

The GUIDE HOME



A Fine Artist's Christmas

*Gretchen Dow Simpson celebrates the holiday in a style
that's all her own: simple and elegant.* | BY POLLY BANNISTER

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ERIC ROTH | STYLING BY KELLY McGUILL

Oak steps are set off by white balustrades. To create dramatic contrast against the trim, painter Horacio Pires highlighted the tread decoration in Benjamin Moore's Venetian Gold, the color of the living-room walls. Gretchen chose it to complement the purple-blue of the staircase area. The oil painting at far left is from the artist's Edgcomb, Maine, series, which she describes as "architectural landscapes."





THE DETAIL

An interesting window configuration in the living room is one of Gretchen Dow Simpson's pleasures. In this triple-fixed transom-type window, the elongated diamond pane is unusual, in that it appears to be floating among the adjoining panes. Small, high, multipaned windows are characteristic of Dutch Colonial style. This architectural form, which harks back to the early Dutch homes of the northeastern United States, was popular from the late 1800s to about 1935. This window reflects a simple elegance, considered an antidote to the embellishments of the Victorian era.

Gretchen's painting *Italy XII* hangs above the mantel in her living room.



2/3 VERTICAL

1/3 VERTICAL

Gretchen Dow Simpson's home in Providence, Rhode Island, is all about what she loves: art and architecture. Her striking paintings hang on every wall of her circa-1935 Dutch Colonial. Arresting black-and-white photos by Aaron Suskind, Harry Callahan, and Salvatore Mancini make the living room feel like a gallery.

The artist is perhaps best known for her 60-plus *New Yorker* magazine covers, EXAMPLE AT TOP. Most of these images are details of buildings: doorways, windows, stairs, rooftops, and porches. "Proportions are important to me," she says, and with that declaration, it's easy to see why she chose this house. High ceilings, long hallways, wide doorways, a broad foyer highlighted by a handsome staircase—all could easily have jumped from her art.

SIMPSON/THE NEW YORKER, 1992 @ CONDÉ NAST PUBLICATIONS (MAGAZINE COVER)

Holiday decorating, LEFT and BELOW, is a simple affair: antique ornaments, sprigs of rosemary in an inkwell, and pomegranates on brass candlesticks.

RESOURCES

HORACIO PIRES PAINTING

Rumford, RI; 401-438-1072

ADLER'S DESIGN CENTER

Providence, RI; 401-421-5157; adlersri.com

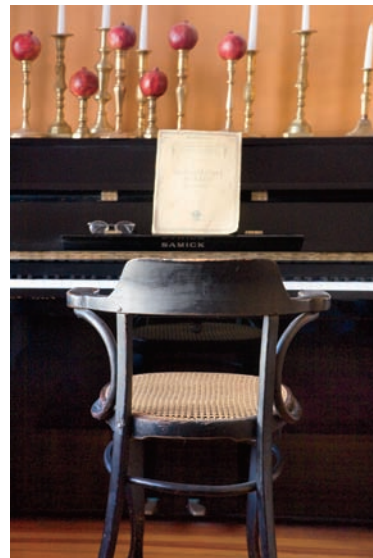
SIMPLE PLEASURES

Providence, RI; 401-331-4120;
simplepleasuresprovidence.com

The house is nestled in a vibrant neighborhood of lovely older homes on the east side of the city. Brown University and the Rhode Island School of Design are nearby, with their happy bustle of students, professors, good food, and culture. Gretchen attended RISD, so when she was looking to relocate from New York in 1987, "I followed my bliss to Rhode Island," she says.

"When I lived in New York, I was nostalgic for the country and its feeling of space," she explains. "Looking at architecture in an abstract way while working on those *New Yorker* covers gave me a sense of freedom. I was able to take out of the picture what wasn't necessary." Her home reflects this same simplicity.

When Gretchen describes her paintings and speaks of the particular elements of her house that she enjoys most, her language is similar. "I'm drawn to geometry and scale," she says. High ceilings that accommodate her six-foot-tall frame also complement the interior views that she admires, such as looking from her living room into the doorway of her kitchen and the porch beyond.



FULL PAGE AD

Tea lights and paperwhites, OPPOSITE, welcome holiday visitors. Gretchen's art graces a dining area, BELOW. The smaller painting is a scene of Morocco; the larger one is *California Magnolia III*.



FAMILY TRADITION

Gretchen and her daughters, Megan and Phoebe, and their families celebrate Christmas Eve together. (Gretchen visits with Phoebe, husband John Bean, and baby Ezra, ABOVE.) True to the artist's sensibility, decorations are unfussy. The handmade ceramic tree, TOP, is a gift from a friend; the snow globe, vase, and reindeer come from Gretchen's favorite local gift shop, Simple Pleasures. A few antique ornaments on an ironstone plate complement the multitude of reds on the table. The menu is simple and light: champagne, shrimp cocktail, salad, popovers, and nime chow from Apsara Palace, a Hope Street venue that receives rave reviews for its Southeast Asian cuisine.

In many of her paintings, you'll see a scene more distant than the immediate one. This attraction to the vision beyond is something she likes about her house; from each room there's a partial view of another room. "I like feeling that I can move around freely," she notes, "because the space is very open." Gretchen's art is marked by a minimalism that's echoed in her house, where linear stretches of rich heart-pine flooring meets white painted woodwork. Her art, her home, and even her holiday traditions work together to paint their own picture of her passions. She speaks to her lifestyle perfectly when she says, "I like to look at things in a different way—that's the job of an artist." 🎨

➤ To learn more about the artist and her work, go to: gretchendowsimpson.com
To see Gretchen's New Yorker covers and to order prints, visit: cartoonbank.com

