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An art consultant turns her connoisseur's eye to her own home, giving the historic Litchfield house a design update that blends beauty and practicality, elegance and ease.

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# Picture Perfect

**An art consultant turns her connoisseur's eye to her own home, giving the historic Litchfield house a design update that blends beauty and practicality, elegance and ease.**

Text by Megan Fulweiler • Photography by Michael Partenio • Interior design: Lauren Della Monica, LPDM Fine Art Consulting • Builder: John Cappello and Sons • Produced by Stacy Kunstel

Watercolors by artist Vico Fabbris line the stairs. Facing page left to right: An antique Federal mirror lends grace to the entry hearth. The beautifully symmetrical, classic exterior enthralled Lauren Della Monica right from the start.

Walls painted Benjamin Moore Cloud White complement the living room's pale furnishings. *Facing page top:* An antique scone is a grace note above a cane-backed settee. *Facing page bottom:* A sunny conversation area in the living room centers around a sculptural modern table.



N

ot every wife has a spouse who so trusts her judgment he would suggest she purchase a house without his involvement. But, then, Lauren Della Monica is a woman apart.

A sought-after art consultant and an author (she co-authored *Flying the Colors: The Unseen Treasures of Nineteenth-Century American Marine Art* and is working on a second book that concentrates on contemporary American landscape paintings), Della Monica is known for her keen eye. It might also have helped that, since her family was in the real estate business, her husband knows an apti-

tude for spotting gem-like homes is in her DNA. And truth be told, he could have been growing just a tad weary.

"We'd been searching three and a half years when a new listing popped up," Della Monica remembers. "It was too big. But I showed it to my husband as an example of the perfect house." Armand was the epitome of encouragement. "Get in the car and go make an offer," he urged. Long story short: patience and perseverance paid off. The lovely 1773 Ephraim Kirby house in Litchfield is theirs, and Della Monica's affection for the place has deepened with every passing hour.

Over the years since it was built, the home had been hauled back from the street twice to escape the en-

croachment of civilization. Now perched in the very middle of three verdant acres, it's the best of two worlds—private, yet accessible to the town's goings-on. Dotted with trees both pedigreed and newly introduced, the setting is as peaceful as one of the pastoral pictures Della Monica so admires.

And the interior? Well, that's where the happy surprise plays out. The structure was sound, which made cosmetic changes the primary order of business. Rather than attempt to replicate the past, though, Della Monica launched a sensitive reinterpretation. Her goal was to maintain the home's sense of history while introducing her own modern sensibility. "We're young and I wanted

Antique green glass from Della Monica's collection enlivens the dining room. Facing page top: A painting by Sarah Hinckley makes a statement in the dining room. Facing page bottom: George, a Welsh terrier, relaxes in the study below a portrait of himself by Susan Randall.



our home to have that young feeling," she says. "I'm not stuck on historic colors. Things like comfort are more important."

Della Monica ushered in a pleasing neutral palette throughout the home's public spaces, paired traditional and contemporary furnishings and sought out forgiving materials like sisal, linen and Ultrasuede to accommodate the couple's army of family and friends. When her Welsh terrier, George, catapults himself onto a sofa, as he frequently does, no one frets.

A welcoming make-yourself-at-home-spirit resonates year round. In winter, visitors step through the front door into the generous entry hall to find a fire blazing on the hearth. The floor is a stenciled checkerboard wrought by previous inhabitants and too wonderful, the owners wisely decided, to edit.

Come spring and summer, guests move from the cream-colored living room through French doors onto the south veranda for a view of the property's most historic tree: a 200-year-old copper beech.

The living room projects a formal air at first, with its gleaming dark floor and gold accents, but Della Monica made sure to design it to accommodate real life, too. The sofa's linen slipcover, for example, can be whisked off in a jiff for cleaning. Charming juxtapositions like the delicate hand-painted antique cane bench perched alongside an edgy chrome tray table keep the mood lighthearted. And then there's the glorious art—a Charles Burchfield lithograph above the tray table and a still life by Katherine Ann Hartley (one of two in the couple's collection) over the mantel.

The dining room owes its cozy feel to its six-foot-ten-inch ceiling, the lowest in the house. Why it should be this way, Della Monica says, is a mystery. The chandelier had to be rescaled to be a bit shorter and wider to make it the perfect fit. Nixing the classic combo of dark chairs and table, Della Monica fearlessly lacquered the table snow-white. At its center sits a handcrafted lamb's-ear sphere by Bethlehem artist Ray Baker. An arresting oil painting by Sarah Hinckley provides an unexpected splash of dreamy color.

In the kitchen and family room, everyone's favorite place to spend time, Della Monica fostered a countrified air by transforming the previously bright-colored space with walls painted Benjamin Moore's Briarwood, a shade that fluctuates between gray and olive green with the day's passing, and a custom-stained maple floor. Two beefy ceiling beams



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Kitchen amenities include custom pendants and charming linen valances. Facing page top: The guestroom's cottagey air appeals to all ages. Facing page bottom: Gleaming copper pots and a dark hood enhance the kitchen's country ambience.



were installed, making the spacious kitchen feel more warm and inviting.

Della Monica also commissioned Bethlehem cabinet-maker Woody Mosch to craft a top using 200-year-old barn wood—in a nod to the age of the original house—for the existing island. The stainless-steel vent hood and soaring metal backsplash were painted jet black to help visually balance the galley with the adjacent family room and its new floor-to-ceiling stone fireplace. An avid chef, Della Monica is delighted that Armand has begun to get enthused about cooking, too. One of the culinary duo's recent dinner party menus is impressive even by Julia Child's standards: lobster ravioli, coq au vin and chocolate mousse.

The house sports five bedrooms, so overnight guests are easily accommodated. The most requested guest room, though, is the "cottage room," a sweet green bedroom accessible from the kitchen by a back staircase. Della Monica grew up on Cape Cod, where blue and white make a familiar marriage. In Litchfield, though, it's about the woods and rolling hills, she says. "There's so much green outside, I wanted some inside." She chose complementary shades of green to cover the room's walls and floor, and added pert painted beds that once graced her childhood bedroom.

In the end, Della Monica's fine-tuned connoisseurship

teamed with her practical "who cares about spills?" approach has made for the grandest, happiest kind of home.

**Rather than attempt to replicate the past, Della Monica launched a sensitive reinterpretation.**

People sense this is a nest to be cherished and enjoyed—not unlike a work of fine art. •

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