

THIS PAGE: The breakfast area creates a comfortable space for casual meals, with easy-care materials and surfaces for the homeowner's young family.





Country House **REMIIX**

Following the expansion of a traditional farmhouse, designer Julie Nightingale and her clients remake the interior of a Darien home with simplicity and style.

BY JUDY OSTROW
PHOTOGRAPHS BY JANE BEILES



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hen they first saw the place—an older farmhouse and barn on nearly three level acres in Darien—homeowners Kathy and Evan Calio knew they had found something special.

“The property was the main selling point,” says Kathy. Beautiful acreage in a desirable neighborhood and the possibility for enlarging the house factored into their decision to buy. Before closing on the deal, Kathy had already enlisted Rowayton designer Julie Nightingale to help her refresh the interior.

“I wanted to make sure that what we envisioned was doable. We wanted a clean, calming environment. The existing house had rooms that were small and in need of updating,” she recalls. The Calios hired builder John Sullivan to do a gut renovation—opening up rooms along its rear elevation, and creating an extension to provide more space and light. The couple and their three small children then proceeded to do what many families might find close to impossible: live in their home throughout the months-long construction project.



OPPOSITE: The open-plan family room features a calming palette and is surrounded by views of the beautiful backyard. LEFT: Glass and steel doors lead to the home office and add a contemporary feel to the entry hall. BELOW: Rowayton artist Charlotte Sabbagh painted the abstract canvases in the dining room and master bedroom.



Custom light pendants in the kitchen are by Helen Gifford.



“They were good sports,” remembers Sullivan, who moved the existing cabinets and appliances to create a temporary kitchen for the family in the garage. His crew extended and deepened the foundation, constructed a large new kitchen and bright, open living spaces, and reworked the home’s dated layout. “Evan and Kathy moved out of the master bedroom and into the guest room for the duration. It was sometimes chaotic for them, but somehow they made it work.”

As construction progressed, Kathy and her designer started putting together the furnishings and decorative elements of the new rooms. Julie understood the couple’s aesthetic, and so the hunt began. One of the big changes was an expansive, open

space that encompasses a large kitchen with a more intimate breakfast area, and a family room.

Says Julie, “Kathy wanted low-maintenance finishes and furnishings because she has active young children. But she was still looking for solutions with style and character. Along with the clean, modern lines that she favors, she also has a bit of bohemian sensibility.” This prompted Julie to introduce Kathy to artists’ and artisans’ workshops where she could find unique furnishings and accessories that add distinctive accents to each room.

In the large open-plan space, the breakfast area where the family gathers in the morning features a warming gas fireplace and a round table with chairs

upholstered in attractive and sturdy indoor/outdoor fabric. Next to the hearth are the children’s fur-topped stools, for a whimsical touch, and a Gus Yero painting adds color to the vignette.

“Gus is a Hamptons artist,” notes Julie, who made a number of trips with Kathy to eastern Long Island galleries and studios. “I like to take clients out there to source fresh design ideas.” In the kitchen, for example, the pendants were custom made by lighting designer Helen Gifford, whose Bridgehampton studio provides unique glass creations for an international clientele.

The kitchen island—broad and long to accommodate the family of five—is formed from a single slab of delicately patterned,



low-maintenance quartz. Julie covered the five sleek counter stools in faux leather, acknowledging the realities of constant use and heavy traffic. While beauty is a foundation for the design choices, practicality is a subtle constant.

“We always had the children in mind when we looked at furnishings,” says Kathy. She wanted everyone to enjoy the spaces, without worrying about the potential for wear and tear in a busy family’s home.

In addition to functionality, Julie and her client made extensive use of simplicity as a design value. For architectural accents, horizontal shiplap paneling highlights focal points around the house: the range hood in the kitchen, for instance, and the hearths in both the family room area and the master bedroom. And by darkening existing floors—“just shy of black,” says Julie—they provided a unifying background for the custom rugs chosen for each room. While whites and neutrals are the basic elements of the interior palette, Julie has used color as a punctuation point throughout the house—in a piece of art or a surprise feature like the bold-patterned wallpaper in the dining room.

Distinctive lighting fixtures are among Kathy’s favorite elements of the renewed interior. Lindsey Adelman’s “Branching Bubble” chandelier illuminates the dining room. Other pieces from such design luminaries—pun intended—as Oly Studio and DWR enhance each room, just as a signature piece of jewelry completes a simple, elegant dress.

One standout here is the master bedroom’s “Random Light,” designed by Bertjan Pot for Moooi. More than three feet in diameter, the fixture was the perfect centerpiece for this large space. When it arrived, one problem became apparent: It was too large to fit through the door to the house. The solution was simple: The team squished it through the entrance and the bedroom door, whereupon it popped itself back into shape. “It gives and takes,” notes Kathy with a grin.

The family has been living in the newly designed spaces for some time now, which is why Kathy has a tough time calling out her favorite part of the home. Instead, she says something that is music to any designer’s ears. “I love all the rooms. It’s impossible to choose just one.”



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Dramatic volume and soft textures in the master bedroom make it a calming retreat; custom flat-paneled cabinetry in the master bath; an abstract painting and small ginger jars add pops of color to the master bedroom.