



When a North Shore couple approached Chicago designer Mitchell Putlack, saying, “We want a living room that the entire family can use,” the challenge was familiar. Theirs was a request many designers hear but few are able to realize: “Everybody says this, but when it comes to really doing the living room they aren’t realistic and choose furnishings that aren’t necessarily family friendly,” Putlack notes.

But with three young children, a host of family and friends to entertain, and what Putlack describes as “a sophisticated yet eclectic sense of style,” the couple really wanted a space both utilitarian and attractive. It also had to be fairly neutral. “They have a growing art collection, and some of their pieces are quite colorful,” he explains.

Putlack found a way to fuse simple elegance and family friendliness in one space.

1 Unity The extra-long sofa and occasional chairs are clean-lined and sturdy, but distinctly different in tone (the former is reproduction English country, and the latter are contemporary). Putlack covered them in different hues of durable chenille and trimmed all three with brass tacks.

2 Flexibility The console against the wall—also an English country reproduction—is actually a table that opens to seat eight. For large dinners the couple moves it into the foyer just outside the entrance, adjacent to the dining room. Everything had to be flexible enough to be “casual or fairly formal, depending on the occasion,” Putlack adds.

3 Frills The sleek, low-slung coffee table is sturdy and unique, thanks to its copper-lined recess. It can be used to hold dirt, sand, and more; the wife fills it with everything from the vases shown here to live plants, dried floral arrangements, or even sand and seashells.

4 Finishing Touches A series of colorful paintings by Chinese artist Li Lin Lee hang in a tightly spaced grouping to make a strong visual impact. More muted pieces—photographs of drive-in movie theaters by Hiroshi Sugimoto over the folding console and a photographic triptych by Luis Gonzáles Palma over the mantel—surround this installation to temper it. But from the wife’s perspective, the best thing she did was treat all the furniture with stain-protectant, which kept her sofa from getting ruined when a 2-year-old took to it with a marker. **MH**

LISA SKOLNIK IS A CHICAGO WRITER WHO SPECIALIZES IN ARCHITECTURE AND INTERIOR DESIGN.

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