

New House, Old Soul

Lee Ann Thornton gives a Connecticut ranch house the romantic treatment, with architectural details and charming florals that exude timeless character—and comfort, too.

Designer Lee Ann Thornton painted the window mullions black and the frames white in a Greenwich, Connecticut, sunroom; the effect lends definition to the soft palette of pale French and peacock blues. The sofa is covered in the same Peter Fasano fabric as the walls. Laguna bobbin chairs, Motif Designs. Chandelier, Paul Ferrante.

Interior Design LEE ANN THORNTON Interview CELIA BARBOUR
Photography FRANCESCO LAGNESE Producer DORETTA SPERDUTO



WHAT FEELS FRESH

Curveball Colors

The fastest way to make sure classic blue and white doesn't skew too sweet: Throw in an unexpected hue, like aubergine or apple green, for a palette that's a sure home run.



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Every decorating project has its challenges, but it sounds as if this house offered little else at the outset.

LEE ANN THORNTON: It was a plain-Jane ranch with low ceilings, small rooms, an unusual flow, and a lot of drywall. To bring in charm and a sense of history, I grabbed ceiling height wherever I could, added architectural texture—shiplap paneling, coffered ceilings, molding—then layered in decor with an easy, romantic spirit.

CELIA BARBOUR: What's your first step in reimagining lackluster spaces?

When I look at a room, I envision its purpose: What will draw you into this room as opposed to another? You have to have a reason to spend time in it.

OK, walk me through an example.

The sunroom had an eight-foot ceiling, two chairs, and a little table. But my clients like to hang out with their friends, and they love snuggling with their kids on Saturday mornings. The first thing I did was build a gargantuan sofa—I took up every inch of space I could. Then, because I wanted people to be able to move around easily, I used two small coffee tables instead of one large one.

Explain the ways you use color to ground a room.

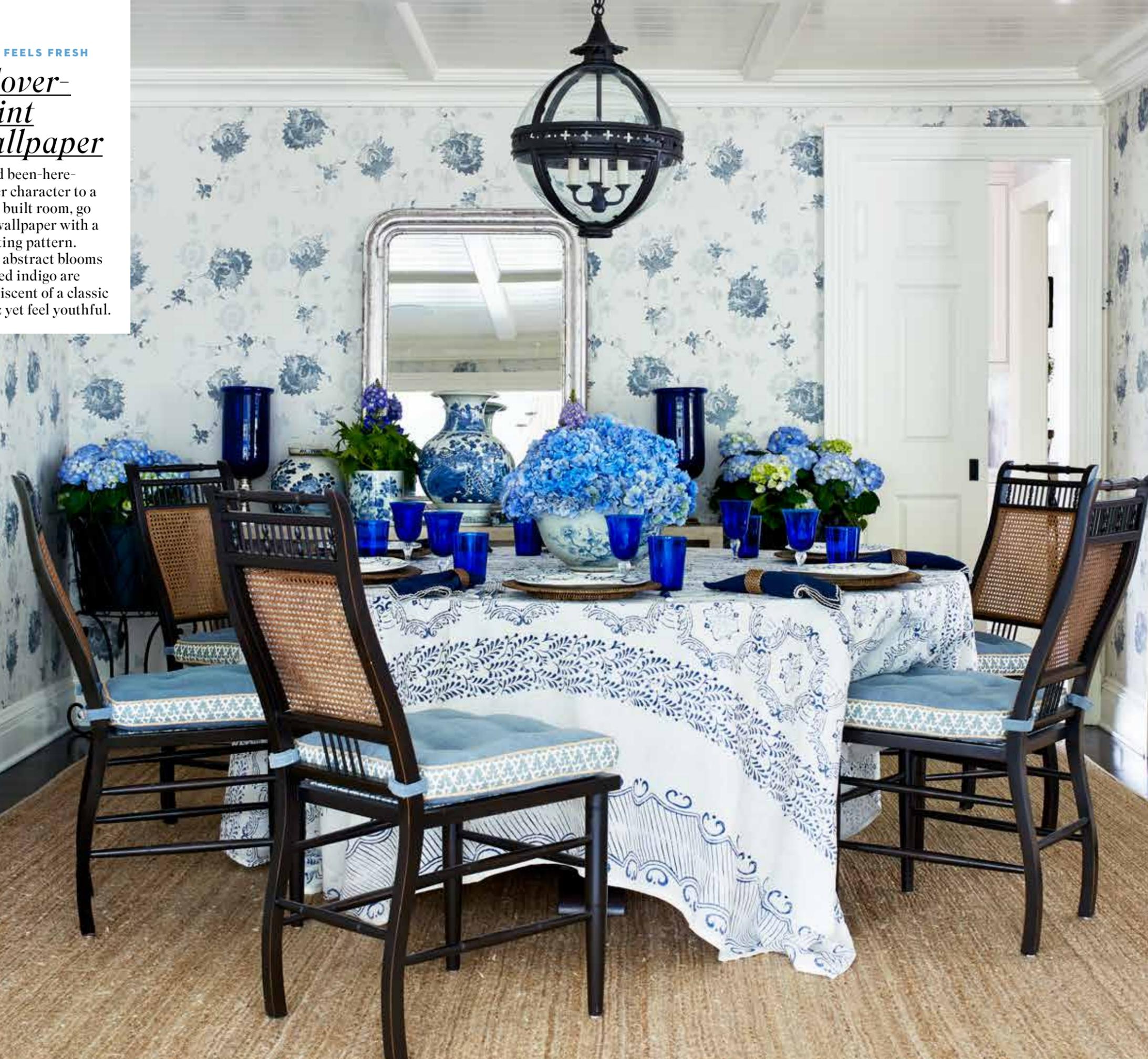
The pale blue fabric on both the sofa and the walls is inviting, but on its own, it might have made the sunroom feel like it could float away. To anchor it, I painted the window sashes black. I love how black adds crispness and clarity to a room; it works like a picture frame to define the overall composition. For contrast, I left the casings white and added sheer café curtains to soften the edges. I also punched up the color palette with peacock-blue accents on the throw pillows, the blanket, and the sconces.

ABOVE: In the living room, tufted Lee Industries chairs flank a chinoiserie coffee table with a caned top covered in glass. Thornton painted the sofa legs white—"one of those custom decisions with quiet impact." The coffered ceiling and built-in cabinetry bring dimension and intimacy to the small, low-ceilinged space. **OPPOSITE:** Indigo grass-cloth wallpaper by Phillip Jeffries sets a sophisticated tone. The ticking-stripe ottoman and card table wrapped in a Fortuny print are from Lee Ann Thornton Interiors Home Collection. Dutch doors open to reveal a bar.

WHAT FEELS FRESH

Allover- Print Wallpaper

To add been-here-forever character to a newly built room, go for a wallpaper with a repeating pattern. These abstract blooms in faded indigo are reminiscent of a classic chintz yet feel youthful.



From indigo to cobalt, blue suffuses the dining room with romantic charm. Because the “free-floating” space is visible from other rooms, Thornton paid special attention to its vibe, opting for an abstract floral wallpaper by TylerGraphic. A black metal chandelier by Paul Ferrante plays off the ebonized wood of the custom caned chairs, which have cushions in a Quadrille fabric with raffia trim. The tablecloth is by Zsuzsanna Nyul. Rug, Merida.



How do you make a familiar scheme like blue and white feel new?

Listen, I didn't invent blue and white, but I love it, whether it has a beachy New England feeling or one that conveys old-world elegance. To update it, I combine unusual shades and patterns and tweak the contrast colors. I used a rich raspberry paisley in the family room on the sofa and added blue cushions and a periwinkle wool carpet that looks as cozy as a cable-knit sweater. In the living room, I started with indigo wallpaper, then added Granny Smith green—it's so good—and aubergine.

Those curtains also add a hit of vivid pattern.

Remember, this house had small rooms and an unusual flow. I wanted to put pattern where it felt manageable—a splash here and there, to quietly draw attention. So those ikat panels frame the seating area, and everything else is soft and muted: the ticking on the ottoman, the Fortuny print on the games table, the jacquard on the sofa.

You use pattern as an energy modulator?

Exactly! Take the dining room: It's stuck between the living room and sunroom. I used an abstract floral wallpaper in muted indigo and followed that blue-and-white theme down the line. That little printed tape on the sides of the seat cushions is really lovely, boxed in by raffia welting with a soft chambray top. Together, they make the room feel incredibly lyrical and soulful.

As in the sunroom, you chose furniture that would fully occupy the space.

The perfectly square room seemed like the right spot for a perfectly round table. There are elements of black in every room, from the black metal sconces to ebonized floors. I love the combination of precious with rustic: dressy fabrics and antiques paired with apple matting or baskets. It makes a huge statement.

Well, it might be huge, but it feels just right for these intimate rooms.

They definitely felt small to begin with. But, without changing their footprint at all, we transformed this into a bright, happy, inviting house.

BELOW, FROM LEFT: The entry introduces several of the home's motifs: muted prints (the Rose Tarlow Melrose House wallpaper), hits of black (the metal sconces and mirror frame), and the mixing of rustic and refined (rush seat backs with seats in a Schumacher linen-cotton). "Blue and white is my go-to," says Thornton, dressed here to match. **OPPOSITE:** The family room is "the relaxed room of the house." Thornton added woodwork to the walls and ceiling for character.



TOP, FROM LEFT: Raising the ceiling of the master bedroom “changed everything,” Thornton says—the walls are papered in a strié Phillip Jeffries grass cloth; the bed is dressed in John Robshaw linens and “looks like it could be at a lake house”; chandelier, Paul Marra. The daughter “did not want a pink room,” says Thornton, who instead mixed up a palette of seafoam, turquoise, and lavender; “If I can get a sofa”—like this one by Lee Industries in a Quadrille fabric—



“into a child’s room, I do it,” she says, adding that it encourages family time; curtains in a Romo fabric with pom-pom trim.



CENTER, FROM LEFT: The family’s Cavapoo dog cozies up between lovebird-patterned pillows by Roberta Roller Rabbit. Checks and stripes give decorative momentum to the twin boys’ bedroom, where Serena & Lily bedding squares off against upholstery from John Robshaw Textiles.



BOTTOM, FROM LEFT: In the boys’ room, the flat-weave carpet by Turabian & Sariyan provides a perfect surface for playing—quietly—with toy race cars or building blocks; the pouf is by Serena & Lily, the wall lights are by Circa Lighting, and the wallpaper is by Quadrille. Horizontal shiplap walls and rustic metal hardware lend the master bath a tidy, efficient feeling; the faux-driftwood floor, laid in a chevron pattern, is easy-to-care-for porcelain tile by Greenwich Tile & Marble; pendant, Thomas O’Brien for Visual Comfort; walls in Benjamin Moore’s White Dove.



Thornton designed the daughter’s bedroom “to take her through her teenage years.” The Quadrille upholstery on the Lee Ann Thornton Interiors Home Collection bed feels at once magical and elegant. Bedding, Serena & Lily. The wobbly-zigzag wallpaper—also by Quadrille—plays nicely with the bulbous Barbara Cosgrove lamp. Bone-inlay bedside table, Roberta Roller Rabbit. FOR MORE DETAILS, SEE RESOURCES