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LOOK BOOK Above: Bookcases and a cocktail cart create a look that's perfectly RL. Right: Stephanie Wirth and Trish Thor stand in front of a bookcase-lined wall of the living room.



Polo Matched

Designer Stephanie Wirth pulls together a leather-tufted, library-chic look inspired by the timeless RL Restaurant.

By Tate Gunnerson
Photography by Eric Hausman

Several times a month, the No. 1 *The New York Times* best-selling author Brad Thor and his wife Trish treat themselves (and often their friends and family) to dinner at RL Restaurant, which they love for the food, the service and especially the eclectically old-world ambiance. In fact, they enjoy the view from their favorite corner booth so much that they decided to use the restaurant's décor as a style template when they purchased and gut-renovated their dated 1980s-era home several years ago.

"We wanted to create a warm, kind of British, cultured, clubby feel with that whole RL Restaurant aesthetic," explains Brad Thor. "There's something really unique and special about RL. It's a very elegant comfort."

The Thors hired a contractor to knock out walls separating the kitchen and living and dining areas on the second floor. To evoke RL's rich mahogany paneling, they added cherry wood wainscoting and built-in bookcases with a brass rail system.

"Part of what brought us together is our love of books, and we wanted to decorate with them," explains Trish Thor.

Bookcases also surround the doorway to a small, paneled powder room where there hangs a framed black and white photograph by Chicago's Victor Skrebneski, which depicts two women dressed in black-tie, one of them aggressively flipping off the camera. **CONTINUED...**



JOIN THE CLUB From top: The preppy-chic living room modeled after the homeowners' favorite restaurant; the bathroom offers a gilded take on clubhouse cool.

...CONTINUED The Thors have a keen appreciation for the renowned photographer's work, as does Donald Nowicki, the vice president of Polo Ralph Lauren, who visited Brad and Trish at home when he heard through a mutual friend that they were having trouble deciding how to hang their art collection.

"I told Brad that the art at RL was hung salon-style," explains Nowicki, who has assembled a collection that includes black and white photography, oil paintings and charcoals. "If you're going to slam it up there on the wall, there aren't many mistakes you can make. It has a little more soul."

Adding a little soul was what Leo Designs' Stephanie Wirth had in mind as well when she attended a dinner party at the Thors' home soon after they completed major construction. Wirth and her husband had previously dined with the Thors at their favorite RL corner booth, and she suspected they were striving to achieve the same look.

"Stephanie leaned over and said, 'I'm so sorry, but this is what I do. I see a leopard runner on the stairs,'" Trish explains. "I said, 'I think I see you as my designer,' and I believe we hired Leo Designs within a week or two of that."

Wirth and Leo Designs co-founder Georgeann Rivas reinforced the old world charm by extending the cherry paneling down the first flight of stairs into the entry. "It added some personality to the main level when you first walk in," Wirth says.

By contrast, in the sunken living room, Wirth and Rivas incorporated more modern elements, including a pair of sofas upholstered with chocolate velvet and nail head trim on top of a graphic zebra hide rug that was inspired by a large mirror hanging over the fireplace in RL's front bar.

"The rug adds a contemporary edginess but in a subtle way," says Wirth.

As does the textural black crocodile wall covering, which Wirth and Rivas selected to help the newly hung salon-style art collection stand out—all the better to be enjoyed by the Thors' many guests.

"We've hosted people who are very important to the fabric of life not only in Chicago but also for the nation as a whole," Brad Thor explains. "We wanted them to feel comfortable and at ease in our home."

Which sounds a lot like something they might say at RL. ■