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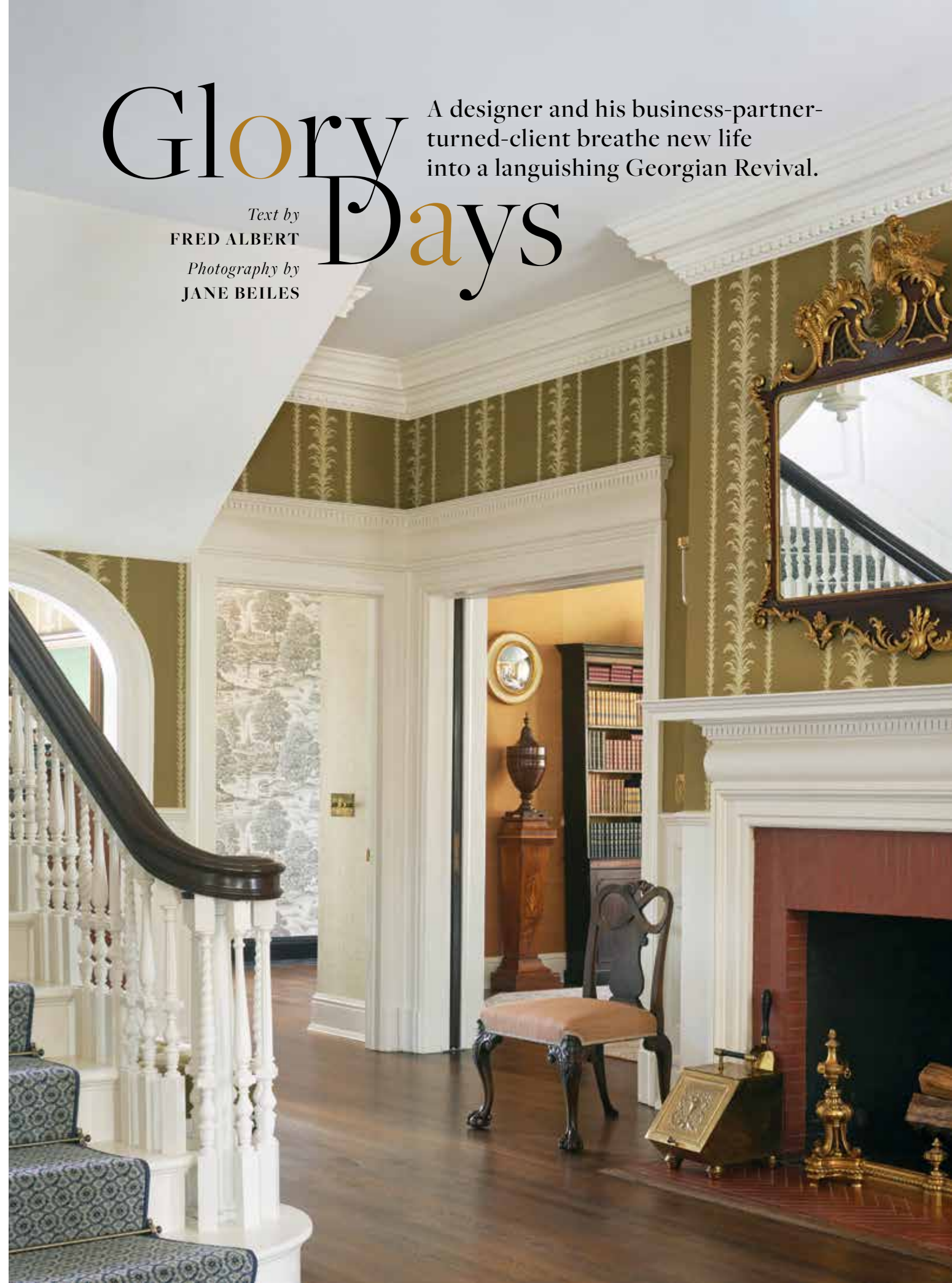


A Visual Comfort & Co. lantern illuminates a nineteenth-century library table in front of the main entry. **FACING PAGE:** When Steven March purchased this Ridgefield house three years ago, the fireplaces were boarded up and carpet adhesive had ruined the floors. Designer Robert Rizzo's renovation honors the home's 1899 aesthetic, as seen in the entry hall, where new oak flooring and crown molding were paired with a George Spencer Designs wallpaper.

Glory Days

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A designer and his business-partner-turned-client breathe new life into a languishing Georgian Revival.



When designer Robert Rizzo was asked to resuscitate a run-down mansion in downtown Ridgefield, it wasn't the lifeless interiors or decades of decline that proved most challenging, he says. It was the owner, Steven March.



ABOVE: Rizzo divided the living room into several seating areas united by a soft, harmonious color palette and understated patterns. A heathered-linen wallcovering from Phillip Jeffries provides a textured backdrop for the antique Georgian-style mirror above the fireplace; the auction-house wing chairs were reupholstered in a windowpane fabric from Holland & Sherry. **LEFT:** Doors on either side of the living room fireplace offer teasing views into the sunroom.

“He calls me the worst client he’s ever had,” says March with a laugh. He and Rizzo have been close friends for thirty years and business partners for more than twenty (March serves as vice president of finance for Rizzo’s firm, Cobble Court Interiors), so the criticism clearly comes from a place of affection—although March concedes his chronic inability to render a

decision *may* have played a small role.

The Georgian Revival house had suffered a host of indignities since its heyday at the turn of the last century. Sold to an oil and gas company in the 1940s and a church in the 1950s, it variously served as a corporate office, meetinghouse, and preschool before March and his husband purchased it three years ago. “It had

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—Homeowner Steven March



ABOVE: To return the house to residential use, Rizzo stripped away some commercial interventions, replaced all the windows and doors, and added a widow’s walk on top. **LEFT:** In the kitchen, brass accents are repeated on the custom ebony-stained cabinets, which open to reveal burgundy interiors. Rizzo collaborated on the kitchen with Mary-Beth Oliver from Karen Berkemeyer Home. **FACING PAGE:** The long, narrow sunroom is home to a conversation area, game table, and bar.

incredible bones underneath all the commercial elements that had been layered on top of it,” March says. “Luckily, most of the work that was done was cosmetic, so when you took all of that out of the house, it brought it back to its glory days.”

March had already amassed a sizeable collection of Georgian antiques and period art and wanted the home to evoke an English country house—minus the stuffiness. “I wanted all the rooms to be approachable and look lived in and like they’d been around for awhile,” he says. And because he doesn’t like pattern, he wanted Rizzo to accomplish it with nary a print in sight.

Since pattern is a key component of English country style, Rizzo had to be resourceful, mixing woods, colors, and textures to create visual interest. A toothy camel-colored linen covers the living room walls, which surround a host of small seating areas united by a single room-filling rug sporting the faintest of stripes. Other hints of pattern are



RIGHT: In the dining room, Rizzo set a ninety-inch round atop a seventy-two-inch table, nearly doubling its seating capacity without the need for leaves (or a bigger table). **BELOW:** March wanted the decor to look masculine, as exemplified by the powder room in the entry hall, which pairs a Holland & Sherry plaid wallpaper with a furniture-like vanity from Fairmont Designs. **FACING PAGE:** After causing massive heart palpitations, the antique canopy bed slipped into the primary bedroom with barely an inch to spare; a Mulberry Home fabric adorns the sofa.



confined to curtains or chairbacks, where they're not as noticeable.

French doors on either side of the fireplace lead to the cheery window-lined sunroom, whose ceiling is warmed by wood-grain wallpaper. Rizzo used a similar trick in the dining room, offsetting the burnt-umber walls with a gray-blue ceiling. "It makes the room so much more cozy," says March. A Georgian breakfront filled with old books—instead of the usual china—enhances the intimate atmosphere.

March loves to cook, but the house had only a vestigial kitchen on the main floor because meals were originally prepared by servants in the basement. Working with SAJ Construction, Rizzo combined several rooms to create a single kitchen and family room, which he outfitted with dramatic ebony-colored cabinets. "Steve didn't want a white kitchen," notes Rizzo. "He wanted the kitchen to feel like it had always been

there." Old-fashioned walnut counters surround a central island topped with white quartz and illuminated by a trio of brass pendants augmented by small flush-mounted lights that look more period appropriate than recessed cans.

When March bought the place, "it was a house that wasn't really a home," Rizzo says. Now it feels warm and comfortable—just like the friendship that fostered it.

EDITOR'S NOTE: For details, see Resources.

INTERIOR DESIGN: Cobble Court Interiors
BUILDER: SAJ Construction
LANDSCAPE DESIGN: Behrens Home Design