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LAW & ORDER

Luxe litigator turned design diva Lori Graham reflects on where it all began

BY KATE ARCIERI PHOTOGRAPHY BY ERIK JOHNSON

Even before they see the 3,700-square-foot Dupont Circle palace she pads around in, people want to shack up with Lori Graham. Just a smidge of one-on-one time with the erudite interior designer and you're sucked into exactly the full-force tornado you would expect Oklahoma to produce (Graham's a Tulsa native). And don't blame the copious coffee—actually a careful blend of stovetop espresso, two-percent and soy milk—she throws back for the rapid-fire verbiage and constant stream of ideas. It's all natural. Her peripatetic nature, when paired with her ebony locks, often lands her comparisons with another Graham, *Gilmore Girls* star Lauren. But while Graham's persona's enticing, it's the magic she has worked on heaps of high-profile homes, 75 projects in the last three years, that has created the real buzz. The former lawyer runs Lori Graham Design, a four-year-old firm with eight employees that can't seem to stop growing. Business is also booming with LG Place, Graham's line of handmade custom furnishings and accessories. Now, just as her star is shooting, Graham's ready to bid adieu to the pile of bricks where it all started. She and husband Rich Berman plan to put the house where she founded her empire on the market this month. Next for the two is a supersize stunner just up the street. But breaking up with their current digs promises to be anything but easy.

The affair with the house started with the fireplaces. Graham admits that back in 2001 they were the reasons she bought the house. One now sits in the living room portion of the open first floor and another is nestled at the back of the kitchen. The then-owner had pulled the fireplaces from the former Prussian Embassy. "He called it salvaged. I call it scavenged," says Graham. "But I love them." The home also boasted a full basement and a walk-up attic, hundred-plus-year-old floors and a plush Q Street location. What it didn't have was a layout that worked. "The first floor had a dining room that could seat 16, and a kitchen that could serve one," she says. "It seriously had one of those dorm-size fridges. I mean, yes, it was a Sub-Zero, but it was tiny." And what may well have suited tenants who hosted only catered affairs, that wasn't Graham's plan. So down came the walls between the kitchen, dining room and front parlor. A bit of space

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In the second-floor lounge, pieces from Graham's LG Place include her 'Camus' sofa and 'Bistro Game Table.' Side tables and white chairs from Sixteen Fifty Nine. Round mirror by Powell and Bonnell, carpet and throw pillows all from Timothy Paul Carpets + Textiles. To the right of the fireplace is Ju-Yeon Kim's *Untitled 74* from Irvine Contemporary Gallery. Chandelier from Holly Hunt.





THE THEN-OWNER PULLED THE FIREPLACES FROM THE FORMER PRUSSIAN EMBASSY. "HE CALLED IT SALVAGED. I CALL IT SCAVENGED," SAYS GRAHAM.

In the master bedroom the 'Jason Bed' is king. 'Jason Console Tables,' 'Avalon Mirror' and bedding are all by LG Place. 'Light Drizzle Chandelier' by Ochre. Opposite: The sophisticated living room sports a red painting by homeowner Richard Berman. Fireplace triptych by Nicole DeWald. Helmut Newton's *Sumo* on stand by Phillippe Stark. Dining table was custom made.





...CONTINUED was set aside at the back for a powder room that the designer set up on a platform, giving the appearance of an in-between floor. All the rest became a grand bowling alley, transitioning from one purpose-driven space to another based on furnishings. The front portion became a refined sitting room with a white leather sofa and a sleek desk tucked into the bay window. The middle got an extra-long black farmhouse table set horizontally, and behind it an open kitchen. On the second floor Graham converted a closed-off bedroom into a TV room open to the downstairs, a perfect space from which to call to her husband as he cooks up dinner.

In the second-floor lounge two photographs by Barbara Probst, from G Fine Art, reign. Opposite: The front door opens right into the spacious first-floor living room where visitors can see a mixed-media piece on aluminum by Bill Colbert, *606025 ALM*, from Transformer gallery. Graham believes in building a room around art rather than selecting paintings that match furnishings. Rugs and antique pillows from Timothy Paul Carpets + Textiles. Stools with goat hair upholstery from Oly Studio. Black chair from Apartment Zero. Sofa from Maurice Villency.

Though Graham had renovated and decorated three of her and Berman's previous homes, it was the Q Street manse which prompted her rebirth as a professional decorator. While practicing law full-time, Graham had taken art history and design classes to set her up for a down-the-line second career. She imagined it would happen "like, when I was 50." But instead it came as she crested 30, as more and more friends saw her home and asked Graham to put her stamp on their properties. It was a bold move, but not a surprising one for someone who had already prepared for a few different careers. Before moving to DC, Graham lived in London where she earned a masters in economics. Her undergrad degree is in philosophy and law school was thrown too.

Now that boundless curiosity has Graham packing boxes, having outgrown this live/work space as her firm fans out. And though there's sentimentality for the lair that launched her career, she and Berman are pumped about the plan for Berman-Graham House, Take III, which includes 7-foot-tall pocket doors to be suspended from the kitchen ceiling and laquered red. We're at the edge of our seats. ■