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Katie Buck in her
home office



coming HOME

Moving into her parents' old house prompts a major renovation and the launch of a new career for one Arlington Ridge resident.

BY KIM O'CONNELL | PHOTOS BY SEAN KELLEY

■ coming home

“**M**y parents were collectors,” Katie Buck says, pulling a rare children’s book, illustrated by Maurice Sendak, out of a built-in bookcase in her Arlington Ridge home. The book, she explains, was acquired by her mother, the late Karen Delligatti, through a rare-books distributor.

Not far away sits a stack of Hemingways prized by her father, the late Maj. Gen. Robert Delligatti. At one point, her parents had some 2,500 volumes, she says, though books weren’t their only passion. They also collected furniture—including a Biedermeier desk and a large French armoire—as well as numerous Oriental rugs, decorative boxes and works of art during their travels around the globe with her father’s storied Air Force career, which culminated with his service as Chief of Staff for the USAF’s Europe operations at Ramstein Air Force Base in Germany.

When Katie inherited the house after her father’s death in 2006 (her mother had passed away four years earlier), it felt only natural to keep some of these reminders of her parents close at hand. After all, she and her husband, Tom—longtime collectors themselves—had always appreciated her parents’ discerning eye.

At the same time, the couple had an equally strong desire for a fresh start. They had been living in Charlotte, N.C., when the financial collapse of 2008 led to Katie’s forced early retirement from an executive position with Bank of America. (Tom is a regional sales director for Adtech Global.) Married since 1989, they had been thinking about “coming home” to Arlington anyway. Now that the house was theirs, life



seemed to be handing them an opportunity they couldn’t ignore. It was one that would also lead Katie down a new, but not totally unexpected, career path.

DURING MY VISIT on a late spring day, the kitchen smells of the spinach quiche Katie is baking for a friend. “Here,” she says, handing me the recipe. “It’s easy.” In this stocked and expansive kitchen, marked by Thermador appliances and pendant lights covered in raw silk, I think almost any recipe would feel easy and fun to make.

Built in 1961, the house was originally a three-bedroom, 2,900-square-foot split-foyer. In the 1980s, before the Fashion Centre at Pentagon City or many of the neighborhood’s high-rises were completed, it offered uninterrupted views of the Washington Mon-

ument from its perch atop “the Ridge.”

Though Katie never lived there full-time—she was in college at George Mason University’s School of Business Administration when her parents bought the house in ’83—she had spent many holidays in Arlington. In the years that followed, she would stay with her folks whenever she was in the D.C. area on business. It felt like home.

Even so, the Bucks knew that the house would require a major renovation to truly make it theirs. They wanted more room for entertaining (friends often come over to watch football games, cook out, or play Bunco) as well as cozy spaces where they could read and watch TV with their two cats, a Maine Coon named Prince Albert and an Abyssinian named Betty.

Working with Arlington-based Troutman Homes, the couple in 2009



In the living room (above), remodeler Dan Troutman added a floor-to-ceiling stone fireplace, complete with a rugged mantel crafted from reclaimed wood. Divided-light transom windows over each room opening lend character to the interiors.



Troutman's addition of a front vestibule and exterior archway allowed for a bump-out in the living room, which now serves as a reading nook. Although the Bucks consigned most of Katie's parents' books, they kept some volumes and now have their own collection.



The "keeping room" is appointed with a finely patterned sofa and loveseat. "I really like the idea of using a small pattern because it hides a world of sins," Katie says. "A lot of people are scared of pattern, but when it's a small pattern, it becomes neutral." Japanese paper scrolls flank either side of an arched picture window.

added a new second story and completely overhauled the main level. But they were careful to avoid renovating in a way that simply affixed a clunky addition to the original house.

Outside, principal Dan Troutman unified the home's two levels by crafting a completely new facade with a dipping Tudor-style roofline, which keeps the now-4,500-square-foot residence unimposing and approachable.

"We didn't want a box on top of a box," Troutman says.

A front archway creates a lovely covered vestibule that shelters people as they enter the house, using a familiar material palette. Whereas the original house was clad in brick and siding, the new exterior features a combination of brick, HardiePlank siding and stone.

Inside, the home is filled with treasures that hold special meaning to its owners. Take the pair of Japanese obis framing one corner of the dining room: One of them was purchased by Katie's grandfather during World War II; she and Tom found the other one themselves.

The dining room is also home to Katie's father's favorite painting of washerwomen in a creek—an Impressionist work from the late 1800s. (Watching her gaze at it, it's clear that it's one of her favorites too.)

"Even when I was a child, gifts were little collectibles," she says. "Then, as a young married couple, Tom and I started collecting right away. If you invest wisely and buy a little at a time, over the years, you can create a nice collection."

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Each room, it seems, is a study in eclecticism. In the living room, a side table holds a bronze abstract figurine and a sculpture made of alabaster. Above them on the wall, a trio of paintings is complemented by an intricate piece of carved wood that acts as a crown for the display—a decorating tip Katie says she learned from her mother.

Some artistic vignettes aren't in the places you'd expect. A narrow wall off the kitchen, for example, holds a decorative assemblage of mirrors, trays and other three-dimensional objects collected by both Katie and her mother over the years. And a window sill in the wet bar finds a Buddha head opposite a wire peacock dating to the mid-20th century that Katie found in an antique shop in Norfolk. No space is too small or utilitarian for art, says Katie, who believes in mixing high-end pieces with more affordable ones.

When friends and visitors began stopping by after the renovation and complimenting her on her decorating flair (and asking for advice), Katie realized that the end of her banking career wasn't such a bad thing after all.

As that proverbial door closed, another one opened.

STANDING IN THE office of 1225 Designs, the home-based interior design business that Katie launched in 2010, it's difficult not to touch things. A long magnetic board on one wall is covered in swatches of fabric and wallpaper, while a colorful curio box tacked to another wall—something she picked up while antiquing with her sister in Culpeper—is filled with paint chips. Two glass desks from Pottery Barn are pushed together in the center of the space, along with a pair of Palceek chairs.

Though her office is in the basement, its south-facing windows make it unexpectedly bright and cheerful. On the walls—which are painted in a smoky purple shade of C2 paint called Bella Donna—I spot a set of botani-

The open kitchen, created by combining two secondary bedrooms on the main floor, is anchored by an island topped with a nearly six-ton, 10.5-by-5.5-foot piece of Coast Green granite. That same color is picked up on the walls of the kitchen and the adjacent family room (Katie calls it the "keeping room" in the Southern tradition), which are painted in Benjamin Moore Fieldstone.



Upstairs, a large master suite opens to a master bath outfitted with a claw-foot tub, an antique French plant stand, Cosmos granite countertops and Graff plumbing fixtures.



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Decorative molding lends a sense of formality to the dining room, although not all of the room's fixtures and furnishings are traditional. The Bucks opted to keep the '70s-era chandelier that had been there since Katie's parents owned the house.

cal line drawings. Katie explains that her mom clipped them from a coffee-table book years ago. She recently resurrected them and had them framed.

The basement also doubles as a recreation room, with a comfortable IKEA couch and a snazzy silver table by Currey & Company. A working turntable sits alongside an impressive collection—yes, another collection—of vinyl records and CDs (the latter are quickly becoming relics, too, the designer says with a laugh).

Today, she keeps plenty busy, serving a range of clients who hire her to mastermind a whole-house redesign, or perhaps just to make over a single room. Mary Morrison Alberg, an Arlington neighbor and recent client, describes the spaces Katie designed for her new house—including a pink-and-orange nursery—as “elegant, comfortable, bright, kid-friendly and timeless.”

“I’m in heaven,” says Katie, an active member of the Aurora Hills

Women’s Club, who is just wrapping up a stint as president of the Arlington Ridge Civic Association. “It’s a job, but I get to be creative by playing with color and fabrics, while helping my clients achieve their goals.”

This September, she and Tom will celebrate their 25th wedding anniversary, surrounded by keepsakes of times gone by and the enduring pleasures of art and books and color.

In their next chapter, they’ll make many new memories in a spacious and comfortable home that is now thoroughly their own. ■

Kim O’Connell has written about design, history, parenting and other topics for The New York Times, Ladies’ Home Journal, Architect, Preservation and other publications. As a resident of Aurora Highlands, she has walked up the hill to Arlington Ridge Road many times and enjoyed the view of downtown D.C.