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ISSUE

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# House Beautiful

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THE SECRET TO TURNING  
A SPEC HOUSE INTO A  
FAMILY HOME? SOFT HUES,  
INVITING SPACES, AND  
WELL-CHOSEN ANTIQUES

# WARMING TREND

*Interior design by* JOAN OSOFSKY & DANA SIMPSON *Interview by* BARBARA KING *Photographs by* MICK HALES

A Lakeville, Connecticut, house was given a contemporary country style by a team from Hammertown, a trio of design stores in the Northeast. Four swivel chairs from Lee Industries—slipcovered in a Covington Fabric & Design linen and topped with sheepskin pelts—offer a cozy gathering place in the family room. Antler candelabras from At Home in the Country flank a painting by Karen LeSage. Bryant chandelier by Thomas O'Brien for Visual Comfort. Pottery Barn rug.

**OPPOSITE:** Flowers are an easy way to introduce temporary color in a neutral room.







**LEFT:** Soft tones and natural textures convey a calming simplicity in the living room, which visually connects to the family room through open doorways along the center hall of the house. Designer Dana Simpson chose identical sisal rugs from Pottery Barn for each space to establish a harmonious flow. Rebecca chairs from Mitchell Gold + Bob Williams, upholstered in linen, face a Lee Industries sofa in Patton linen. The wood-and-metal coffee table from BoBo Intriguing Objects lends both earthiness and airiness to the room, and the red étagère, a flea-market find, adds interest to a corner. Walls and trim painted Benjamin Moore Aura in China White. Painting by Karen LeSage.



**BARBARA KING:** The tagline for Hammertown, your trio of lifestyle stores, is 'Love where you live.' It's also the title of your new book on stylish country homes. And the mantra, no doubt, for this Connecticut house.

**JOAN OSOFSKY:** That's the guiding force for all my design decisions. One thing I've learned from my stores is that if I don't connect with an object or a piece of furniture, I shouldn't buy it. If I do, I should. People will come in and say, 'Oh, I could live here.' They feel the love! The homes I really respond to are lived in and loved. They have personality, they have heart and soul. I can picture the occupants sitting in armchairs reading the paper, having drinks in the living room, cooking in the kitchen.

**And yet these clients brought next to nothing to their house.**

No furniture at all, just a couple of beautiful rugs that belonged to her grandmother and some art. They're a young couple with two toddlers, and this was their first real home. It was smart of them to realize they needed help developing their style. My daughter, Dana Simpson, who is my marketing director, was actually the lead designer, although neither of us is a professional interior designer. We collaborated with two other absolutely indispensable women: Wanda Furman, a stylist who works with us at Hammertown, and Camilla Mathlein, a space planner.

**DANA SIMPSON:** And, of course, we worked closely with our clients. We spent a lot of time antiquing to find statement pieces that spoke to them, to give the rooms a depth and character that would make their home feel settled. They chose the art, and they were clear from the start that they wanted a neutral backdrop interspersed with dashes of color and lively global textiles.

**How many houses has the Hammertown team worked on together?**

**DS:** This was our first big project. We've done smaller jobs that involved restyling a room or two, rearranging furniture, painting the walls, just editing the space. But this was a



whole empty house where we had to start from scratch.

**Most surprisingly, it's a new spec house. Who would have guessed?**

**DS:** And yet it was possible to imagine it as an old house, because the builder used a lot of vintage materials.

**JO:** The clients did make revisions that probably changed about 40 percent of the architectural features.

**That's pretty radical.**

**DS:** It was a traditional, Georgian-style house that we modernized by taking down some walls to make rooms bigger and by enlarging windows to expose more of the surrounding landscape, the lush greenery and hills. The great room, or family room, was actually once three very separate spaces—a dining room, a library, and a butler's pantry.

**And now they're all merged?**

**DS:** In a sense. The idea was to create a large, family-friendly room that serves many functions. The cozy seating area just off the kitchen has four swivel chairs that can be turned toward the fireplace, the coffee table,

**ABOVE:** Dark-bronze hardware and lighting fixtures add patina to the gleaming white kitchen. Boston pendant lights from Visual Comfort.

**OPPOSITE:** An elm table from Hammertown gives an instant sense of warmth to the breakfast area. Eldridge chandelier from Ballard Designs. Walls painted Benjamin Moore Aura in Edgecomb Gray set off the white cabinetry and dishware.

or the TV. Because there's no longer a formal dining room, we set up a table in a corner that is normally used like a library table, but can be pulled into the room and extended for holidays or special occasions. We replaced a fireplace that was on the wall behind the pair of yellow chairs with a bank of French doors and windows. Upstairs, we removed an entry wall in the guest room that prevented us from putting a large bed in there.

**Any other major changes?**

**DS:** We added French doors in the master bedroom, again to take advantage of the views. We also made simple changes in the kitchen that had a big impact. It was so loaded down with chrome hardware, and all that shiny silver against the white gave it a clinical, almost hospital-like feeling. We replaced the pulls and hinges and lighting fixtures with dark, oil-rubbed bronze elements, which instantly imparted depth without altering the space's polished, modern feeling. To add character to the breakfast area, we put in an elm table. Every room needs a character piece to instill a sense of history and place. You can't do that if everything is brand new, even if it's made to look old.

**This mix of modern and country is very much in keeping with the Hammertown style, isn't it?**

**JO:** 'Modern country' is exactly how we describe our style. It's a clean, relaxed aesthetic that works equally well in new houses, old houses, charming cottages, or airy, minimalist rooms.

**Can any home be imbued with heart and soul?**

**JO:** Any home, if it reflects your passions, the authentic you—if you bring to it the spirit of what makes you happy. After my divorce, I went from a big Greek Revival house to a small contemporary farmhouse, and it showed me that if you surround yourself with things that have meaning, it doesn't matter where you live.

**After all is said and done, what's the best thing about this house?**

**JO:** The family loves where they live.

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1. A weathered old table from Michael Trapp anchors a wall in the central hall. Walls, Farrow & Ball Modern Emulsion in Pavilion Gray. 2. Kuba-cloth pillows personalize Mitchell Gold + Bob Williams Marlina chairs in the family room. 3. A panel by Natural Curiosities creates a focal point in the master bath. Bench, Cisco Brothers. 4. On the screened porch, a Currey & Company driftwood chandelier hangs above a vintage French tray table. Indonesian chairs from Michael Trapp. Restoration Hardware rug. 5. A local craftsman made the Shaker-style bed in the guest room. 6. Red chairs and a kilim pouf, all vintage, punch up the living room. **OPPOSITE:** Subtle grays are layered in the master bedroom. French Wing bed and Louis bench, Restoration Hardware. Matteo quilt. Tree of Life panel by Natural Curiosities. Pottery Barn lamp. FOR MORE DETAILS, SEE RESOURCES



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