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## Home & Garden

### More Than One Revival in a Manhattan Ruin



The Lufkins added stenciled plaster walls inspired by a 19th-century abbey and a Gothic-style fireplace.

By [JOYCE WADLER](#)  
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IF the [Manhattan](#) apartment of Cynthia and Dan Lufkin, with its vaulted ceiling, arched windows and touches of gold leaf, is reminiscent of a church, that is because it was one — the chapel of the New York Cancer Hospital, built in the 1880s. The living room, which looks out on Central Park West between 105th and 106th Streets, has a 38-foot ceiling. The stenciling of the plaster walls was inspired by an English abbey.



**RESTORATION** Cynthia Lufkin and her husband turned the chapel of a former cancer hospital — the city's first — into a three-level Manhattan apartment. Before the renovation was complete, she found herself battling breast cancer.

It is indeed an impressive renovation: such reverence for history, in the restored stonework of the columns and arches! Such glorious detail in Ms. Lufkin's mezzanine office, tucked high up under the ceiling, with the Gothic rose window motif echoed in the winding stairs! Such a draft! Is one of the windows open? The place is freezing.

You seem to have a draft here, this reporter says.

"Something did happen where we paid for the insulation and didn't get it," Ms. Lufkin says. "My husband isn't happy about that."

Her husband, who arrives about an hour later, clarifies this. The insulation in the ceiling was really bad, he says, so they installed fans in the office to circulate the hot air. If it feels chilly now, it's because the heat's turned down.

"We're not here full time," he says. "We haven't got much heat."

How rich does one have to be to have spent \$5.5 million for an apartment that is used only a few days a week? Very, very rich. Which, Mr. Lufkin, who is 76 — yeah, he laughs, more than 30 years older than his wife — is.

He was one of the founders of the investment firm Donaldson, Lufkin & Jenrette, and kept an apartment in the Carlyle for 20 years. The Lufkins also have a farm in Connecticut and are building a home in Canada on Prince Edward Island. Should multiple residences and unusually high ceilings inspire your class hatred, you should know that his dad was a printing salesman and Mr. Lufkin went through Hotchkiss, and then Yale, on a scholarship.

He is also a man of action. After Donaldson, Lufkin & Jenrette went public in 1970, he ranched in Oregon and became an amateur cutting horse champ. Those days are over — this fall he had hip replacement surgery. He wears a yellow [Lance Armstrong](#) bracelet.

“I’m a great admirer of his,” Mr. Lufkin says. “His motto is Live Strong. And that’s a good motto.”

Ms. Lufkin, who is 45, had a run-in with breast cancer two and a half years ago when pregnant with her second child and was last week named mother of the year by the [American Cancer Society](#). She arrives at the apartment accompanied by her driver, Fernando, who is carrying a tote and a small, white Dior shopping bag. At the elevator, as if seeing the reporter taking a mental note of this, Ms. Lufkin says she’ll take the bags. The next thing you know the driver has vanished, to wherever drivers go when not in use.

Ms. Lufkin’s style, nonetheless, is that of an independent college grad. She wears a brown hoodie over a white blouse, and her face has a fresh-scrubbed look. She seems down to earth, and also somewhat vulnerable — perhaps because she has a bad cough from a cold; perhaps because of her visible pain when she relives her cancer story. That she ended up in what is believed to have been the first cancer hospital in the country, a wreck when she and her husband first saw it seven years ago, is a dark irony that does not escape her.

“Even as a mud pit, it was a place of great beauty and a place of solace,” she says. “You could see people praying for miracles and giving thanks here, and in reality that’s what it became for us. Which we couldn’t have anticipated.”

Ms. Lufkin grew up in Neshanic Station, N.J., in Somerset County, where her mother's Dutch ancestors settled. If it sounds as if there was no need for her mother to work, that is incorrect. Her mother worked in pharmaceutical imports. Her father is not a subject she's eager to discuss. He and her mother split up when she was 12; he died in Florida, when she was 25, she says. The cause of death?

"They don't know," Ms. Lufkin says. "The homicide detectives did hold his body for a while."

(The *homicide* detectives? Now there's a story waiting to be told, which won't be.)

What did he do?

"Nothing," Ms. Lufkin says. "I think he may have had the alcoholic gene."

Ms. Lufkin got a bachelor's degree in chemistry from Trinity College in Hartford, then spent time traveling. In Milan, purely by happenstance, she landed a nonspeaking part on a soap opera, as "a secretary for a wealthy gentleman," Ms. Lufkin says. "I lit his cigars and opened up his Jaguar door." She laughs. "Training for the future." Do she and her husband have a Jaguar?



**THE ECHO OF HISTORY** Dan and Cynthia Lufkin said they tried to honor the history of the former New York Cancer Hospital rather than replicate the original design.



Bedrooms on the lower level are conventional.



**PRIVATE AND PUBLIC** Ms. Lufkin's mezzanine office is tucked away above the dining area.



A small study is down the hall.

**"We do have a Jaguar, and he does love cigars."**

She was divorced, with a 1-year-old daughter, and working in public relations for Tiffany & Company when she met Dan Lufkin, in the spring of 1999. He'd been married twice and had four daughters. They married in June 2000, in Southampton. They lived first on Gracie Square, camping out at the Carlyle for six months while they renovated.

Then, in 2001, they read about the planned renovation of the old New York Cancer Hospital by Daniel E. McLean, a Chicago developer, who would be

adding a high-rise apartment house behind it. The hospital, which had later become a nursing home, had been abandoned for 25 years and was in a terrible state of disrepair. The Lufkins remember rats, holes in the roof, dust, a wooden ceiling that was falling apart, missing windows, plaster walls that had rotted away to the bricks. They also knew this was where they had to live.

“There was a lot of chopped-up cement, a lot of dust, but I thought the actual space itself was extraordinary,” Mr. Lufkin says. “We had looked at box after box after box, and they seemed so uninteresting.”

The couple did not try to recreate all of the apartment’s original architectural detail — it had, after all, been a chapel — but they tried to preserve a feeling of its history. The vaulted wood ceiling is much like the one they saw in an old photo of the space, as are three large hanging globe lamps, which they found online at Urban Archaeology, for \$15,000 apiece.

“Whenever you’re trying to do anything to emulate history, it ain’t cheap,” Mr. Lufkin says.

The firm of Taconic Builders was in charge of the structural work, which included creating four bedrooms on the apartment’s first level; replacing windows; and building Ms. Lufkin’s office. (They had nothing to do with the insulation in the ceiling.) The spiral staircase up to the mezzanine was done by NE&WS, and the Gothic fireplace in the great room was made by the British company Chesney’s, which has offices in Manhattan. The walls, which appear to be weathered plaster with faded stenciling, were done by BiggArt Design. The patterns were not part of the original chapel, they were inspired by a medieval tapestry in a 19th-century British abbey, as well as the abbey itself.

Mr. Lufkin declines to give the cost of the structural renovation, saying only that it was “in the low seven figures.” He does say that the decorative work was about \$350,000.

Decorators, according to the Lufkins, were not always helpful.

“The first series of decorators said we really need to do this ceiling blue, robin’s egg blue,” Ms. Lufkin says. “And the walls need to be bright yellow. And the windows — we need to hide these windows.”

Her husband picks up the story. “With bright aubergine drapes. So they left. We respected the history and the architecture of the building,” he says. “That’s why we bought it.”

During the years of renovation, Ms. Lufkin had been having her own health problems. She and her husband very much wanted to have a child together. She’d miscarried a boy, suffered an ectopic pregnancy and had five in vitro treatments before finally becoming pregnant once again.

“It was the perfect storm of estrogen,” she says of this period.

In September 2005, when Ms. Lufkin was seven and a half months pregnant, she received a diagnosis of breast cancer. Ten days later, she delivered a daughter by Caesarean section. The baby weighed five pounds. She was named Aster Lee, her first name taken from the flowers the Lufkins had seen as they walked through Central Park after Ms. Lufkin’s diagnosis — there had been a lot of long walks after that diagnosis, Ms. Lufkin says.

Soon after her birth, Aster Lee stopped breathing and was put on a respirator. A few days later, Ms. Lufkin and her husband were told that their daughter had a 50 percent chance of making it through the night. “The first question on my mind after my cancer diagnosis had been, ‘Am I going to have this baby I have wanted for years and then die leaving the baby motherless?’ ” Ms. Lufkin wrote, in an unpublished story about her experience. “Now the question everyone was asking was were both my child and I going to die?”

The next day, her baby started breathing on her own. And today, Ms. Lufkin is fine. She and her husband are creating the Cynthia Lufkin Center for Nutrition and Fitness at the new breast cancer treatment center being built by Memorial Sloan-Kettering, the hospital where Ms. Lufkin was treated. At the American Cancer Society awards lunch for Ms. Lufkin at [the Plaza](#) last

week, Aster Lee was in attendance, along with Ms. Lufkin's 10-year-old daughter, Schuyler Hazard.

And yes, to get back to the apartment, Ms. Lufkin did end up going through chemo after she and her husband had moved into the chapel of a cancer hospital. Her daughter Aster Lee was also christened there. The Rev. Peter Larsen, rector of St. John's Episcopal Church in Southampton, who had married the Lufkins, officiated. He had done many christenings, he said at the service, but this was the first one to which a family brought their own church.