

Artistic Expression

Petal-pink ceilings? Leaf-painted floors? 'Why not?' says Robin Henry, as she layers a Connecticut vacation home with color and imagination.

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new traditional
ROBIN HENRY

“I may be a suburban mom of two, but my mind is actually a wild place,” says interior designer Robin Henry with a laugh. Her exuberant, freewheeling style—informed by an art degree, a stint as a clothing store owner in Puerto Rico, and enviable moxie that once led her to cold-call designer Katie Ridder asking for an internship—is on full display in this Connecticut vacation home. (As for that call to designer Ridder, “She told me to come in for an appointment,” Henry says. “I stayed for eight years.”)

The 1950s house that Henry designed for a couple with four young children is a midcentury marvel of color, pattern, and all-out verve—at once practical, artistic, and undeniably fun. “The owners are very sporty and usually have friends and family with them,” she

says. “There are always lots of people dragging heavy things around that could ruin your floors.”

In fact, painting the great room floor was Henry’s first step toward reviving the tired house. “It was vast

Den The den is snuggled with a Room & Board sectional. “This room doesn’t get a lot of natural light,” designer Robin Henry says, “so we decided to go with it and make it feel very cocoon-like, rather than try to pretend it’s something that it’s not.”

Textural interest is supplied by grass cloth covering the walls. **Preceding pages** Vibrantly hued botanical prints float above an antique sofa in the great room, where Henry paired the owners’ leather chairs with a reproduction Robsjohn-Gibbings coffee table and a cowhide rug.





Dining area The flirty light fixture and Thonet chairs belonged to the owners. Henry conceived the banquette, creating a multipurpose spot for eating, art projects, and grown-up work. **Entry hall** A mirror leans casually against a wall in the entry hall, reflecting a table the designer purchased at auction in Pennsylvania.

and drab. It seemed like it went on for acres," Henry recalls. "It wasn't, shall we say, enhancing." To counter its expanse and boost its durability, Henry seized a lightning bolt moment and asked artist Jay Lohmann to paint the floor with a Henri Matisse-inspired array of leaves. "It seemed like all the trees outdoors should come in, with leaves blown onto the floor organically," she says.

With its carefree vibe established—along with a happy color palette that includes coral, turquoise, and red—Henry turned her attention to furnishings. "I don't like a house to look like a curated museum of fancy objects bought at a store or a showroom," she says. "I prefer making custom things because they're created just for you." To wit: the master bedroom's whimsically shaped headboard and the dining area banquette. Though elegantly tufted, the banquette wears indoor-outdoor fabric that resembles linen, yet easily shrugs 40 peanut-butter-and-jelly fingers.

Henry is equally fond of antiques, such as the

great room's Hepplewhite sofa, which she covered in turquoise felted wool. She claims a soft spot for patterned draperies and pillows. And she is a huge fan of wallpaper because, she says, "Not every room can be painted. You need to experience texture and special moments as you move through a house, and wallpaper provides those." From grass cloth in the den to William Morris paisley in the bedroom shared by all four children, Henry's picks demonstrate her open-minded approach to design. "I love color and pattern, but because there's not actually a lot of stuff in this house, it feels pretty clean and simple," she says. An artistic feat, indeed.

Screen porch The beer garden table and bench are ideally suited for the space. Henry painted the walls a dark, moody shade to draw the eye straight outside toward the view. "White would have stopped your eye cold," she says.





Master bedroom Henry revisits the entry hall's fallen-leaf motif, courtesy of a whimsically shaped custom headboard. The vintage metal table, with its bouquet-like base, was her client's serendipitous find. A chair and ottoman by Bunny Williams wear a small-scale print to counteract the large scale of the draperies.





tips of the trade

Color your world with fresh ideas from interior designer Robin Henry.

Think top to bottom.

"Don't forget about your ceiling and floors," Henry says. "Both are great surfaces for adding unexpected color."

Outline windows. Consider painting window mullions and trim a different color from walls. Henry likes to paint both charcoal gray, to mimic the look of metal.

Treat white as an option.

Instead of defaulting to white, consider it as carefully as you would any other color option.

Paint the doors. "It seems like doors are always white," Henry notes, "but painting them a different color can be very chic. The doors in my house are all lichen brown!"

Bedroom Shared by all four of the owners' children, this sophisticated, gender-neutral bedroom will grow with its occupants. The modern lines of the reproduction midcentury chair are juxtaposed with a picture of George Washington. The master bedroom dresser is crowned by antique botanical prints.