THE MAKING OF A COUNTRY CLASSIC

AN INTERIOR DESIGNER, WIFE, AND MOM HAD A MIDLIFE DESIGN AWAKENING JUST IN TIME TO TRANSFORM HER "ORDINARY" CONNECTICUT HOME INTO A SHOWCASE FOR ARTISTIC AND AUTHENTIC STYLE.

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OPPOSITE A skilled rug-hooker, Jane Bescherer works in a home studio dedicated to that pursuit. **THIS PHOTO** The small confines of the dining room are characteristic of the house overall, and that's fine with Jane. "I'm not a fan of the open floor plans of today," she says. "They don't have the intimacy or soul of a house like this." The ladder-back chairs surrounding a Pierre Deux table are "quite rickety," Jane says, but she refuses to get rid of them.

JANE BESCHERER APPRECIATES NICE THINGS. SHE BELIEVES in dressing thoughtfully and keeping a tidy house. In college, she was visually aware enough to pursue a degree in textiles and interior design. But having grown up in the gray, steely industrial setting of northern Indiana, she didn't feel she was exposed to truly beautiful design. It wasn't until she was well into college—taking courses in art and furniture design—that she had an epiphany. "We had a professor who showed slides of furniture from classic designers like T. H. Robsjohn-Gibbings," Jane says, "and I was knocked clean off my feet."

The revelation continued into the 1970s as she completed her degree, moved with her husband, Ed, to Wilton, Connecticut, and was introduced to historical architecture and tree-lined neighborhoods with a vintage residential aesthetic. Meanwhile, American arts institutions such as the Wilton Historical Society American Artisan Show and American Folk Art Museum in New York City were popping up on the East Coast, further shaping her design preferences. Then came the ultimate aha moment: the arrival of the "new country" movement in the 1980s, with its relaxed, welcoming vibe; soft colors; and painted antique furniture. "I had an immediate response," she says. "It wasn't something I learned."

From that moment, Jane approached her home with a casual and collected country vision. Her first act was to update—and add charm to—the kitchen, upstairs bath, and master bedroom in the 1963 house, what she describes as a "very ordinary builder's Colonial." Jane recruited local architect Mark Finlay in the late '80s to tailor-make these and subsequent changes. "I researched his work and met with him personally," she says, "and I knew right away he was the one to give us a new space that wouldn't look new."

Ed waited another decade to get his cherry-paneled office and a new "tree house room" that would await grandchildren. A few

OPPOSITE, TOP LEFT An old potting table and Jonathan Kline splint woven tray join a collection of black-and-white framed photographs of Jane's father. **OPPOSITE, TOP RIGHT** The footprint of the Bescherer home makes for a rambling, pseudo-T shape designed to make the most of the property's limited flat landscape. **OPPOSITE BOTTOM** Clerestory windows and open built-in shelving are the stars of Jane's studio. **THIS PHOTO** Guests enter to a view of a beautiful curved stairway; the hand-milled railing and treads were brought in from an old house down the road.

LEFT This pine Pennsylvania cupboard is one of Jane's first major antique investments. "It was nerve-racking to hand over that much money for one item," she says, "but I'm so glad I did." The chair in front of it is an original work from renowned artisans Jan Hoffman and David Woodward. **BELOW** Shaker baskets, a Native American papoose, a vintage wooden glove mold, and a lamp base made from an old stair bannister join primitive furniture in an ode to the beauty of folk art.

years later, Finlay returned to redesign the upstairs windows and install more architecturally appropriate dormers. Throughout the house, Jane wove in the antiques she discovered at local fairs and shows: painted corner cupboards, Native American woven baskets, black Windsor chairs, and cross-stitch and needlepoint folk art. "I think my first buy was a $12 stoneware crock," Jane says. Then, with the commission from an interior design job she landed in New York City, she was able to nab a few pieces of timeless designer upholstered seating.

Daughter Katherine remembers being in awe of how her mother pulled the house together over the years. "I'd watch her take a piece of art and build a color palette off it," she says. "She'd almost meditate on the colors."

A fourth and final round of Finlay renovations 10 years ago gave Jane her own studio, a spacious, light-filled addition with clerestory windows and

ABOVE The living room is home to many of the upscale (and long-lasting) designer upholstery pieces Jane bought during her working years as an interior designer, including the Brunswick sofa covered in Donghia fabric. The fireplace surround was stripped to its raw finish. **OPPOSITE, BOTTOM LEFT** Jane re-covered the seat of this living room chair with a vintage French feed sack after the original was ruined in a cleaning mishap. The hooked pillow is a Jane Bescherer original.

THIS PHOTO When the Bescherers moved into their 1963 Connecticut house, this step-down sunroom had only one or two windows. A window update and sponged-on green paint brought in much needed light and views of Jane's extensive gardens outside.
OPPOSITE The modest kitchen features Poggenpohl cabinetry and a primitive table. The white porcelain tile backsplash was handmade by Massachusetts artisan Mara Superior.

LEFT Jane added shutters to the master bedroom windows for privacy. The four-poster still allows the surrounding architecture and furnishings to be seen. A primitive, white-painted chest at the foot of the bed stores extra blankets. **ABOVE** A crude side table serves as a nightstand. Below it, a Native American basket is both artful and practical. **BELOW** One of Jane and Ed's earliest renovations included updating the upstairs bathroom, which includes a built-in linen cupboard and new Waterworks sink. **OPPOSITE** An upstairs guest bedroom wears its original unfinished beaded-board paneling and wood flooring that Jane hand-stenciled. The painted four-poster was purchased new.

ample built-in shelving. After Jane picked up the art of rug hooking, she wanted a space devoted to practicing the craft and displaying its implements. "Prior to that, I had been storing all my wool in plastic bins," she says, "which are not only unattractive but also hide all that gorgeous hand-dyed fabric. I wanted it in full view."

Now in their 80s, Ed and Jane aren't of the mind-set for more projects. If anything, Jane's main directive is paring down. "I'm trying very, very hard to not buy anything else," she says. In place of antiquing and renovating has come a new, equally fun endeavor—gifting her children with a prized piece here and there. "They have all followed my lead in their own homes," she says, "and they're more than happy to accept their mom's stuff!" □

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