

Designers &amp; Inspiration &gt; The Ultimate House Tours Guide

# Designer Emily Sturgess Creates a Refreshing Retreat for a Young Family on Long Island's Gold Coast

**Sturgess struck gold with a stunning American Georgian manse designed by Gilded Age great Mott B. Schmidt.**

BY [LAUREN WICKS](#) PUBLISHED: NOV 11, 2022



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Winnetka, Illinois-based [Emily Sturgess](#) says she grew up in a world where she was exposed to beautiful things from a young age, as her mother is an interior designer, but she never dreamed it would also be her path. However, after working as a publicist for some of the most iconic names, brands, and show houses in the design industry, Sturgess organically found her voice as a creative herself. Once her friends began buying homes and having babies, they turned to her for design advice, and Sturgess eventually went out on her own in 2017 and has been designing homes around the country ever since.

One of the creative's most rewarding projects began with an unlikely client who had a vastly different design sense from Sturgess. While the designer leans into traditional American style with plenty of pops of pattern and color, the couple resides in a sleek, modern apartment in the West Village that is a far cry from Sturgess's portfolio. However, when the couple shared that they found the ultimate family retreat in a historic home designed by Gilded Age architectural great Mott B. Schmidt,



Sturgess knew they would be able to collaborate together and make something truly special.

“It was mid-pandemic and the couple has two young girls, and they were looking for a place to escape to from the city,” says Sturgess. “They found this magical home on the north shore of Long Island and wanted to dive into its aesthetic, traditional roots, and historic bones. They trusted me 100 percent to own the house and a specific vision.”

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For Sturgess, the design process often begins with a fabric, and she found the perfect inspiration in a botanical Cowtan & Tout fabric for the living room settee that set the scene for the rest of the home. As soon as the couple saw it, they wanted everything to be centered around the

fabric, from the colors and patterns to the odes to nature that reflect all the organic beauty right outside their front door.



The Cowtan & Tout banquette fabric was a springboard for the entire home's design.

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“That really showed me that they could handle all sorts of patterns, florals, and layers of texture,” says Sturgess. “Every room speaks to each other, and I believe there needs to be a thread throughout the house. Here, it’s the blues and greens that speak to the home’s park-like natural setting.”

Since Sturgess most often works with young, growing families who don’t want to sacrifice on beauty or livability, she spends ample time on each project finding fabrics and other materials that will create magazine-ready spaces that can stand up to sleepovers, craft sessions, and life’s messes. When referring to the elegant jade green-swathed dining room, Sturgess says that the dining chair fabric looks like jacquard but is actually performance fabric that ensures “you could have a kid’s birthday party in that room.”



A Visual Comfort light fixture brings some joie de vivre to this elegant formal dining room.

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The same rings true for the rest of the home, as Sturgess knew the exterior would evoke a real “wow” factor for anyone coming up the driveway, and she wanted to ensure both guests and owners would feel comfortable enough to kick off their shoes and jump in the pool or plop on the couch with a cocktail as soon as they stepped inside. One of her favorite spaces in the home is the foyer, as she feels it is an appropriate “welcome letter” to the rest of the house, juxtaposing a formal skirted table with a modern art piece commissioned by Anna Kunz and the house’s original 1930s brick floors.

“It’s this beautiful mix of new, vintage, traditional, and this fresh element of art that welcomes you in and makes you excited to discover what’s around every corner,” says Sturgess.

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Considering it was mid-pandemic, the house was nearly a century old, and the couple wanted the home ready as soon as possible to retreat to, Sturgess worked diligently to find the right craftsmen who would be able to preserve the architectural integrity of the house while making it an idyllic vacation home for a modern family. She also had to get creative within the restraints of pesky supply chain issues, opting to work with vintage and antique dealers whenever possible and choosing in-stock wallcoverings and fabric that could be delivered on time. However, this didn’t stop Sturgess from creating a colorful, comfortable home fit for her discerning clients and completing the project in an impressive 18 months.

Lovingly nicknamed “The Secret Garden” due to its enviably verdant surroundings, Sturgess has created interiors that can stand up to the property’s awe-inspiring colors and textures for a wonderland all its own. While it’s a far cry from the family’s black-and white contemporary apartment in Manhattan, that’s exactly the point, and Sturgess has created a bucolic getaway that the family is sure to cherish for decades to come.

“This project is totally emblematic of my style and it feels super special to me, but it’s also very reflective of the client as it’s a house they can entertain in on the weekends or just enjoy together as a family of four,” Sturgess says. “It’s the perfect representation of who they are: young, creative, and fun.”

### LAUREN WICKS

Lauren Wicks is a Birmingham-based writer covering design trends, must-have products, travel inspiration, and entertaining. She’s obsessed with globally inspired textiles, hosting dinner parties, and French cocktails.

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