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SILVER LINING

After fire destroyed her home, Annapolis designer Arlene Critzos turned tragedy into triumph by re-creating the architecture and design with a fresh, cool approach to color and texture.

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Three years ago, during a torrential fall rainstorm, lightning struck Arlene Critzos's Annapolis house on Chesapeake Bay. The bolt ignited a fire that would quickly destroy the Maryland designer's 14-year-old residence. Flames, smoke, water, and ash consumed the house, leaving it a total loss. "As soon as the reality passed that we were safe, my mind drifted to the beautiful, irreplaceable objects and art we lost," says Critzos. "And then I thought

of the most important things—family photos and other memories that were gone."

Nevertheless, several tapestries, antiques, and pieces of art were able to be restored, and these items inspired Critzos and husband John to rebuild. Those pieces kept the feeling of "coming home," she explains. The couple had loved their original house, and now they would love it even more the second time around by rebuilding and updating it a bit.

The large scope of the project was nothing new to Critzos, who

launched her company, Interior Concepts, in 1979. Through her business, she has spent her adult life juggling intricate design projects with family commitments, always keeping her eye on the silver lining. And that's just what she did with her own home. "When we took a fresh look at our new concept for the interior design, we made minor but effective floor plan changes," Critzos explains. "We then chose crisper colors in neutral grays and white instead of the previous tans, browns, and terra cottas." Her house today feels refreshed

Previous pages, left to right: The most formal space in the house is the grand living room. Critzos dressed the sofa in sleek bullion fringe, a traditional touch that feels "contemporary, cleaned up, and refined." In the dining room, an Austrian carved raw wood cherub head hangs at the center of the thistle wreath on a large French ormolu mirror. These pages, above: Dark gray waxed Venetian plaster walls reflect light streaming through the bay window in the dining room. Right: Contemporary brass sconces create a unique juxtaposition to the airy antique gilt chandelier over the table.

In the expansive living room, Critzos created more intimate rooms within rooms. The caramel-toned sofa against the far wall provides an anchor. A tufted chaise lounge in the middle breaks up the oversized space and provides a perching spot for guests during parties.





Opposite: The great room is "Edwardian in feel," says Critzos, with colors that channel the early 20th-century decorative period. The antique mantel and tile fireplace surround, from an old English estate, survived the fire. Gothic windows and old wood doors add to the eclecticism of the space. Above: The terra-cotta urns and lanterns made it through the fire, stalwart relics that stand sentry before the front door. Below, left to right: Antique cherubs and oyster shell spheres decorate the lush banister garland. A mid-19th-century Belgian tapestry suffered extreme smoke and water damage during the fire, but meticulous restoration brought it back to life.





yet classic with a design veteran's balance of antiques and contemporary treatments.

Once the challenge of the rebuild was complete, Critzos faced yet another hurdle as the holidays approached. The couple had lost all their ornaments and other Christmas décor in the fire. "They were all gone—the Christmas things I'd collected my whole life," the designer says. Having spent much of her childhood in Europe and then working in Asia years later, Critzos had amassed quite a collection, including her cherished handmade Italian pieces. Now she would have to choose a different holiday decorating route. "I began the hunt for 'uniques' rather than ornaments," she says. "I found embroideries, antique trivets, and Moroccan tea vessels, as well as natural organic objects and decorative elements from antique pieces."

The results of Critzos's quest are seen on the home's two trees—one in the living room and one in the great room—each displaying its unique character. The living room's tree is more formal, which is consistent with the refined tones and

streamlined spirit of the space. Metallic ornaments and organic elements play off each other. The great room, in contrast, has warm caramel-colored suede walls and cashmere window treatments with touches of eggplant, loden green, and neutrals. The tree here feels more traditional. Handmade Santas, small copper pots, and overscale red balls fill the inner layer of the tree, offering colorful celebrations of the holiday.

While beautiful, this year's Christmas on the Chesapeake resonates with even more emotion and meaning. Says Critzos, "Today and every day, I look at things so differently and with so much more appreciation for everything. There is never a day when thankfulness is not at the forefront."