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AT LAST

AFTER YEARS OF GLOBETROTTING, A CONSERVATIONIST
COUPLE FEATHERS A NEST IN CONNECTICUT.

WRITTEN BY KATE ABNEY / PHOTOGRAPHY BY TIM LENZ



ARCHITECTURE / JACOB ALBERT AND
CRAIG GIBSON, ALBERT, RIGHTER
AND TITTMANN ARCHITECTS
INTERIOR DESIGN / HEIDE HENDRICKS,
HENDRICKS CHURCHILL
HOME BUILDER / RUSS ALLIK, PJT INC

In the entryway of this recently renovated Weston, Connecticut, abode, designer Heide Hendricks placed a Caucasian rug from her firm's showroom, Reservoir, to extend a warm welcome. In concert with an octagonal mirror from RT Facts Design & Antiques and Circa Lighting fixtures, the clients' own Heritage-Henredon walnut chest and collection of walking sticks underscore the home's Americana mood.



Not 60 miles from Manhattan, Weston, Connecticut, remains a bastion of colonial New England, retaining both its romanticized rural qualities and strong sense of community. That's largely what drew homeowners David and Kat McConnaughey to its winding roads, softly rolling hills, thick stands of trees and ultimately, to a 1928 cottage poised on a pristine riverbank. Former New York City dwellers who have traversed global points near and far, the couple found themselves uncharacteristically besotted with the setting, which they considered a naturalist's dream. "We loved the idea of meditating by the river, watching the sunset and the wildlife go to sleep," says Kat.

With such beautiful surroundings, the couple's designer, Heide Hendricks, was tasked with enhancing, not upstaging them. "I was instructed not to block any windows," reveals Hendricks, whose mandate was to create cozy, serene and textured spaces that would pay tribute to the rich tapestry of her clients' lives. Kat, a native Texan and a former flight attendant, "had the most amazing stories about traveling the world," Hendricks notes. "She wanted to create a home that was finally representative of not only her own life, but her life with David." Known for lived-in interiors with a narrative quality, Hendricks was delighted to inventory the McConnaugheys most cherished items and give them pride of place at last.

The den's chambray sectional by RH joins a vintage Hans Wegner rocker and a pair of Blu Dot Hecks ottomans to form a cozy seating spot for reading or watching TV. Presiding over built-ins by architect Jacob Albert, a print by Bryan Nash Gill creates a compelling sight line between Thomas O'Brien's Reed sconces for Circa Lighting. The high-gloss ceiling (Farrow & Ball's Cornforth White) was meant to mimic the watery surrounds.



In the sun room, a Lillian August settee, paired with pillows in Morris & Co., Jim Thompson and Kirsten Hecktermann textiles, sides up to a jaunty coffee table ottoman from Hammertown Barn Country Store in Pine Plains. Between a pair of petite RH club chairs rests a set of kidney-shaped midcentury walnut nesting tables from 1stdibs. Bamboo blinds by Rita König for Joss Graham filter sunlight without obscuring the view.

A few months before finding and falling in love with Hendricks' portfolio, the homeowners had tapped an architect they already knew and trusted, Jacob Albert of Boston, to renovate the residence. "The McConnaugheys wanted to enhance the way spaces related to each other. They hoped to maintain the charm that was already there, but to improve upon it," explains Albert, who collaborated with firm associate Craig Gibson on the project. That goal was met in large part by his decision to designate a proper central entrance to the exterior. "It made the way you move through the house fall logically into place," he notes. In the end, renovations touched every room, says Albert—though it doesn't appear that way. "Everything looks like it belongs."

Remaining far afield during the renovation was hardly an issue, partly because Kat had tracked down the precise general contractor who spearheaded the home's renovation for its previous owners. Already familiar with its bones, Russ Allik was able to execute Albert's concepts flawlessly. "Russ excelled so much at the details that we rarely needed to be on site," the architect notes.

By the time Hendricks arrived for the decorative layer, she had similarly earned the homeowners' confidence. "David and I have strong opinions, but we trusted Heide implicitly," reveals Kat. "At times, I asked her to take our requests out of the equation because I knew she understood us that much."

Between the kitchen and living room, Hendricks endeavored to “carve out a formal dining area within an open-concept space.” Here, vintage Hans Wegner chairs surround a cast-iron trestle table base topped with a live-edge walnut slab—a piece custom-fabricated by Get Back, Inc. Hendricks had the chandelier assembled from naturally shed elk antlers gathered by Montana Boy Scouts.



Since celebrating the outdoors was imperative, one of Hendricks’ first moves was to designate a window-clad corner of the sun room as a breakfast nook. “David liked to eat at the kitchen island, but it wasn’t very comfortable,” the designer notes. “I saw a great opportunity. Now, they have their coffee here every morning.” Another moment of ingenuity is seen on the basement level, where Albert had converted a former root cellar into a convivial bar accessed via Dutch door. There, Hendricks followed suit with a coat of red brick lacquer. With David less keen on a constant color jolt than Kat, Hendricks adds, “all they need to do is close it.”

Curios from the couple’s travels proved key here and throughout. “Having a cache of mementos was inspiring and quite useful,” says Hendricks, who achieved harmony by balancing the couple’s treasured keepsakes with fresh acquisitions touting unique or soulful qualities. “Nothing made the cut unless it had significance for Kat or David,” the designer assures.

Hendricks happily reconceived family heirlooms, too: a black hutch in the dining room, which once belonged to David’s mother, displays his inherited antique silver, along with Kat’s milk glass and ironstone. A 1950s pink patio set, also from David’s mother, was repainted white and installed beneath Albert’s elegant design for the back patio. And a bobbin bench in the mudroom is topped with pillows fashioned from remnants of her late mother’s jeans. Incorporating his collection of vintage duck decoys was a must for David, whom Hendricks describes as the consummate outdoorsman. Her expertise found these characterful objets d’art homes within Albert’s built-in bookshelves, where they now converse with tomes, natural artifacts and other nods to the couple’s passions.

“Jacob and Heide showed us how to live in and really captured the essence of what our experience at home should be,” Kat concludes. For the first time, “there’s nothing missing.”

Opposite the den is a stylish bar Albert converted from a former root cellar. “The bar needed to be special,” says Hendricks, who painted its beadboard walls and Dutch door interior with Bookroom Red by Farrow & Ball. An antique Biedermeier occasional table holds center court surrounded by antique Chinese chairs from Montage Antiques and a re-covered midcentury Jens Risom bench.

“The clients wanted a calm space,” explains the designer, who strayed from a predominantly white palette by painting the master bedroom walls Farrow & Ball’s Light Blue. The hue, “makes the room more interesting by framing the river outside,” she says. This sweet window nook features a Perennials fabric on the bench cushion paired with panels of Schumacher’s sheer Boboli embroidery for privacy.



Dressed in Rough Linen’s Orkney bedding, the clients’ master headboard wears a whimsical Morris & Co. textile for a folkloric focal point. Regina Andrew’s alabaster Despina lamp sits atop West Elm’s midcentury-inspired eucalyptus-wood Penelope nightstand. The blue walls take on a grayed cast in the shifting light of day.



Opposite: The 1928 residence sits proudly above the riverbank, surrounded by swaying ferns and other lush late-summer foliage—the result of passionate landscaping efforts by the homeowners, David and Kat McConaughy. Other recent updates include the addition of a pergola by Albert, a classic structure providing a touch of shelter for 1950s outdoor furnishings that David inherited from his mother and Hendricks had repainted.

Below: Placing a pair of Smith & Hawken sun loungers atop a grassy plot established a haven for soaking up the natural world. “The river curves around the house just enough; we get multi-angle views of all the colors and the vibrancy and the animals that pass through,” Kat reveals. Happily, “Heide understood that for us, it’s not just about living with and looking at nature but carrying that feeling into the house.”

