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Summer 2011 Issue
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FAMILY FIRST

A stylish and colorful revamping of a gracious home gives a happy Greenwich couple just the environment they imagined for raising their three youngsters. TEXT BY MEGAN FULWEILER • PHOTOGRAPHY BY MICHAEL PARTENIO • ARCHITECTURE: DOUGLAS VANDERHORN, HILTON-VANDERHORN ARCHITECTS • INTERIOR DESIGN: CINDY RINFRET, RINFRET, LTD. • LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE: PETER CUMMINS, CUMMINS ASSOCIATES • BUILDER: WRIGHT BROTHERS BUILDERS • PRODUCED BY STACY KUNSTEL

The living room's stylish grass-cloth wallcovering has a subtle silvery sheen that makes it a perfect backdrop for everything from the Greek key–patterned sofa pillows to the moldings and fluted mantel to the chic coffee table with its faux bamboo base.

If, as they say, a beautiful woman lights up a room, the reverse is true as well—a beautiful room lights up those lucky enough to stand within its walls. Down through the ages, savvy women have used their surroundings to enhance their own charms. Still, when told that her designer describes her as a lovely blonde and says, "These settings complement her coloring," the owner of this Greenwich home simply laughs. She and her husband have a far more compelling reason for adoring their Greenwich house. It's the home they'd always envisioned for raising their three young children.

"Family is important to us," says the homeowner. "It's a pretty house, but it's not showcase-y. It's a home where people feel

comfortable. Rather than have our kids go visit elsewhere, we want their friends to come here. That's really why we bought this place."

Two hundred and fifty acres of breathtaking land owned by the Boy Scouts of America couldn't be a more perfect neighbor. The wealth of green provides a sense of privacy and gives the property a bucolic, "we're removed from everything" feeling. Curtains—except in the kids' rooms—are unnecessary. It's a good thing, too, because even the cremone bolts on the casement windows deserve highlighting.

Fortunately, by the time the owners took possession, the house had already undergone an extensive renovation led by

A trellis-patterned rug warms the dining room. *Facing page clockwise from top:* The graceful staircase is reflected in the entry's bull's-eye mirror. Whimsical chinoiserie directs attention to the dining room mirror. A generous courtyard complements the house.

This pretty auxiliary space just off the kitchen serves for breakfast or kids' craft time. *Facing page top:* Decorative lanterns and a copper hood boost the kitchen's charm. *Facing page bottom:* A window-lined addition encompasses the workout room.

Greenwich architect Douglas VanderHorn of Hilton-VanderHorn Architects. "The house was built in the 1950s in a fairly modest French style," VanderHorn explains. "Our client considered it a tear-down. But there was enough house to save and so, staying in the French vein, we did a complete gut, renovated, replanned and added the third floor."

Almost nothing you see today is original. The old brick exterior was stripped and new brick installed, along with a distinctive slate roof. The original front door was nixed for an Indiana limestone surround and a glass door dressed with an ornate iron grille designed by VanderHorn. At night, lit from within, the entry glows like a lantern.

To elevate the interior, the architect added beautiful details, including moldings, trim and delicate transoms above the doorways. It was a glorious rebirth, but the owner at that time had a penchant for all-white rooms, with one notable exception—a plum sitting room! Such a noncommittal palette, as pleasing as it was, downplayed the home's character. The current owners engaged Greenwich designer Cindy Rinfret to enliven the architecture with colorful new interiors.

"Cindy has an amazing way with color," says the happy wife. And if proof of that is needed, she has only to initiate a tour. The sun-drenched rooms—all dreamy blues and beiges—unfold one after another in an appealing scheme that underscores the home's attributes. Teamed with a barely-blue Kravet wallcovering, for instance, the entry's creamy paneling gains prominence. And a shimmery Donghia grasscloth catapults the living room's moldings and fluted mantel to the forefront. Accents of red and coral—like a sweep of

The architect added beautiful details, including moldings and delicate transoms above doorways.

Rinfret designed an ultra-feminine sofa for the guest suite's plum-colored sitting room. *Facing page top:* The paneled library exudes a masculine tone. *Facing page bottom:* A new outdoor hearth and pergola frame the pool-side sitting area.

rouge on the cheeks—give it all a lively kick.

"That's the great thing about this house," says Rinfret. "It's elegant but not stuffy. With children and dogs all about, my clients craved rooms that were also practical."

Rinfret's take on family living means mixing old but not overly precious pieces with newer items. Many of the furnishings were transferred from the owners' last home (also a Rinfret project) and revamped. About 75 percent of the accessories, Rinfret estimates, were culled from her own Greenwich shop. Custom rugs made in Nepal cozy up wood floors for kids who sometimes prefer to shed their shoes.

As user-friendly as they are, the interiors are also chic. If Mom and Dad don formal attire for dinner, they won't look out of step in the dining room, resplendent with a custom-colored Gracie wallcovering. An antique gilded chandelier dripping crystal prisms is the kind of fixture that inspires toasts. And while guests are admiring its silhouette, they'll notice the blue-as-sky ceiling. "It's one-sixth of the room," says Rinfret. "Never leave a ceiling white." A set of cheery pagodas—a bit of whimsical chinoiserie—sits atop the marble mantel.

The stunning library, paneled in butternut and sporting a gold ceiling, would do as well for cocktails as it does for reading. Through an open door, a lick of purple appears. "It was such a cool color, we kept it," says the wife of the sitting room. Rinfret piled on more color, wallpapering the ceiling and designing a luscious sorbet-hued sofa.

The kitchen—the family hub—exhibits the same delicious balance of functionality and sophistication. VanderHorn had seen to the kitchen in his renovation, and then Rinfret gave it her fabulous stamp, lightening the dark cabinets and cleverly swap-

Rinfret's take on family living means mixing old but not overly precious pieces with new items.

Antique botanicals bring the garden into the wife's dressing room. *Facing page clockwise from left:* Robert Allen pillows suit the master bedroom. A sweet settee sits at the foot of the elegant bed with its gilded canopy. The gazebo holds faux bois concrete furnishings.

ping out their doors for new models with bamboo trim. She also tucked the fridge behind mirrored doors—just another of the designer's ingenious, why-didn't-we-think-of-that moves.

An adjacent breakfast room, one of two casual dining areas, is frequently commandeered by the children for projects. Rinfret devised a corner cabinet, also with mirrored doors, just for arts and crafts supplies. Steel chairs—"a link to the kitchen's stainless appliances," says Rinfret—with leopard seats are reminders that it's good to think outside the box.

The parents' Rinfret-designed canopy bed came along from their old home, as did the sweet heirloom settee at its foot. Tiptoe into the wife's dressing room and the feminine ambience escalates with a

pretty wallcovering and a dainty blue chaise. Her bath (the husband has his own across the way) holds a bowfront tub and an antique Venetian mirror.

As soon as fair weather arrives, of course, the family zips outdoors to make good use of the pool and tennis court. Twin pool pavilions with romantic bell-shaped roofs contain a kitchenette and bath, respectively. The property's little pond is amazing, too, claims the wife. "The children get to watch tadpoles grow into frogs," she says. No doubt they'll remember that miraculous event—and all their days in this welcoming house—forever. •

Resources For more information about this home, see page 131.