



OUT
OF THE
SHADOWS

TEXT BY MARIA LAPIANA
+ PHOTOGRAPHY
BY MICHAEL PARTENIO
+ PRODUCED BY
STACY KUNSTEL

A dark, inward-looking house is opened up and given a colorful makeover to become a fun weekend spot.



A love of Moorish and Moroccan design inspired the home's vivid colors, brilliant patterns, global accents, and eclectic blend of traditional, modern, and mid-century silhouettes. The great room sports a round sofa from Mitchell Gold + Bob Williams outfitted in a bold Fabricut fabric. **FACING PAGE:** Designer Robin Henry added cool blues to lend a soothing counterpoint to the fiery reds and oranges.

They say there's something mystical in the power of three. It's a symbol of unity, harmony, and completion. In fact, it took the collective talents of three highly creative women to work magic on a nondescript 1980s ranch in Sharon. Together they transformed the ugly duckling into an enchanting family home.

It was "all orange and shag carpet, with a bachelor-size kitchen," remembers Rachael Combe, the home-

owner, who, with her husband, Orlando Knauss, discovered the sleeper in 2004. They were living in New York City at the time and were in the market for a weekend home. The house was dated and gloomy, but they loved that it sat on just over nine acres, snug against a hillside and shaded by tall, sheltering trees.

They called on architect Stacey Jacovini Storm to evaluate its potential. "It was solid, but frustratingly introverted," says Storm, whose firm, ASCAPE, was



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: With its charcoal-gray barn board and relatively few windows, the simple facade belies the interior's lively attitude and connection to the outdoors. A Matisse-inspired, hand-painted floor adds a whimsical touch to the great room. The ceiling casts a rosy glow, thanks to a coat of Pantone Creole Pink paint.

PROJECT TEAM

ARCHITECTURE: Stacey Jacovini Storm, ASCAPE
 INTERIOR DESIGN: Robin Henry, Robin Henry Studio
 LANDSCAPE DESIGN: Robin Leigh, Country Gardens & Pools



Henry punched up the breakfast area with bright fabrics. **FACING PAGE, TOP:** The modern, streamlined kitchen was designed by architect Stacey Jacovini Storm during the initial renovation in 2007. **FACING PAGE, BOTTOM:** The homeowners fell hard for the backyard view when they first spied the fixer-upper in 2004.



“The house had to **suit our family** and be **inviting to guests**. It had to be **durable**, a place that could stand up to wet bathing suits, **muddy feet**, and guests who **spill red wine**.”

based in New York at the time. She convinced them a gut renovation was the way to go. The collaboration came naturally. “Stacey is my best friend—and she also happens to be aesthetically astute,” says Combe. The admiration is mutual. “Rachael has a good eye; she knows her likes and dislikes,” says Storm.

They reconfigured rooms and added 1,200 square feet of living space, including a modern, family-size kitchen. They brightened every dark corner. “It had such untapped potential,” says Storm. “The Connecticut countryside demanded large openings directed toward the view of the trees and sky. The land was amazing.” New fenestration throughout enhanced the views and reinforced the home’s link to the outdoors. They simplified the interiors in part by painting all of the walls, as well as a wood-paneled ceiling, white. “There’s a brick fireplace. Not really great, not





“My husband spent part of his childhood in North Africa, and his love of Moorish and Moroccan design informed a lot of Robin’s and Stacey’s choices,” Combe says.

the job. “It was a good canvas, and Robin is pretty great. She can work with both of our sensibilities,” Storm says.

The client’s charge to the designer: “The house had to suit our family and be inviting to guests. It had to be durable, a place that could stand up to wet bathing suits, muddy feet, and guests who spill red wine.”

Henry got it. “They had made the house livable,” she says, “and now it had to be family-friendly, with pretty, practical fabrics—and it absolutely had to be

magical,” says Storm, “so we painted it white, too, and now it’s a perfect backdrop.”

The renovation was completed in 2007. While it served its purpose as a getaway for the growing family (the couple now has four children), the home remained sparsely furnished and largely undecorated for more than five years. In 2010 Combe and Knauss moved their primary residence from Manhattan to Westchester (“more space, better schools”) and commissioned Robin Henry of Robin Henry Studio in New York City to design the interiors of their new home. Soon after, Combe turned her attention to Connecticut. “Once we finished Larchmont,” she remembers, “I thought ‘Oh, but now Sharon is so sad.’”

Storm agreed it was “time to polish the edges. Rachael has a look that is very her and very them.” It was time to let it shine through.

She also agreed that Henry was the designer for

colorful. Rachael is very sophisticated about color.”

The project swirled around a few quality pieces the couple owned, including an antique Hepplewhite sofa and a collection of gorgeous Moroccan rugs. “My husband spent part of his childhood in North Africa, and his love of Moorish and Moroccan design informed a lot of Robin’s and Stacey’s choices,” Combe says.

As the design plan came together, Henry proposed painting the floors in the open living and dining room area. As a practical matter, it would help define the space, and because it’s a high-traffic area, it just made more sense than placing area rugs all around.

Her inspiration for the floor-as-canvas came from the lush cutouts of Henry Matisse. “I wanted to use sunrise colors and scatter shapes all over the floor,” she says. When she took the idea to her clients, they laughed. “I guess I thought it was nuts,” says Combe, “but I trusted her.” Henry called in decorative painter



The master suite reflects the homeowners’ love of color, texture, and Moorish design. The headboard is custom-designed by Robin Henry and upholstered in a wool felt from Holland & Sherry. The chest at the foot of the bed is a family heirloom. **FACING PAGE:** The master bath is simple and elegant, a vision in white.



LEFT: "Mix it up and let color rule" is the mantra in all of the bedrooms, including a children's bedroom that sports blue-striped walls and mismatched bed linens. BELOW: A bathroom was designed for easy care and timeless good looks. FACING PAGE: A William Morris paper creates a traditional backdrop in the nursery, while one of the homeowners' many Moroccan rugs adds a bold, bright accent.

"The nice thing about a second home is you don't fret quite as much about everything 'going together.'"

Jay C. Lohmann of New York City and Milan. She showed him Matisse and he crafted the layout and pattern for the floor. It was a bold move—but a good one, says Combe. "It's lovely when the sun comes in through the windows. It feels as though a door to the yard was left open, and leaves blew in. I love that."

Color is a constant in both subtle and not-so-subtle ways. The Hepplewhite is covered in electric-blue felt. A red chandelier takes center stage in the dining area. Henry played with mixed materials and patterns throughout, choosing silhouettes that echo the colorful curves on the painted floor.

The walls in a quirky bedroom are papered in blue stripes; the bedcoverings are mismatched, and a bright red Moroccan rug knits it all together. In the master suite, a custom headboard with arabesque notes, a colorful coverlet, and pillows evoke that Moorish vibe. A baby's room features red-and-navy patterned William Morris wallpaper and another

bright rug underfoot. "It all works," says Combe. "The nice thing about a second home is you don't fret quite as much about everything 'going together' . . . it's fun to have something different and cheerful."

To her mind, busy is good. "Sometimes when I see a home in a magazine that's all neutral and calm, with everything in its place, I think it would be nice to have that, but I don't think I ever will," she says. "I do like a casual home—that's why the painted floor works. It's okay to have things around, including toys on the floor, and yet it doesn't feel like clutter; it's actually more conducive to using the space."

This colorful home makes the perfect place for the family to chill out on weekends. "We love it here," says Combe. "You can just feel the temperature go down when we arrive—on all of us."

RESOURCES For more information about this home, see page 138.