

MHD

MAINE HOME + DESIGN

AMERICANA EMERGES

A SOUTHERN MAINE GETAWAY WITH
19TH CENTURY CHARM

SEPTEMBER 2023



ART AT HOME

BLENDING ARTISTRY AND DESIGN
ACROSS THE PINE TREE STATE

MHD

MAINE HOME + DESIGN

If whole or part of this article is reproduced online, we ask that a link back to Maine Home+Design be placed. Thank you.

207-772-3373

mainehomedesign.com

For Your Reference

Lilse McKenna makes over a southern Maine summer home with Americana colors and artistic nods to the past

BY MARNI ELYSE KATZ
PHOTOGRAPHY BY READ MCKENDREE / JBSA





Lilse McKenna loves a good research project. Digging into historic archives for inspiration is her thing. The findings help tie the interiors she designs to a building's architecture and establish a sense of time and place. That said, McKenna's schemes are never stilted. "I introduce historical references that aren't overtly reverential," the designer says. To that end, patterns might be pared down and colors enlivened to align with current tastes.

Such was the case when she reimagined this southern Maine getaway. Twenty-five-plus years after building a shingle-style home—a look quite popular in late nineteenth-century coastal New England—in the area where the wife spent childhood summers, the owners were ready to rethink and refresh. With their son and daughter grown and two grandchildren in the mix, they needed larger gathering spaces and easy maintenance. "We want friends and family who wander through to feel welcome, and comfortable sitting on the sofa in a wet bathing suit," one owner says.

McKenna, who had recently made over the couple's condominium in a flurry of florals and spirited stripes, was the obvious choice for turning the outdated home into a gracious, family-friendly haven. "There wasn't much

color and pattern before; just the Calico Corners fabric I picked out when I was 25," the owner laughs. "Lilse is a delight, and so creative." Local design-build firm Eider Investments signed on as the contractor.

One of the designer's first moves was to paint the brown-stained beadboard paneling a warm white to lighten and brighten all the rooms. The floorboards followed suit. "Painted floors are easy to sweep after sandy feet come through, and feel very beachy," McKenna says. As for the color palette? "The design brief was that it should feel like Maine," McKenna says. "To me, that means blue and white with pops of red." She also wove in aqua for seaside airiness.

The owners had another request: gingham. "The wife wanted her Gloria Vanderbilt moment," McKenna recalls, referencing the late fashion designer's famous pink gingham-on-gingham bedroom. While McKenna punctuated the spaces with gingham sofas, stools, and pillows, her overall approach was subtler. "I found inspiration in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century quilts and early-nineteenth-century wall stencil patterns that were based on grids," the designer says. "Checks became an underlying theme."

The foyer, which the team expanded and squared off by removing an awkward hallway to the guest room, sets

(Opening spread) A well-burnished table passed down from the husband's family lends a collected-over-time look to the dining room, which used to be a library. "I felt they should have a separate dining room," says interior designer Lilse McKenna. "There were enough gathering rooms, and they already had a dining table."

The team doubled the size of the screened porch (above), staining it the same green as the existing trim.



the tone up front. Knowing she couldn't add pattern with wallpaper given the humid environment, and hesitant to disrupt the original beadboard anyway, McKenna turned her attention to the floor. "We blew up an early-nineteenth-century wall stencil and put it on the floor like a rug, with a border around it," she says, describing the design executed by Connor Owens of JJ Snyder Studio.

A modern iteration of a nineteenth-century historic document is the focal point of the living room too. Tasked with hiding the television (for rainy days only!), McKenna designed a large wooden screen that is imperceptibly split down the middle; at the press of a button, each panel slides smoothly behind the built-in bookshelf beside it. The functional folk art piece, which pictures cheerful potted plants, birds perched on blossoming branches, and ripe fruit, grew out of a historic family-tree-type document that McKenna unearthed in the online archives of the Bates College Museum of Art. "The original was only about 12 by 8 inches," she says. "Connor did a beautiful job interpreting it."

The room's furnishings are equally thoughtful and inviting. A marine blue indoor/outdoor rug with a quilt-like pattern anchors the space. Upon it, McKenna layered

Florals, vines, and gentle geometrics abound in the primary bedroom (above). "Having done their condo, the clients and I were already speaking the same language," McKenna notes. "It was understood that there would be lots of pattern."

A bench from the husband's family's summer place in the Adirondacks (left) sits beside the original entry door that the builder transformed into a Dutch door at the owners' request.



more than a dozen other prints. A cushy sofa repurposed from the wife's father's home and reupholstered in pale blue gingham nestles between the bookshelves; a pair of club chairs in the bay window sports a stylized vine fabric; and the custom double-sided sofa—it both completes the main seating arrangement and faces the kitchen island—is done in a measured medallion design. And then there's the bevy of throw pillows, pleated lampshades, and quilts.

Woven rattan tables, a green wicker rocker, and the river stone fireplace reference the coastal setting and keep the room from feeling stuffy. Meanwhile, collections and inherited family pieces make the room feel like home. "I appreciate that Lise was willing to reuse some furnishings we had, so everything doesn't look new," one owner says.

Not only does McKenna incorporate clients' existing pieces, she wants them to add treasures once she's

gone. Rather than compose a perfect space that a client might hesitate to touch, McKenna purposely chooses elements that seem the slightest bit off. In the dining room, McKenna painstakingly picked a trim color that does not match the mural. (Nor does it match the cabinetry in the rehabbed kitchen; that's a deeper shade of aqua.) The strategy is twofold: "You get an impressionistic effect when colors don't match perfectly, making for a more beautiful whole," she asserts. "And it allows the room to evolve."

As for the wall mural itself, like the floor treatment in the foyer and the folk art in the living room, the concept came out of McKenna's research. Owens modeled the dreamy scene on a work by Jonathan D. Poor, a muralist who painted commissions in the same manner as his well-known uncle, Rufus Porter, for well-to-do homeowners throughout nineteenth-century New England. "Chances

Expanding the size of the screened porch (above)—complete with a hanging swing that looks to the Atlantic Ocean—increased prime hangout space without the inconvenience of interior construction.

(Opposite, clockwise from top left) McKenna paired Benjamin Moore's Antiqued Aqua paint on the kitchen cabinetry, which stretches along the back of the house, with hand-painted ceramic tiles from Balineum. A seascape by Ann Conrad Stewart hangs over a Fabulous Things game table and antique stools in the living room. Mottled ceramic tiles from Balineum and a sink skirt in a simple leaf print by Décors Barbares add charm to the pantry: "Spatterware tiles brought to mind Sister Parish and Americana design," McKenna says. The designer surrounded the family's existing dining table on the screened porch with chairs from Walters Wicker, spray-painted dark blue and topped with cushions made from paisley outdoor fabric by Peter Dunham.



are, if you had an amazing house in New England, one of them would have painted a mural in it," McKenna reasons. "We brightened the colors to feel fresh, summery, and happy instead of brooding."

A water scene also wraps the screened porch, which the team doubled in size. It's where the family spends the majority their time eating, drinking, and playing. The trees are scruffier and the boats sleeker than those in the mural, but the view is equally picturesque. Taking cues from the green-stained walls that meld the room with the landscape, McKenna spray-painted the wicker furniture in dark greens and blues, and she stuck to those tones for the textiles, too. The most coveted spot in the house is the hanging bed from the Porch Swing Company that McKenna outfitted with an English-stitched mattress. "If I can't sleep, I cuddle up down there and wait for the rest of the house to wake up," one homeowner says.

The couple hears the ocean from their bedroom as well, thanks to French doors and the deck where they read in the late afternoon sun. In addition to renovating their bath—it's now a clean, crisp white with indigo shower tile and sky-blue accents—McKenna spruced up the bedroom decor. She reupholstered their chaise, hung a trio of nineteenth-century engravings with hand-painted frames that ingeniously add textile-like pattern to the wall, and chose a Bunny Williams faux bamboo bed that is yet another nod to nineteenth-century style.

More important than the peppy color, nuanced texture, and period-appropriate detail is how McKenna gave the couple's old house a new life. "Every room can have grandchildren running around with sandy feet, wet bathing suits, and jam on their hands," the designer says. "It's a place where they can all be together." **MH+D**

Folk-art-style panels with a faux bois frame hide the television in the living room, which explodes with pattern without running wild thanks to McKenna's expert command of the color palette.

(Opposite, clockwise from top left) The frames of the medicine chests in the primary bath are painted with a subtle basket weave pattern in the same color as the Colleen and Company sconces. Speckled vinyl floor tiles in the laundry room drove the color of the trim, painted in Benjamin Moore's Vienna Green. McKenna turned a dressing room into an office by adding built-ins and painting the millwork in Farrow and Ball's Dix Blue. In the nursery, an existing wicker chair got a fresh coat of white spray paint and a new, bright blue cushion in a Brunswick and Fils fabric.