

FINE FOLK



Color, comfort, and a big gush of gingham enliven a formerly forlorn Maine family retreat

BY STEPHANIE HUNT
PHOTOGRAPHY BY READ MCKENDREE
STYLING BY FRANCES BAILEY

Above the living room sofa, early American botanical panels—reinterpreted replicas of a museum find that became designer Lise McKenna's starting point for the room—conceal a television.





GO DUTCH

From the breeze-inviting Dutch door to the hand-stenciled floor (a pattern McKenna found in a book on 19th-century decorative arts), the entryway rolls out a delightful seaside welcome. “It felt like Maine to me,” she says of the folk-art flair. A verdigris lantern and scalloped wall sconces echoing the door’s cornflower blue underscore the throwback aesthetic. “As I was sourcing pieces for the home, I kept buying 19th-century Americana without consciously realizing it,” McKenna adds. “It’s what this house called for.”

At a ripe 30 years old, it was full mid-life crisis. This classic shingle-style house on Maine’s mid-coast had, for three decades, served as summer central for a Massachusetts family. They loved its tucked-away water-

front locale and salty New England charm, but the home’s dark interiors, cramped kitchen, and general sense of the blahs begged for a refresh. Plus, grandkids were now in the mix, so additional sandy feet toddling around necessitated rethinking the flow and functionality. “Our goals were to make it bright and fun and to reference the 19th-century shingle-house vernacular a bit more without being stuffy,” says interior designer Lise McKenna, who kept the original beadboard but gave the existing dark stain a creamy white face-lift, and started anew with most everything else—gutting the kitchen and baths, and expanding the much-used screened porch overlooking the woods and water.

Minus the porch addition, the home’s footprint stayed the same, but new arched doorways, molding, and coffered ceilings added architectural verve. McKenna’s vibrant layering of texture and patterns, from cheery checks to vintage chintz, amped up a sense of youthful coziness. She drew palette inspiration from 18th- and 19th-century folk art, including a piece discovered at Maine’s Bates College Museum (re-created above the living room sofa), and gave the entryway a similar dose of Americana, replicating a 19th-century wall stencil pattern. Tired wood floors were freshly painted, and new gathering spaces invite lots of grandchild lap-sitting. “To me, upholstered furniture and layered patterns are just so comfortable,” says McKenna, whose “formula” entails juxtaposing historical references—pairing a French floral with an Indian block print, for example. “It’s now a happy, sunny house that still feels like Maine.”



CREATE A SCENE

From the wall mural to the hand-painted floor and plaster-painted chandelier, decorative artists from JJ Snyder Studio served up the main courses in the dining room—a space formerly used as a living area. “I loved the Rufus Porter School murals from 19th-century New England and Maine,” says McKenna, who designed one inspired by artist Jonathan D. Poor’s depiction of a maritime scene like those once visible outside this room. McKenna paired the client’s antique pine table with chairs custom slipcovered in blue block print, and added a midcentury bull’s-eye mirror for further nautical effect.



SPARK UP A FOCAL POINT

McKenna stoked the Rumford fireplace (far left) with fresh character, removing the existing mantelpiece and brick surround and replacing it with beach and river rock with big grout lines. "It gives it a naïve quality," the designer says. "It's a fun change—slightly unusual—and I like that it references the beach nearby."

KEEP IT FLEXIBLE

Adjacent to the dining room and kitchen, the keeping room (above), like the dining room, had been used differently in the home's former configuration, but McKenna "doubled down" to turn it into an inviting nook for after-dinner drinks or cozy morning reading. "It's a sweet space for when there are a lot of guests in the house and you need a quiet place for a cup of coffee," she says. She countered the checks with a Raoul Textile print on the swivel chairs and added unexpected shape and form with a Spanish Baroque ottoman.

PILE ON PATTERN

McKenna's client's one request was to go for it on gingham. The designer typically leans toward stripes but, starting with the sofa (left), acquiesced with varying scales and colors and layering pattern upon pattern, as if Sister Parish were having a checkered moment. Old wicker, quilts, and a smorgasbord of textures—from the rattan coffee table to a woven-basket side table—add to the vintage maritime vibe.

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ADD FLAVOR WITH COLOR

"This is a family who loves color. It's evident in how they dress, how they live," says McKenna, who brought that joie de hue to the kitchen, with cabinets in a turquoise aqua and kicks of bright blue thanks to gingham-covered counter stools. Brass pendants feel shipworthy, while built-in plate shelves flanking the kitchen entry solved "a design problem" for McKenna. "They wanted to be able to display and switch out the expanding collection of plates gifted annually from the local beach club."



GET IN THE SWING

Being outdoors, and trading digital screens for a breezy screened porch, is the whole point of this family's Maine retreat, so extending the outdoor living area was top on McKenna's list. "Darker, more muted greens" blend in with the woody landscape, she explains, and abundant wicker, with cushions in a Sister Parish ikat, allows for ample seating. A daybed-cum-swing is the perfect afternoon nap spot, while a vintage Adirondack table in the corner is card-game ready.



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EMBRACE THE VIEW

“The balcony off this bedroom is the best view in the house, so that was our central focus,” says McKenna of her choice to paint the room and trim in a soothing sea green, a shade that blended seamlessly with the exterior “and worked really well with the light.” A bouquet of soft florals (Quadrille curtains and Matouk bedding) accents a set of late-19th-century botanical engravings that McKenna had her decorative painter augment. “We extended the pattern onto the mat and frame to add some life.”

