



# Eternally Graceful

Casual and comfortable for the children, chic and sophisticated for the grownups, a young family's first house is designed to suit them for a lifetime.

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ARCHITECTURE: JOHN CURRIE • INTERIOR DESIGN: LAUREN MUSE •  
BUILDER: TIM GILSON • PRODUCED BY STACY KUNSTEL

**C**ity living had been fine for the young couple when they were college students, then newlyweds and new parents. But as their elder son approached kindergarten age and they made plans to enlarge the family (baby number three, a daughter, is on the way), the suburbs beckoned. "We wanted a fresh start," the wife says. "We wanted a community where our kids could go to school for the long term, where we'd have friends and family around." • They settled on the village of Old Greenwich and quickly found a house they both loved—a not-quite-finished gambrel-roofed, shingle-clad shore colonial

Texture plays a large role in the living room, where walls are treated to a glossy chocolate-brown lacquer, chairs and sofa wear cushy fabrics and the rug is woven in a high-low geometric in wool and linen.





that, for all its newness, looks like it was built during the beach community's early twentieth-century heyday.

Designed by local architect John Currie and constructed by local builder Tim Gilson, the three-story house displays the high quality one would expect in a custom home, from the attractive moldings to the family room's coffered ceilings to the arched details above the kitchen cabinets. "We both loved it," the wife says. "We thought the bones seemed really solid."

As traditional as the house looks from the outside, Currie's interior floor plan follows the more contemporary fashion of letting public spaces open to one another. "We wanted to set a relaxed tone," the architect explains. "Old Greenwich is beachside, so we were shooting for something elegant, yet informal, a place more conducive to walking around in your bare feet."

To that end, the first floor holds smallish living and dining rooms for formal entertaining, while the kitchen, casual dining area and family room form an airy space ending in French



doors that open to the backyard. "I really like the layout," the wife says. "It's nice to be cooking and still keep an eye on the kids playing in the family room or in the yard."

While the house was in construction, Greenwich-based designer Lauren Muse lent her expertise, suggesting finishes and wall colors. The new homeowners liked what Muse had done, so they enlisted her to finish the job for them. "They wanted to start fresh, so they brought very little with them from their city apartment," Muse says. "They were very open and really let me run with it."

Muse probed her clients' likes and dislikes and discovered that they tended to prefer solids to patterns and favored neutral tones and blues. She also found that, though the two generally share similar tastes, they had slightly different priorities. "I like things to look very nice and maybe a little bit



In a nod to the nearby beachfront, the family room sports shades of blue from sky to turquoise against a background of sand shades. *Facing page clockwise from top left:* Traditional and casual come together in the wide entry hall. The homeowners love the shore gambrel for its "good bones." Family room accessories add some playful pattern to the solid backdrop.



A distressed trestle table and a wipe-clean banquette make the breakfast area child-friendly. *Right:* Clean and classic defines the kitchen. *Below:* Textured linen chairs and a black lacquered table are a sophisticated mix in the dining room.



contemporary,” the husband says. “My wife likes extreme comfort and livability.”

Like Currie’s “elegant yet informal” architectural plan, Muse designed an interior that meets the husband’s desire for sophistication and the wife’s wish for a comfortable, family-friendly environment.

The foyer sets a classic tone with its herringbone-patterned floor and its wainscoting topped with wide-striped wallpaper in pale neutrals. “I had a vision of what I think an entrance should look like,” the husband says. “I wanted it to be fairly classic, and I think Lauren got that right.” A bleached oak console with horn pulls, designed by Muse, and a contemporary sunburst mirror add a casual note to the traditional entry.



In the formal living and dining rooms, Muse indulged the husband's preference for elegance. One wonderful element often triggers the design of a room, she says. "Something inspires me, whether it's a piece of fabric or a carpet, and that starts the ball rolling." In the living room, that inspiration took the form of the drapery fabric, a neutral linen with cocoa-colored embroidery. The stitching inspired the wall treatment—a rich, glossy lacquer applied layer by painstaking layer by New York artisan Roman Kujawa—which looks, Muse says, "like a melted Hershey's candy bar." The room's overall effect is one of utter luxury thanks to those gleaming walls and Muse's introduction of texture in the sofa and chair fabrics, chenille toss pillows covered

"Old Greenwich is beachside, so we wanted to set a relaxed tone."



with openwork netting and a stunning wool and linen rug with a subtle geometric pattern in shades of brown, beige and the palest blue.

In the formal dining room, Muse began with a wallpaper that depicts willow-like branches in ivories and light gold. Mindful of her clients' leaning toward solids, Muse eschewed pattern in the rest of the room, opting for ivory linen drapes, an almost-black table and white chairs. Again, textures provide the interest: the lacquered table, the linen chair backs (the fronts are brushed velvet) and the smooth Lucite chandelier. A pair of purple-and-yellow cloisonné jars on the dining table adds energy to the quiet color scheme.

The large family room offers all the comfort the wife sought without sacrificing style. "It's largely neutral, too," notes Muse, "but it's a bit brighter, a bit more youthful." Twin sofas in a striped chenille face off across an ivory-colored lacquered coffee table with an inset grasscloth center. Pale blue recesses in the coffered ceiling and accessories in several shades of blue—a nod to the home's waterfront location—

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brighten the neutral backdrop. And, once more, textures—a grasscloth wallcovering and a geometric-patterned rug in a high-low weave—bring depth to the space.

The kitchen is clean, classic and all-white, from the marble countertops to the Christopher Peacock-inspired cabinetry to the Ann Sacks mother-of-pearl tile on the backsplash. A child-friendly breakfast area sports a distressed trestle table and a banquette covered in a treated fabric that cleans up with the swipe of a damp sponge.

"I want to design houses that are beautiful and modern and today but also very functional," Muse says. "This house balances the two, and it functions very well for them as a family."

When they began the process, the wife says, "I was very focused on making it a great house for our family. My husband was thinking this would be our house forever, so let's make it amazing."

In the end, the homeowners agree, they both got exactly what they wanted. •

**Resources** For more information about this home, see page 112.

Traditional and modern mix in the master bedroom, where a Lucite-legged bench keeps company with aged, silvered nightstands. *Facing page top:* A custom bench in the vestibule gives a preview of the tranquil master suite. *Facing page bottom:* The wide-striped wallpaper from the foyer reappears on the stairway to the second floor.

