Here&There

GOING TO TOWN

Captivated by the idyllic surroundings, designer Kaitlin Smith goes all in renovating her dream home in Essex.

BY LISA H. SPEIDEL

Designer Kaitlin Smith arranges a bouquet that complements the Anna French for Thibaut Roscoe wallcovering and the dining room ceiling lacquered in Benjamin Moore Newburyport Blue.

Photography by Read McKendree. Styled by Frances Bailey

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First, designer Kaitlin Smith fell for the town: "Essex is the total package. It has a classic small-town feel, the architecture is beautiful, and there's not a lot of development. It almost feels like a Hollywood set—it's that great," she says. (Not to mention Essex is halfway between Smith's home-and-design shop in Watch Hill, Rhode Island, and her husband's Hartford office.)

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: Smith envisioned the den, with its patterned curtains from Quadrille and Ferndale wallpaper from Anna French for Thibaut, as a cozy space for morning coffee and a post-work glass of wine; however, her three children had other plans, claiming it as their own. Smith, husband Matthew, and their young kids gather near their front door, which is painted Sherwin-Williams Coral Bells. "The green mohair George Smith sofa was in my house growing up," says Smith.

While Smith, who loves to cook, describes her kitchen as "mostly white," she incorporated color by sidling up Lillian August stools to an island painted Benjamin Moore Kensington Blue. On the far wall, which overlooks the patio, Carrara marble runs from the counter to the ceiling.

Then she fell for the house: a 1939 colonial surrounded by mature trees and lovely historic homes. Smith knew it was her dream house, even though her husband, Matthew, initially raised an eyebrow. To be fair, "it didn't have the curb appeal it has today," admits Smith with a laugh. It also had a disjointed layout, no storage, and a tiny kitchen.

Undaunted, Smith set about devising a multi-phase renovation that would, over time, address various shortcomings while adding square footage for a growing family. Phase one ratcheted the curb appeal with new siding and windows and incorporated a light-filled new kitchen and dining room off the back of the house. Phase two brought a new primary suite above the kitchen and addressed the overall flow of the second and third floors while integrating a new staircase between the upper stories.

When it came to her overall design aesthetic,

Smith took a personal approach. "When it's your own house, you have a lot more freedom," she says. "You can go for it, whether for the good or the bad—you're going to live with it." In keeping true to the home's era, Smith rejected an open-concept layout, instead designing rooms that each have their own identity. Common themes do present, however. "I'm not afraid of color," she says, "I love color, texture, and the layering of patterns."

Blue is a favorite hue, and Smith pays homage with a lacquered navy ceiling in the dining room and high-gloss trim in the den. Pretty patterned wallpapers play nicely with pieces passed down from family. The designer also sprinkled in finds, like a vintage rattan chair and a ceramic lamp with pleated shade, from her own shop, Highpoint Home, to complete the look.

Now finished, the house, picture-perfect inside and out, is as enchanting as its silver-screen-worthy surroundings.

EDITOR'S NOTE: *For details, see Resources.*

INTERIOR DESIGN: Kaitlin Smith Interiors
BUILDERS: Sapia Builders, Chōwa Home

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: "I wanted to create young bedrooms for my young children—I wasn't worried about them growing into them," notes Smith, pointing to the Sister Parish Serendipity wallcovering on the ceiling, the vintage Babar the Elephant prints, and the vintage rocker from her own store, Highpoint Home. Smith wanted a clutter-free and serene primary suite, so the closets and dressers are built in; builder Derek Huckel of Chōwa Home incorporated a white-washed oak ceiling to soften the space. Antique French cane beds with Matouk linens and Amanda Lindroth shams anchor a cheery guest room.