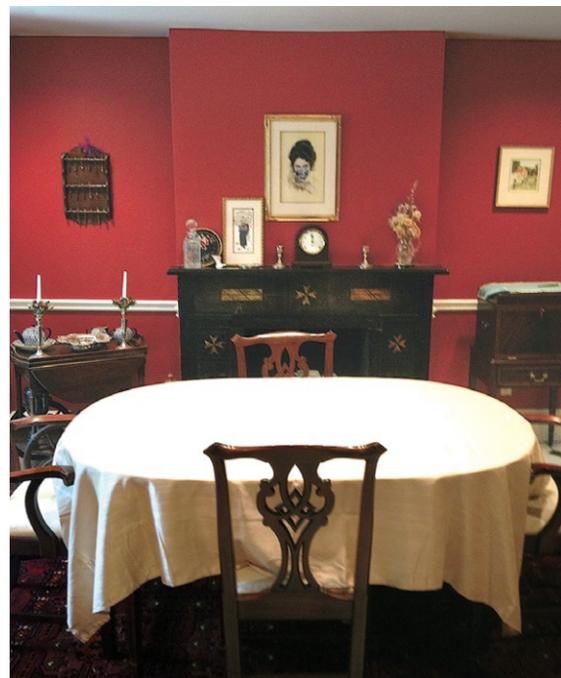




BRIGHT IDEAS: Annie Elliott brought a lower-level space out of its dark, Victorian-era rut [opposite page, bottom] with fresh wallpaper, light tile, and well-proportioned furniture.



HOW TO OPEN UP A DARK ROOM

Tips from designer Annie Elliott

Get rid of chair molding. “Chair rail slices a room in half,” Elliott says.

Add lighting. “A chandelier is not enough!” If you have a surface that can accommodate a pair of dimmable lamps, fantastic. If not, try a floor lamp.

Play down the brown. Combine wooden chairs with upholstered seating at a dining table, and consider painted furniture.

Go sheer. Replace heavy window treatments with semi-sheer Roman shades.

Get reflective. “A large mirror will open up the space and bounce light around the room.”

■ INTO THE LIGHT

Victorian rowhouses conjure ornate woodwork and dark, formal rooms. Designer Annie Elliott, however, was intent on a new vision for her clients’ lower-level dining area on Capitol Hill.

The space played to the stuffy stereotype, with deep-red walls and heavy furniture. A beautiful fireplace, original to the 19th-century rowhouse, got lost in visual clutter that included white chair rails and dated black-and-white floor tile. “It felt closed, which it shouldn’t have, given the amount of light coming in,” Elliott says.

The designer had already decorated several of the house’s other rooms, and

her clients—a retired couple—gave her carte blanche to transform this one. “It had to be a comfortable, multi-use space,” Elliott says. “That was our direction.”

She papered the walls with a fanciful pattern of birds and greenery, pulling inspiration from the English-style garden just outside the windows. New porcelain floor tile, resembling pale, creamy-gold limestone, further brightened the room. Elliot got rid of a bulky radiator cover and eight-inch-deep windowsills in the niche, making room for a plush settee and side table.

Because her clients wanted the space to fill a variety of roles, she paired a whimsical round table with skirted upholstered

chairs that “are not overtly dining chairs.” She also managed to fit in a desk, giving the couple a dedicated spot to work or pay bills, because their upstairs living room and library didn’t have one.

One of the owners’ must-keep items was the large, dark china cabinet. To make it less dominant, Elliott moved it to a wider wall and lined the backs of the shelves with grass cloth. “Without that, the piece was very heavy,” she says. Now the items on display pop from their lighter background.

And that original fireplace? The room’s only distinctly Victorian feature is finally the focal point it always should have been.

—JENNIFER SERGENT

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