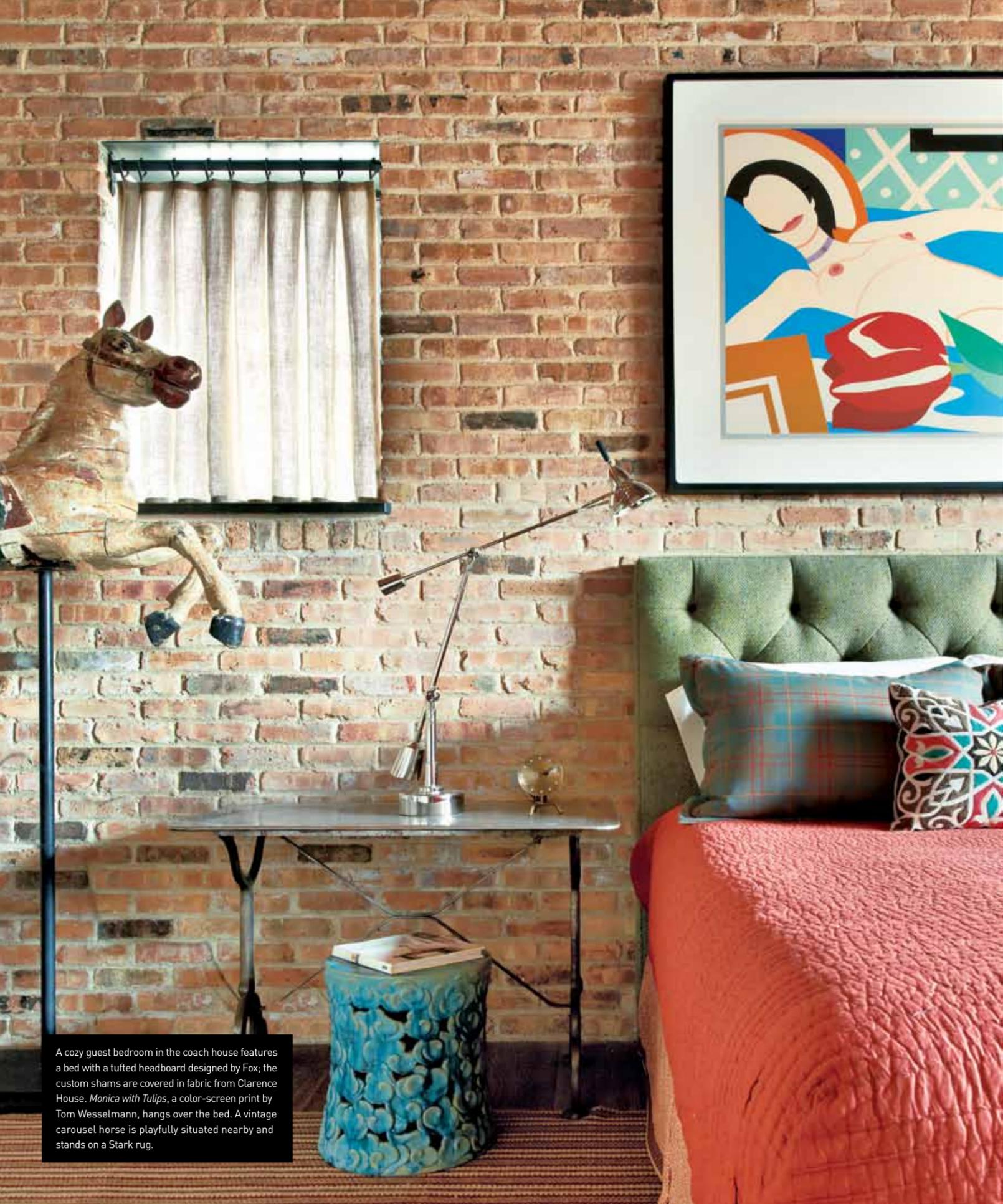
A variety of different shades and materials continue throughout the rest of the home. “Color brings life to this home; it wakes up my senses and it’s fun,” Novak says. “Bruce used fabrics that were a variety of solids, stripes and plaids, and then incorporated others that were more formal; it was a complex yet complementary dialogue.”

Fox used a playful mix of furnishings, as well, such as a vintage George Nakashima live-edge wood table in the living room, Novak’s own dining table, and four iconic Hans Wegner Papa Bear chairs in the conservatory. The second floor houses guest quarters with three bedrooms for Novak’s four adult children and two grandkids who frequently visit. “They can have as much or as little interaction as they want,” Novak says.

Novak loves being in the city, but he still wanted a little serenity, as well—and this home delivers. “The house sits inside of a walled-off garden with the entire ground floor open to the outdoors,” Graham says. Outside,



The wine cellar boasts brick masonry that supports a heavy timber structure. The antique French wine table is from Antiques on Old Plank Road, the bear rug was given to Novak by a friend, and the horse sculpture was a gift from Bergmann. *Left:* An Origines spiral staircase—purchased by Graham at an auction outside of Paris—leads down to the wine cellar.



A cozy guest bedroom in the coach house features a bed with a tufted headboard designed by Fox; the custom shams are covered in fabric from Clarence House. *Monica with Tulips*, a color-screen print by Tom Wesselmann, hangs over the bed. A vintage carousel horse is playfully situated nearby and stands on a Stark rug.



An existing leather chair provides a comfy lounging spot in the coach house guest bedroom; the Visual Comfort floor lamp was purchased at New Metal Crafts. The flying pig in the hallway is part of Novak's collection of vintage carousel animals from Italy.



Some of the home's exterior details draw inspiration from Edgar Miller-designed houses from the 1920s through the '30s. The upper balcony features a Jean Prouvé circular pattern that was water-jet cut into the steel plate. The iron grille in the foreground, constructed by blacksmith Norbert Pobuda, was influenced by the work of iron artist Samuel Yellin.



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landscape architect Craig Bergmann and his team used plantings to create a layered effect for privacy and to diffuse noise from the street—for example, adding a densely planted row of skyline honey locust trees on the street side of the public sidewalk. They also incorporated vibrant colors throughout the garden, mixing burgundies such as a purple fountain weeping beech with contrasting greens including Japanese hakone grass in a brilliant chartreuse. “On the pergola that overhangs the patio, instead of using one vine we used six various ones, which gives it a tapestry of textures and foliage colors,” says Bergmann. “In the fall, some of the wisteria will turn yellow, the Boston ivy will turn bronze, and the Virginia creeper will turn crimson.”

In the end, Novak and his team created a home resplendent in texture, color and whimsy. Says the homeowner: “We put our heart and soul into this place. When it’s snowing and the fireplace is going, I’m in my own world; it’s such a little gem.” **L**

A guest bedroom in the main house features Venetian plastered walls. Windows are framed in draperies by Interior Dynamics, made with Robert Kime linen. The sculpture, *Magiscopio*, is by Feliciano Béjar; a custom wool rug is from Stark. An existing yellow chest and patterned chair add vibrancy.