

Q&A with Interior Designer Elaine Santos

Elaine Santos gives a client's weekend retreat a glam makeover that marries comfort and luxury. Santos heads up the thriving interior design practice at full-service design firm, BarlisWedlick.

by New York Spaces



Elaine Santos of BarlisWedlick.



Dining Room. Photograph by Jonny Valiant.

NYS: This is a gorgeous weekend retreat your clients asked you to design under a bit of a time constraint. What was that like and how in-depth of a renovation did you have to do?

Elaine Santos of BarlisWedlick: (<http://www.barliswedlick.com/>) A bit? I'll say! We met the client in early October and they served Thanksgiving dinner in their new home! The interiors project was extensive, as it was a newly purchased home. This initial installation meant to hold the client over while we worked on designs for a thorough renovation, which is happening now. Some clients come to us with months or years to work and plan, but for this portion of the job we only had weeks. We love to help our clients enjoy new spaces right away as we work on larger design projects because it helps them get to know the home and the land better.

NYS: How does this project fit into your current portfolio of work? Would you call it representative of the interiors you create at BarlisWedlick

(<http://www.barliswedlick.com/>)?

Elaine Santos of BarlisWedlick: (<http://www.barliswedlick.com/>) Yes, like all of our work, these interiors are inviting and collected, thoughtfully designed without feeling precious. The client shared our passion for working with local craftspeople. Most importantly though, this project feels like us because it feels like the client. Our clients are at the forefront of every project so that the end result reflects their personalities and how they want to live in their home.

NYS: We love that the house dates back to 1709. How did the age and history of the home affect the interior design?

Elaine Santos of BarlisWedlick: (<http://www.barliswedlick.com/>) We too loved the history of the house and wanted to leave as much as possible exposed and accessible to the touch. We kept the stone walls and sills for perching on. We loved that the surfaces—like the undulating plaster walls and exposed beams—showed their age. So all we did was freshen them up with paint to keep the feeling of the house light and bright. In some areas, we peeled away materials that had been added over the years (centuries in fact!) to better appreciate the honesty that a stone home of that era embodies. It can be lived in just as it is for centuries to come.

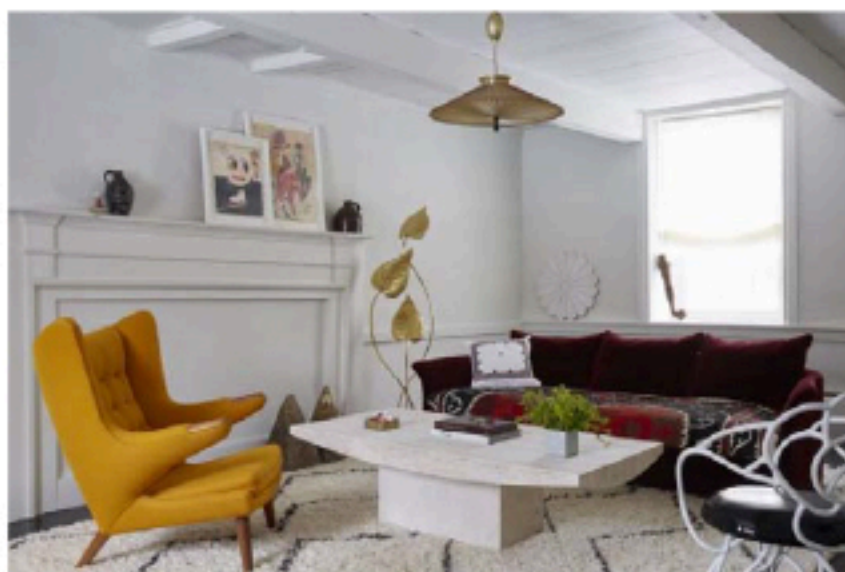
NYS: You stated that the interiors have a sustainable focus. How so?

Elaine Santos of BarlisWedlick: (<http://www.barliswedlick.com/>) For this project, we procured mostly vintage furniture and lighting—everything from upholstery to case goods to rugs is in essence recycled. All the textiles are natural fibers like cotton, linen, wool, hemp and jute, all of which are considered rapidly renewable. Where we needed new pieces, we turned to local artisans to create timeless pieces intended to be handed down, not disposed of in a few years.

Thanks to our enlightened clients and our experience in this field, all of our projects set 'green' design as a priority without compromising on beauty. Our high-performance homes built to Passive House principles benefit more than just the environment and utility bills. They enhance air quality, sound attenuation, and thermal comfort. We always use low-VOC paints and set high standards for the 'clean,' non-toxic



Kitchen. Photograph by Jonny Valiant.



Living Room. Photograph by Jonny Valiant.

levels of materials we use in the home and furnishings.

NYS: What do your clients most value about the home? What was their directive if there was one?

Elaine Santos of BarlisWedlick: (<http://www.barliswedlick.com/>) The priority was a home to unwind in, a country retreat far removed from the demands of city life. The spaces had to feel approachable and comfortable from the moment of walking through the door. By celebrating nature, the history of the home and its place on the

land, the home was to become a haven for solace and a true oasis out of the city.

NYS: What was your approach to the living room? We love the mix of colors, materials, and fabrics! Where did you source your furniture?

Elaine Santos of BarlisWedlick: We wanted to create a room that felt elegant without being the least bit formal. We found the Hans Wegner Papa bear chair at Wyeth and chose a yellow ochre upholstery fabric from Maharam to be consistent with the period of the piece. After this selection, the rest of the palette flowed. To counterbalance that mid-century feel, we went with rich jewel tones like the aubergine. The rest of the furniture and lighting is antique and vintage, sourced locally in the Hudson Valley (Balsamo) and New York (Demiurge and Flessas). We tried to choose silhouettes that would work together playfully.

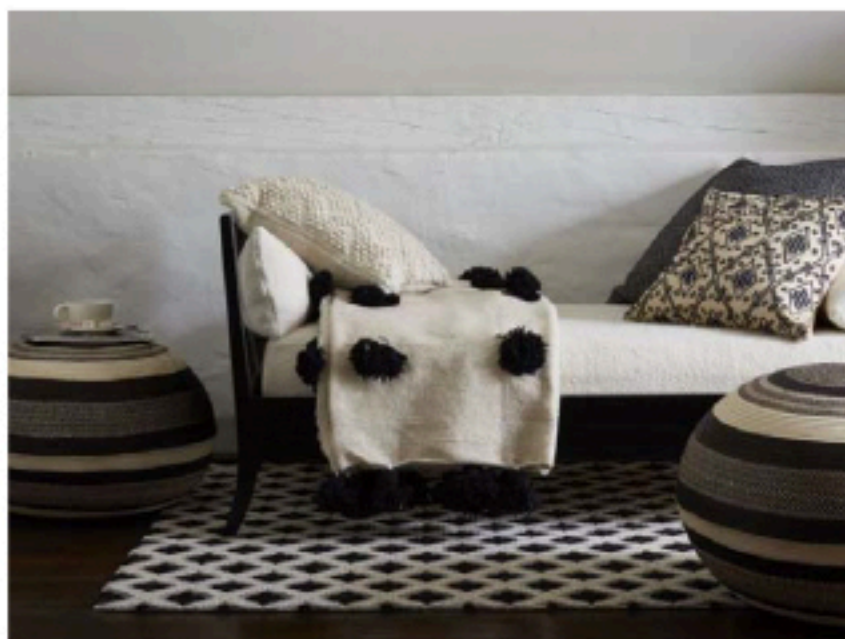
NYS: Can you tell us about the sculptural piece in the window?

Elaine Santos of BarlisWedlick: (<http://www.barliswedlick.com/>) The piece in the window is the client's, a silhouette of a forearm and fist carved out of wood. We try to use anything and everything that our clients have held on to. We find that objects often take on new meaning and prominence when placed in a different context.

NYS: Image 30: We absolutely adore the contrast of leathers and various materials in the den. What was your design approach?



Den. Photograph by Jonny Valiant.



Elaine Santos of BarlisWedlick: (<http://www.barliswedlick.com/>) The den is a room for reading, watching TV, and lounging. Everyone should have such a room! We painted the walls in a matte finish to bring out the texture of the original plaster. We selected a vintage Roche Bobois (<http://www.roche-bobois.com>) leather sofa, pairing it with articulated lights for reading, and a round walnut coffee table. The rug is vintage Moroccan; the brass side table and the leather and black frame chair are also vintage. We wanted the textiles and materials to feel

invites you to come in and relax.

NYS: What did you do in the bathroom? We love the contrast of the ceiling to the floors and the glam aspect to the design!

Elaine Santos of BarlisWedlick: (<http://www.barliswedlick.com/>) We cleaned up the original wide plank floors, painted the beams and boards on the ceiling, and restored the antique tub that came with the house. We used a vintage chandelier to soften the lines of the ceiling. The vintage pharmacy cabinet provides storage while the plush seating and soft white rug provide a little luxury.

NYS: Can you tell us about the black and white room? Where did you source all these fabulous pieces?

Elaine Santos of BarlisWedlick: (<http://www.barliswedlick.com/>) This is one of my favorite spaces, and it's not even a proper room: it's the second floor landing. We wanted to define the space, and give it purpose—now it's another lounge area, as well as an extra space for overnight guests.

The slatted daybeds are Danish, from the 1940's. We had them refinished in a black wash by Arenskjold Antiques (<http://www.arenskjold.com/>) in Hudson, and we had all-natural mattresses made up of wool, cotton, natural latex, and coconut. We chose a simple black-and-cream palette, which freed us up to have a lot of fun with texture. The daybed covers are an Alpaca boucle. The cana fleche poufs are from one of our favorite vendors, L'Aviva Home (<https://lavivahome.com/>). We fell in love with the wool blanket with oversized pompoms and paired it with beaded cushions.



Bathroom. Photograph by Jonny Valiant.

NYS: The dining room is quite striking. Can you tell us what you did in here?

Elaine Santos of BarlisWedlick: (<http://www.barliswedlick.com/>) We turned to renowned furniture maker Ian Ingersol to fabricate the black Walnut table. It's the centerpiece of the room. Together with Ian we went through countless slabs until we found "the one." The scale of these vintage Cassina chairs worked perfectly with the table's sculptural quality. The vintage brass barrel arm chairs at the head and foot bring some contrast and elegance to the table.

NYS: What did you do to the ceiling in this room? What do you think it adds to the space?



Dining Room. Photograph by Jonny Valiant.

Elaine Santos of BarlisWedlick: (<http://www.barliswedlick.com/>) This was one of the elements we looked at when considering how much of the historic structure to "clean up." While this wood treatment doesn't date back to the 1700s, we ultimately decided that it helped tell the tale of the house and its history, and so we kept it. The wood adds texture and warmth to what is a fairly minimal furniture plan.

NYS: Where is the chair in the black and gold from?

Elaine Santos of BarlisWedlick: The pair of bass chairs are vintage, made by Mastercraft and acquired through a local dealer. We recovered them in an almost-black natural leather hide.

NYS: We adore the kitchen. What was the goal in here? Can you tell us about the floors throughout?

Elaine Santos of BarlisWedlick: We knew we were designing a kitchen for active, everyday cooking and food prep. We installed a workhorse of an island and found some mismatched tractor stools

for people to pull up a seat. They're very comfy! We restored an old shelving unit that was found on-site and repurposed it—the beautiful patina on the wood balances the cooler glint of the stainless steel appliances and creates some no-frills open storage. The wood floors needed some work, so we chose a dark ebonized finish, which is the most forgiving for blending repairs.

NYS: We again love the mix of materials and patterns as seen in the Master Bedroom. What was the goal and approach in this room?

Elaine Santos of BarlisWedlick: (<http://www.barliswedlick.com/>) As soon as we saw this intensely pigmented Alexander McQueen rug, we knew we wanted it to be the star of the show. We turned to local craftsman to make the lighting and nightstands from wood, leather, and brass, with rustic details to balance out the high-fashion statement of the rug. The bed is covered with a Mexican otomi coverlet, also from L'Aviva Home (<https://lavivahome.com/>).

NYS: How did the clients feel about the end result?

Elaine Santos of BarlisWedlick:

(<http://www.barliswedlick.com/>) We are happy to report that the client is thrilled! The client feels lucky to be able to live in a house that feels familiar, but new, in a very historic context. It's a perfect way to enjoy the home while continuing to dream up the overall master plan.

NYS: When can we move in?

Elaine Santos of BarlisWedlick:

(<http://www.barliswedlick.com/>) Ha! I'm so glad you like the project as much as we do. In the end, the challenge of the tight timeline actually helped us by ensuring that we stayed efficient and made quick decisions.

NYS: What other projects are you working on?

Elaine Santos of BarlisWedlick:

(<http://www.barliswedlick.com/>) We are busy across both our offices, one in Tribeca and the other in Hudson, New York. We are typically at work on about 50 projects at a time, at various states of intensity and scale. Many times with repeat clients who enjoy the process as much as we do! Some of the more interiors-focused projects I'm most excited about right now include some unique townhouses: a gorgeous home on the Upper West Side, a brownstone on an iconic West Village block, and a third townhome in Fort Greene, Brooklyn for a young growing family. Outside the city, from the Hamptons up through the Hudson Valley, we are at work on our usual wide range of projects from weekend retreats to artist compounds.

****Interested in more articles like this? Sign up for our Newsletter (<http://www.newyorkspacesmag.com/Newsletter.cfm>)!***



Master Bedroom. Photograph by Jonny Valiant.