

color story

Inherited pieces fit in seamlessly in a refreshed Darien home.

by ANN KAISER photographs AMY VISCHIO





Over a ten-year career in design editorial, the owner of this home has gotten inside the heads of some of the best in the business. “I learned something from every designer I ever interviewed, from Mario Buatta to Amy Lau to Vicente Wolf,” she says, “but the one I learned the most from is Sandy.”

“Sandy” is otherwise known as interior designer Sandra Morgan, who worked with former *New York Times* reporter and founder of WriteNow Valerie Cruice and her husband, Jay, to incorporate the best of both the past and present into their home in Darien. The couple have lived there for over thirty years, and the interiors hadn’t been updated much since the homeowner decorated it with her interior designer mother around that time. “Floral chintz was on every window and chair—very Reagan-era,” laughs the homeowner. She’d been trying to redecorate for a while, collecting bags and bags of wallpaper and fabric samples, but as every design-minded pro knows, your own home is always the hardest. “I knew what I wanted, but I couldn’t execute it,” she says, but when she saw Sandra’s work in another magazine, “It resonated with me.” Sandra was familiar with her client’s work, too, and they worked out a partnership. “Once we started playing off each other, it was amazing,” says Valerie.

The two were on the same page right from the beginning, and the project proved to be a

It’s all about the details in the entryway, from the icy blue-painted ceiling to the stenciled floors. Mac, one of the couple’s three dogs, welcomes guests out front.

opposite: The vibrant living room is always in use. “You can see the life in it,” says Sandra.

Sandra introduced the homeowners to artist Penny Putnam, whose piece hangs above the living room sofa. The walls are painted a custom coral.



A Bungalow 5 bamboo chair from SM Home is a fun counterpart to the secretary the homeowners purchased at the Charlottesville Auction House during graduate school. Their tennis trophies fill the cabinet.



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—SANDRA MORGAN

great collaboration. “If she didn’t say it first, I said it first,” says Sandra. “There were so many times when one of us would say, ‘I was *just* going to say that.’” Her client is quick to give the designer credit: “We really ham-and-egged it, but Sandy was the guiding force,” she says.

“Our task was really to infuse a beautiful, very traditional setting with a young, upbeat, fresh flavor,” says Sandra. To start the process, the designer first took a look

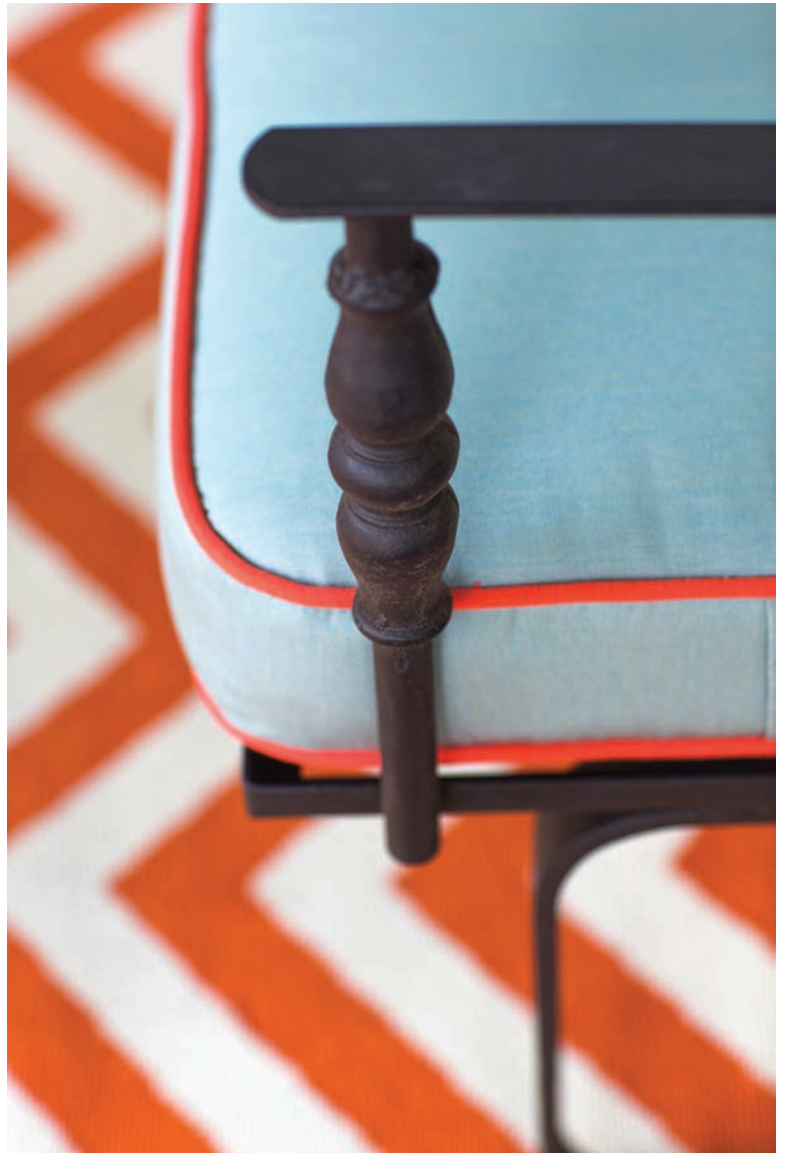
at what the couple already had, including quite a few family pieces, which they wanted to incorporate into the new design. “They really wanted to respect those and integrate them into their lifestyle,” says Sandra, but the pieces needed some rehabbing to make them fit seamlessly into the much-updated interiors.

Perhaps the most important of those pieces is the antique rug in the living room, which came from Jay’s child-



"Stream of Consequences" by Penny Putnam hangs in the dining room. Floor stenciling is by Lawrence Oliver.
opposite: Sandra used silk Anna French "songbirds" fabric on the dining room drapes, and covered the walls and ceiling in Osborne & Little's "Fretwork" paper.





Mac relaxes on the patio near the pool. Chevron lamps from SM Home flank the sofa, with cushions upholstered in Sunbrella fabrics. The embroidered panels are from the Irish Linen Shop in Bermuda.

hood home in Delaware. It was in bad shape when it arrived in Connecticut, but after a restoration by Proudian, the revived hues drove the color palette on the first floor. “When you have something of quality, it’s just going to keep coming back,” says Valerie. Some other quality pieces from her husband’s family are the Chippendale camel-back sofa, now recovered in a Holly Hunt fabric, and the show-stopping loveseat in the living room.

Other pieces were finds in the homeowners’ long history at the house. The blue lamps flanking the fireplace were retrieved from an old furniture shop in Darien in the 1980s. Around the same time, Valerie wanted a big mirror for over the fireplace, so off she went, six months pregnant, to United House Wrecking, and spotted the gold antique that now hangs there.

It’s the mix that gives this home its unique personal-



"I love to play with words, and I don't want to take things too seriously," says the homeowner, who had pillows with the cheeky inscription "The Big Eau" made for the lounge chairs near her (relatively) small pool.

ity, though, the merging of modern and traditional. The vibrant living room wall color was taken from the antique rug. "[The homeowners] are full of life, so doing a coral room that was warm and lively and rich was very appropriate for who they are," says Sandy. A pair of custom Lucite tables sit in front of the love seat in the living room, and in a nod to Valerie's days as a concert pianist, a bust of Beethoven by Peter Rubino sits on a pedestal in the

living room. The lighting, too, is a mix of sleek and traditional pieces, which serve an important function in each space. "Without the right lighting, it doesn't matter what else you do. You can make the most beautiful room in the world, but if the lighting isn't right, no one will appreciate it," says Sandra. A mix of floor and table lamps, and overhead and wall lighting gives the homeowners the opportunity to highlight different areas and play with mood.

A photograph of a well-maintained garden featuring a swimming pool. In the foreground, two large, ornate, grey stone planters hold tall, green plants with purple flowers. A stone patio leads to a swimming pool with a stone border. A lounge chair with orange and white striped cushions is visible near the pool. The background is filled with dense green trees and foliage.

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—THE HOMEOWNER



The contemporary works of artist Penny Putnam are also illuminated in the living room and dining room. In the latter space, the homeowners opted out of traditional-feeling Gracie panels in favor of a fretwork paper from Osborne & Little, which adorns the walls and ceiling and creates a kind of gazebo effect. Ballgown-esque Anna French fabric drapes hang from modern Lucite rods, and complete the shimmering space. The wooden dining chairs were lacquered in white, and orange faux-leather seats make a statement without being high-maintenance.

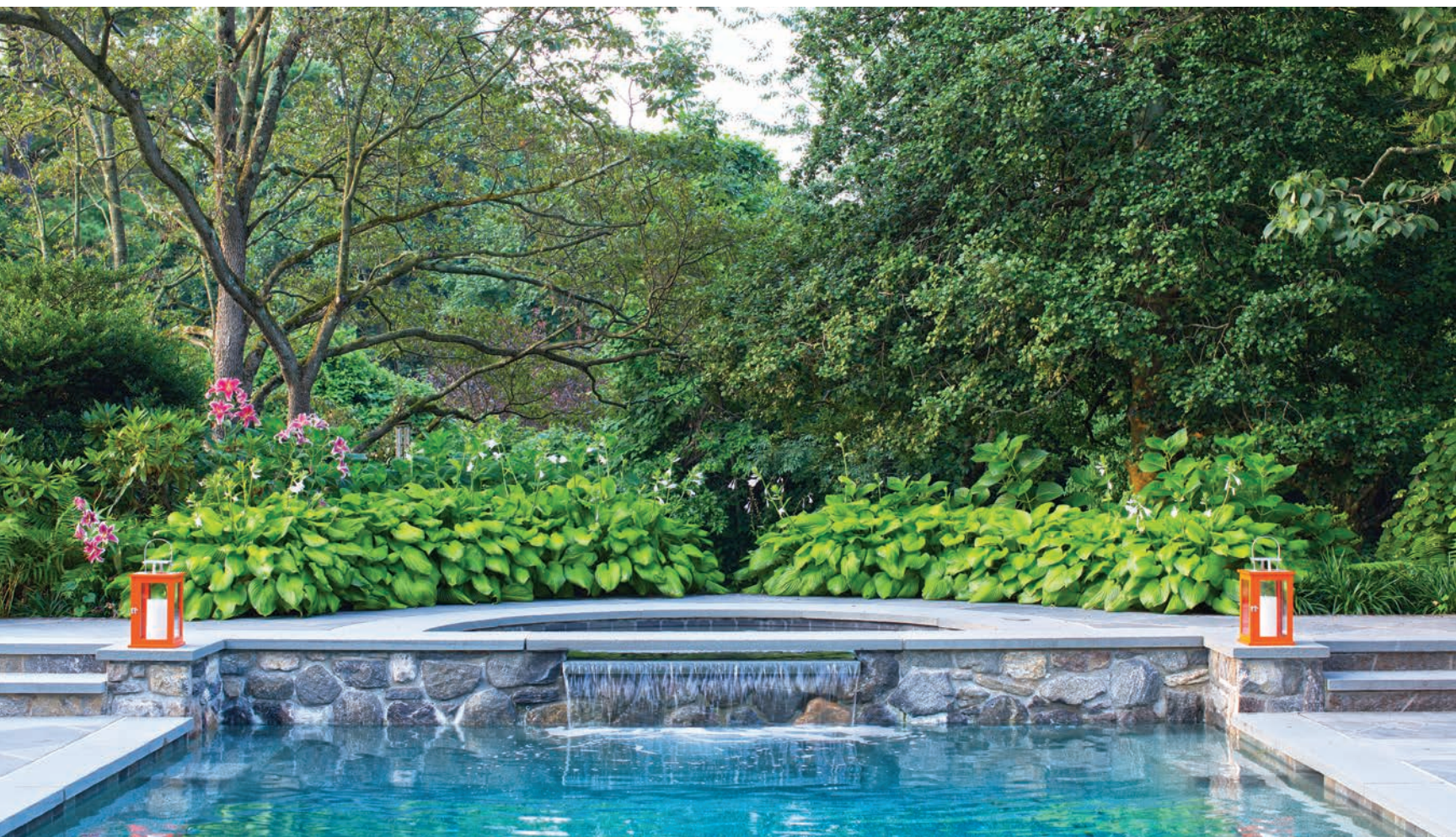
Across the lawn, the pool house is both a getaway and a guest space. When the homeowners put in the pool and pool house about eight years ago, Valerie chose to tackle the project herself. Their oldest child had just gotten engaged, and it made the couple rethink their spaces. “All of sudden, when something like that happens, you look at your house in a completely different way,” says Valerie. “We’d been putting it off, and that spurred us into ac-

tion.” The blue-and-orange color scheme is as lively as the palette in the main house, making the space a wonderful spot to relax and entertain guests in the warmer months.

Combining the past and present is no easy task, but incorporating meaningful pieces—and design sense honed over years in the business—into a home is what makes it truly personal and special. After more than three decades in this house, it really looks like the couple who live there. “We finally feel like it’s an accurate reflection of who we have evolved into at this point in our lives,” says Valerie. Which just goes to show, it’s not always a bad thing when history repeats itself, as long as you learn along the way—and give it a modern twist. **ah**

RESOURCES

Sandra Morgan Interiors, Greenwich,
sandramorganinteriors.com
WriteNow LLC, writenowdone.com





The pool house was Valerie's project and is now a great place to entertain guests. The palette of blue and orange echoes the patio furniture off the rear of the main house. **opposite:** Orange lanterns stand out against a natural backdrop of green.



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