

SIZE MATTERS

For some of us, a 10-bedroom home with an indoor pool is the only way to go. For others, one perfect cozy room is the right fit. To show you how both sides live, we take you inside a classic Georgian Society Hill mansion and a contemporary Frenchtown bungalow. We tell you what accoutrements are needed to appropriately accessorize each lifestyle. (Hint: A 900-square-foot loft and a Bernese mountain dog don't mix.) We give you insight into the newest nesting trend—artisan revival style—and ask design experts to share their secrets for making big feel cozy and small seem spacious. So, as they say, it's actually *not* the size that matters; it's how you use it. **Edited by Meg Cohen Ragas**
Photography by Pascal Blancon and Catherine Tighe

In an enormous Georgian townhouse, a family infuses warmth amid 14-foot ceilings and 18th-century antiques, with a little dose of neon and foosball
By Amy Donohue

When you walk into Georgeann and Roger Ballou's vast circa-1810 Society Hill townhouse—some 7,500 square feet, with ceilings scaled for Shaquille O'Neal, and rooms sized to accommodate the be-wigged founding fathers and gowned women who once attended parties here—you are met with an immediate impression of warmth. Even, dare we say, coziness. This is surprising, considering that the Georgian house is filled with glossy antiques bought at Sotheby's or in Europe, and is in every way grand, evoking some storied London mansion rather than a modest Philly townhome. But in the living room, with its bar in a French *buffet* decor, and twin Queen Anne armchairs flanking a marble mantel, Georgeann Ballou, wearing jeans, casually pushes back the poufy silk pillows that take up most of the sofa as her dog Tucket—a wagging mix of beagle, terrier and Ridgeback adopted from a shelter in Nantucket—licks ev-

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HOW TO LIVE LARGE





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everything in sight. Sinatra's "You Go to My Head" is piped in from invisible speakers somewhere near the fireplace, where gas-fueled logs are flickering, and the whole effect is one of dreamy relaxation. You find yourself sitting back, lounging, rather than perching formally, as you might have expected.

The trick, Ballou says, is to live, really live, with kids, dogs and life's chaos, amongst 14-foot ceilings, antique rugs and French armoires. Despite the grandeur of the rooms, the Ballou house conveys warmth in two particularly effective ways. First and foremost, Georgeann Ballou's down-to-earth personality instantly desanctifies the entire house (as does Tucket the dog). Plus, there is an English-style air of "yes-it's-worth-a-fortune-but-go-ahead-and-put-your-drink-on-it" casualness in the decor of the rooms, which are comfortably outfitted with pillows, plants and objets d'art.

"We configured a family house," explains Georgeann, 53. "The kids have grown up with antiques." So while the Ballou's son and daughter often join their parents for dinner at the 15-foot-long Regency dining room table, Georgeann has created many spaces throughout the house where they can throw down their backpacks, play games with their friends, and kick back in front of a DVD, including a cozy breakfast nook that features a country French table and a state-of-the-art flat-screen TV.

Upstairs, beyond the mahogany-banistered, wide-plank staircase, 13-year-old Grant Ballou is doing homework on his computer in the kids' sitting room, where the TV is hidden inside an antique French bonnetiere cabinet near a foosball table, and green velvet chairs and sofas invite naps and giggling when his 10-year-old sister Mariza has friends over. With four floors of rooms full of places for entertaining or family lounging (five, if you count the wine cellar), parties and gatherings seem to organically occur in the Ballou house. "We had a Moore Brothers wine-tasting here last week that we won at a charity auction," says Georgeann, gesturing through the living room's open doorway into the dining room, where that Regency table perches elegantly atop three pedestals.

The Ballous are relative newcomers to Philadelphia: Roger, 53, is president of CDI Corporation, which provides engineering and technology outsourcing, and *(continued on page 114)*

ROYAL TREATMENT To give the formal dining room a touch of whimsy, top, Georgeann Ballou chose a leopard print for the chair upholstery. The elaborate crystal chandelier came with the house, along with 66 other sconces and light fixtures. Bottom, from left: the second-floor library; the 2,000-bottle wine cellar, a favorite spot for entertaining; the kids' sitting room, with bonnetiere-enclosed TV.



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bottles of wines, it's clear that integrating the sublime and the ridiculous is essential to making any house a livable family space. Here, the kids (and Tucket) have plenty of cozy spaces to call their own—and have learned to live among treasured antiques with ease. **T**

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Backstory

Behind the scenes at the Ballous' Society Hill townhouse

1. The marriage armoire. In a house as large as Roger and Georgeann Ballou's, an enormous piece of furniture like the nine-foot-tall French country "marriage armoire" in the library actually brings the room down to scale. The Ballous found this 18th-century cabinet, with its intricate iron hardware and carvings of flowers, grapes and garlands portending love and great abundance, on King's Road in London. They use it to hide clutter such as candles and silver—and a nest of robin's-egg-blue Tiffany gift boxes.

2. The photo album. In her living room, Georgeann Ballou keeps an album of old photos of the house before its restoration in the 1960s. "It was a tenement," she explains, leafing through bleak black-and-white shots showing the living and dining rooms with bathrooms and kitchenettes built into corners, their ceilings stained and cracked by water damage. The house's former tenant, interior designer John Roland, restored it, Ballou says, praising his work: "We came in and really only painted and redid the kitchen and bathrooms." Luckily, 90 percent of the gorgeous original moldings were still in place, even after the house had served as a many-partitioned apartment building.

3. Carmana Designs. The South Philly artisans who built the Ballou kitchen, master-suite dressing room, wine cellar and new bathrooms in stages over 18 months are self-confessed perfectionists who customize every job in their 23,000-



square-foot shop near the Melrose Diner. Carmen Vona has eight staffers working alongside him, fashioning cabinetry such as the beaded inset doors, modeled after a Clive Christian kitchen (the British custom designers), that he made for the Ballous. ("Mrs. Ballou is one of the few clients we have who actually cooks!" says Carmen's wife Anna Maria, who runs the business end of the company.) Carmen carefully inventoried the Ballous' pots and kitchen utensils prior to drawing and building, and even counted Georgeann's shoes before beginning work on her closets. "When

we get clients, we're in bed with them for a long time," says Anna Maria.

4. The paintings. Many of the Ballous' oil paintings were bought at auction or at galleries in Europe, such as the living room's Impressionist view of a South of France harbor, purchased at Doyle auction house in New York. But the Ballous' favorite artist is Stephen Hannock, who's still alive and working, painting beautifully moody landscapes and city scenes. Hannock's paintings in the Ballous' library include this view of the Arno River in Tuscany. —A.D.

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