



Comfort Zone

Smart planning and a meticulous eye for detail helped **ROWAYTON DESIGNER ELENA PHILLIPS** CREATE HER FAMILY'S DREAM HOME



BY MALIA MCKINNON FRAME | PHOTOGRAPHY BY JANE BEILES

left: Elena Phillips at the entry of her newly-renovated and designed Rowayton home. **this page:** Phillips put her stamp on everything throughout the home, from accent pillows to wallpaper. A look at the home's exterior, which was also updated.



Prussian Blue laquered walls and printed drapes add drama to the dining room.



The cozy living room is set up for family gatherings with a custom game table and new gas fireplace.

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—ELENA PHILLIPS



A reading nook inside the home office.

Elena Phillips loves a project. The interior designer honed her skills working in New York City for heavy hitter firms David Kleinberg Design Associates and Cullman & Kravis before starting her own business in 2012 which serves clients in Fairfield County and beyond. When asked about her signature style she explains, “I get to work with people who love traditional, modern and everything in between, so my style tends to evolve every day.” When her family moved into their 1885 Victorian in Rowayton at the end of 2010, it was time for Phillips to turn her attention to her own home. She did some cosmetic work including wallpapering, painting, redoing the downstairs floors, reworking some of the rooms and adding a mudroom. Fast forward to 2014, when her second child was on the way and the growing family needed more space. Renovation number two involved adding trim, rethinking the use of certain rooms and replacing the stone floor in the kitchen. The family enjoyed the home for three more years, then with the arrival of baby number three in 2016, the designer realized she’d need to take the house down to the studs to achieve her vision. “The baby was sleep-

ing in my walk-in closet, the kitchen bothered me and overall I wasn’t happy with the aesthetic,” she explains. The family moved out for over six months and forged ahead with a third and final revamp. “Everything was thought out, and every part of the house was touched except for two rooms,” she remembers. This renovation brought about big changes, including a new and improved kitchen. Phillips wanted an open floor plan, so she extended the kitchen into the back wraparound porch, enlarging the space and making it more family-friendly. “We have a two, three and almost nine-year old, and we hang out mostly in kitchen,” she says. For extra light, she added sliding glass doors and additional windows that match those on the other side of the home. Since blue is her favorite color, the versatile hue is present throughout. The lower part of her custom cabinets are painted in Farrow & Ball’s Hague Blue, and Strong White adds a striking contrast on top. She also opted for brass hardware everywhere because, “it patinas over time, is warm and works well with blues.” A 36-inch farm sink and a sleek Sub-Zero were also on Phillips’ wish list. “I’ve always dreamed of having a clear door refrigerator,” she says.

On the island, a thick two-inch Danby marble countertop sourced in Vermont looks like jewelry combined with shiny brass pulls from Classic Brass. “I love how the island has a warm caramel color mixed with gray, so it works well with my stainless steel and brass.” The mom of three incorporated child-friendly fabrics where possible, strategically covering her barstools in a printed fabric by Rebecca Atwood that camouflages stains, and accented them with brass nail heads. Other details like the brass-topped lip of the refuse bin and brass baseboards around the island add a special touch and withstand the wear and tear of a young family. A custom sectional fits snugly into a nook near the island so Phillips can cook while her kids read or watch TV in plain view. The best part of the room is the beautiful view that overlooks a large back yard and the restored barn. “We have a great outdoor zone now,” she says. Moving to the front of the home, the dining room draws you in with high gloss Prussian Blue laquered walls and printed whimsical drapery panels by Clarence House. A fun, sparkly Phillips Jeffries Mica wallpaper covers the ceiling and adds a touch of glam. “This room isn’t too serious, and now that we don’t have infants we hope to entertain a lot,” she explains. A stately grandfather clock resides here, which belonged to Phil-

lips’ grandfather and was a fixture in her own Victorian childhood home which happens to be located down the street. A serene ocean photograph by Richard Misrach that she and her husband bought each other hangs on the wall. “I’m drawn to anything with landscape or water,” says Phillips. Textural sisal rugs add warmth to this room and the adjoining living area, unifying the two spaces. The living room is all about family fun, evident from the custom gaming table inset with dark blue leather that sets the stage for hours of quality family time with puzzles, Scrabble and card games. A large screen television doubles as a piece of artwork, another clever feature. Fine art plays a major role in the home’s décor, as Phillips comes from a family of artists and loves displaying their talents. An eye-catching sculpture by her mother, artist Cornelia Kubler Kavanagh was chosen for this room, as well as a colorful painting by her brother-in-law, Frank P. Phillips which hangs over the mantel. “I have several pieces of my family’s work that I rotate throughout the house,” she explains. Moving upstairs you’ll see the same understated, sophisticated elegance in play. A peaceful, neutral-toned master bedroom is bathed in the natural light from three big square windows that face the backyard. “When you lie

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Phillips chose brass hardware as an accent in the kitchen and Rebecca Atwood fabric-covered stools to mask any stains and spills.



in bed you can see the reflection of the trees in the TV,” notes Phillips. Her master bath is covered in a unique silver metallic Katie Ridder wallpaper printed with a whimsical seaweed motif. When it came to the kids, Phillips designed the rooms around their personalities. The girls love purple and pink, so one room has fun purple quadrille fabric Roman shades that complement sweet Serena & Lily twin wicker beds. The nursery has pink walls and is a transitional space that can be converted into a walk-in closet, dressing room or a playroom as the girls get older. Her son loves soccer, so his walls are painted a vivid kelly green that emulates the soccer field, and maps—another interest— adorn the walls.

After a lot of work, the Phillips family moved back into their home in April 2018. The last undertaking was finishing the 1,000-square foot barn, which Phillips claimed for her office. Downstairs there’s a guest bedroom, and an upstairs aerie is home to her library of swatches, rug samples and wallpaper. Phillips kept the original 13-inch pine plank flooring, which contrasts beautifully with a set of modern dark green pendants, mixing old and new. To finish, she added a new metal roof, restored the board and batten exterior and painted it dark gray. The barn has become a much-needed sanctuary as well as a calm workspace where creativity can thrive.

Happily, the end-result for this fun young family is an updated home with a Victorian farmhouse feel that preserves much character and charm. “It’s so nice to be settled,” says Phillips. “I wanted my home to reflect what I love but also be practical for my family. It really feels like home.”



The kids’ rooms were designed with their personalities in mind. The girls, who will soon share a room, love pink and purple and Phillips’ son is big into soccer, so his walls are kelly green, similar to that of a field.