



EAST MEETS WEST

WRITTEN BY DONNA PIZZI PHOTOGRAPHY BY BLACKSTONE EDGE STUDIO

"The kitchen is my favorite room in the house for entertaining, doing homework and being together," says Jennifer, who worked with Garrison to add a more modern take to the initial drawings, including picking the statement stone, cabinet fronts, hardware, colors, cabinet style, faucets, perimeter countertops, and backsplash.



A NEW CANAAN, CONNECTICUT FAMILY TEAMS UP WITH WEST COAST INTERIOR DESIGNER GARRISON HULLINGER AND EAST COAST ARCHITECT MICHAEL SMITH TO CREATE A STYLISH COLONIAL HOME WITH CONTEMPORARY INTERIORS FOR THE HOMEOWNERS' ACTIVE LIFESTYLE.

Rob and Jennifer Sechan of New Canaan, Connecticut turned to the internet recently when faced with the dilemma many married couples encounter when deciding whether to move or renovate their existing home. Rob, a project-oriented 21-year veteran wealth manager recently honored as one of Barron's Top 100 Financial Advisors, who also races cars, and presides over the New Canaan Youth Basketball Team, was adamant. He wanted to sell. Jennifer refused. Sure, their former 1950s ranch home, which a local builder had transformed into a quasi Colonial in 2006, had problems, but it was, she argued, located on prime real estate - a 2.5 acre lot that abuts the town's Nature Center - a mile from New Canaan's charming downtown. Frustrated, Rob searched the internet for "Contemporary Casual Interior Design" and up popped Garrison Hullinger Interior Design (GHID), recently named one of the 100 fastest growing companies in SW Washington and Oregon. Rob did the unimaginable. He invited Garrison to their Connecticut home to discuss decorating the Sechans' Florida condo.

"He must have thought I was a whack job," says Rob, who inherited his interest in architecture from his family's real estate business. "What I really wanted was to show Garrison a home by local architect Mike Smith and have him convince Jenny to buy it."

When Garrison arrived in Connecticut, Rob drove him over to see the Smith home he wanted to buy. "It was stunning," recalls Garrison. "They had carved out this long lane that led to the bottom of this large property and its gorgeous setting. I'd never seen a pool and layers of hardscaping like that before," he says. He recommended the Sechans buy it and let him decorate it. Jennifer loved the house, but disliked its location, long driveway and placement near a busy highway.



A lengthy front porch unifies the newly renovated Sechan home with such traditional Colonial design elements as cedar shingle gabled roof, dormers, double hung windows, and painted black louver shutters. ENTRY Boxed panels line the entry walls, where horizontal artwork is softened by a fiddle leaf plant. A Bernhardt bench shines beneath the Lillian August lantern.

To open up the narrow space, the formal living room was designed on a horizontal plane with similar seat height, side table, and bottom drupe panels. With both morning and evening sun entering the room, a sophisticated, gray-toned wall color that changes with the light was chosen. A whimsical collection of books fills the stone-trimmed fireplace.



She agreed, however, that their home suffered from schizophrenia. "You walked in the front door and the new living room, guest bedroom and office were on the right and rarely used. On the left was the tighter old ranch portion with low ceilings, a small kitchen, and dark family room."

"It was big," says Rob, "but with the kitchen and family rooms the smallest rooms in the house, it just wasn't the gathering place for our four children and their friends as they were entering high school."

While the Sechans' Connecticut stalemate continued, Garrison traveled to the family's Ft. Lauderdale condo, and made a proposal for its decor. Once his firm was engaged, a working relationship ensued and a bond of trust was formed.

"It turned out phenomenally," says Rob. "I adore Garrison's passion for what he does and the output he produces. He's a wonderful human being."

A year later, the Sechans had reached a compromise. They would stay in their New Canaan home if Rob could add a basement - a decision which meant razing nearly half the house to carve out space - and Michael Smith Architects of Wilton, Connecticut whose work they both loved, was brought on board.

"I wanted to marry the traditional elements in Mike's homes, which have a lot of character, porches, gables, and plenty of architectural details, with the transitional decorating element we were after," explains Rob.

After Mike Smith, winner of numerous HOBI (Home Builders Association of Connecticut) awards, assessed



The heavily ornamented previous drapes were jettisoned when they seemed antithetical to the family's casual lifestyle. Simpler, more practical ones let the bejeweled wallpaper take center stage. "It didn't make sense to spend a ton of money on custom drapes if Rob wasn't sure they were going to stay in the house," says Garrison.



the home, he became disturbed by its asymmetry, step down roofline, poorly proportioned portico, and various other out-of-proportion details.

"We tried to work with the original ranch area rather than demolish it, but the results would have been sub-standard. In the original layout, the kitchen and family room were separate with no access to the outdoors other than a small porch. The whole goal," he says, "was to create a full basement for Rob and the family, and an open feel between the kitchen and family room, where the family spends 95% of their time."

Mike's plans included removing a recently added portico that Rob disliked, which spanned the back of the house, and opening up the family room, utility room, and Jennifer's new office to the back patio and new covered porch area via a trio of glass French doors and back-to-back, indoor/outdoor fireplaces. On the street side, he unified the two wings with the addition of a long porch that creates perfect visual symmetry.

Jennifer, who holds a degree in marketing, recalls initially considering local interior designers for the project. "When I started talking to them, not one of them took the time to get to know me, how we live or what we wanted to use each room for."

"Garrison also took the time to know each of our kids so our home would be a place they wanted to be," adds Rob. When plans for the basement were stalled at a crucial crossroads, they turned to GHID for inspiration. "I didn't want our home to look like every home in Connecticut, but not so different that it didn't still resonate," says Rob. "After working with Garrison in Florida, I knew he could achieve that, because he has ideas that are unique and different relative to what we see in Connecticut."

"Rob fell in love with my associate Daniel's and my drawing of the basement," says Garrison. "Our inspiration photos added flavor to the space, giving it that masculine, rough hewn feel - yet not too rustic or salvaged. We wanted some sophistication down there, as well as a non-traditional brick wall. We knew the entertainment area needed to seat as many people as possible. In fact, that was what they liked about our design for the Florida home, creating a space where all six of them could hang out together."



A spacious sectional brings family together in the light, bright family room. French doors lead to the patio and dual fireplaces. JENNIFER'S OFFICE Jennifer now enjoys a roomy office, which features shiplap horizontal board, a single built-in desk and window seat adds. ROB'S OFFICE A formerly dark space, gets a makeover with woodwork in a softer tone of grey and fresh designs from Dwell Studio by Precedent.

"It's my husband's favorite space," says Jennifer. So, too, is the spectacular indoor basketball court that doubles as a typical three car garage. For an award-winning race car driver and car collector like Rob, this is possibly one of the greatest sacrifices of all!

By February 2013, the bi-coastal team of architect and designer was in place, working together in a give and take situation whose results Rob describes as "a terrific marriage of both talents."

"After working with Garrison in Florida, we found you don't need to hire a local designer. The internet makes it easy, with weekly conferences, and someone in Garrison's office always available, giving him the final say," says Jennifer, who worked hand-in-glove with Garrison to add a modern twist to the traditional kitchen design. "When Garrison decorates," she adds, "he not only makes the room look good, but functional, as well. He listens to how each space is going to be used, and then saves a few surprises for the end."

Vintage European style Jewel Pendant aluminum industrial lights with brass hardware by Hudson Goods provide task lighting for island. Backsplash tile by Pratt & Larson. Chown Hardware provided cabinet hardware. A handy 36" farmhouse sink is paired with a Kallista "Quincy" Nickel faucet for food prep. KITCHEN NOOK The slab walnut nook table was fabricated by The Joinery in Portland, Oregon and shipped to Connecticut.



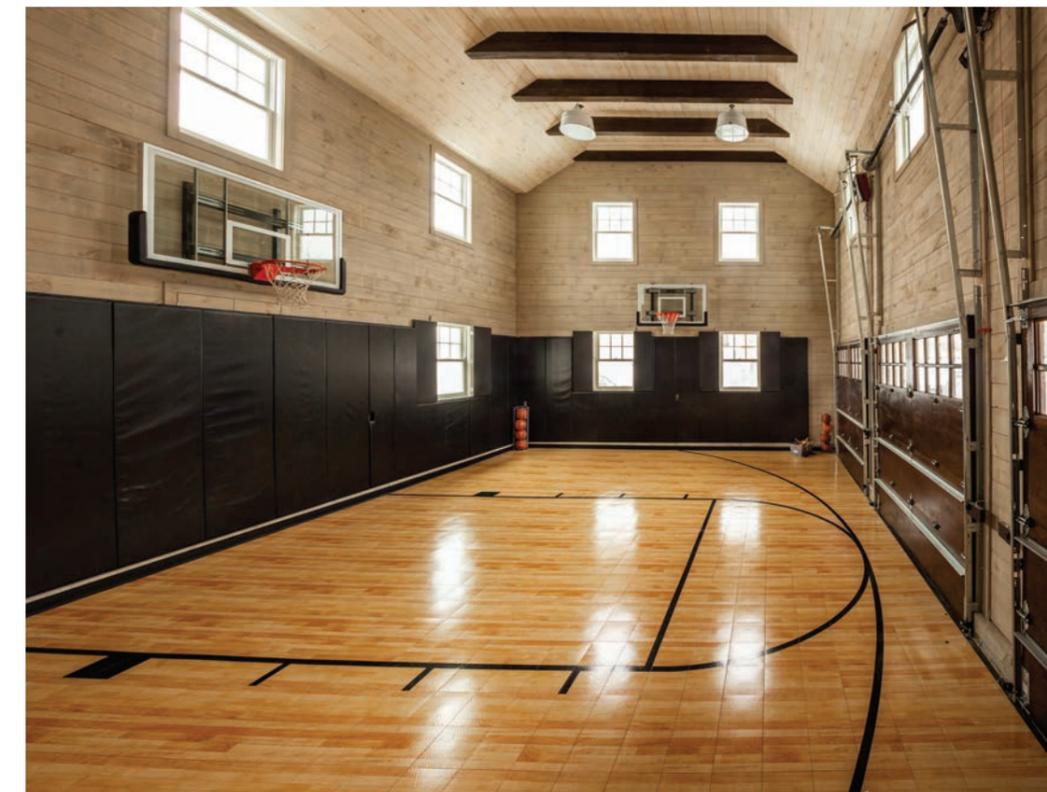


Jennifer admits her love for a neutral palette was periodically challenged by color-loving Garrison. "Looking at a 2" sample of the formal dining room wallpaper, for example, was difficult for me. He explained that it would appear more solid when the whole wall was done, and I trusted him."

"He's not afraid to tell you his opinion, doesn't give me 1000 choices, just three and puts his favorite first," says Jennifer. "He'll also tell you what has to go, and what can be reused like our former appliances which are now installed in the basement bar area." During the recent 2014 New Canaan Cares Kitchen and Home Tour, 700 attendees filed through the Sechans' newly renovated home, surprised by the twists that lay behind its classic Colonial exterior. They loved the beautifully coffered kitchen and adjacent family room ceilings countered by wide white oak flooring stained with a rich, dark Jacobean/espresso finish.

GHID furnished modern kitchen materials, including easy-to-maintain perimeter countertops fashioned from polished Stormy Sky Chroma Quartz and Asian Statuary marble tile backsplash. Contemporary custom cabinets play off a honed White

The basketball court that doubles as a 3 car garage was Rob's idea. BASEMENT Rough sawn oak walls feature basketball memorabilia. Spacious seating, and multiple TV screens promote casual entertaining. Highly resistant porcelain plank flooring resembles wood. BOY'S ROOM A low-slung, rough hewn bed crowned with basketball memorabilia echoes a wall of built-in shelves.





Arabesque marble island top. The classic breakfast nook boasts washable banquette upholstery.

Mike's architectural detailing strengthened the classic Colonial entry with boxed paneling, additional columns and the replacement of several half round windows with a trio of more suitable rectangular styles. GHID struck a modern chord by hanging horizontal artwork across the boxed paneling, adding a stair runner with pewter-hued tread rails, and crowning the space with an edgy lantern fixture with modern geometric style.

"There is a certain level of tradition, symmetrical colonial trim profile, and moldings juxtaposed against more contemporary light fixtures and wall finishes," says Mike, "which works really well. The house is not stuffy; it's light, bright, casual, with almost a modern feel to its interiors."

"Garrison was involved in every architectural and design decision along the way," says Rob, including having the children's input on the key design elements in their rooms. "If ever there was a disagreement between architect, designer, or builder Jay Pirrone of 5K Development, they would come to me as the final arbiter."

"Rob was very engaged," says Mike. "He took a great deal of interest in just about everything, and had a lot of positive effect on the house. Sometimes you'll get a client that wants to meddle around and it doesn't work. Rob knew what he wanted, and Garrison and I would carry out whatever worked."

The Sechans are both delighted with the home the talented bi-coastal team created. "It makes me happy every day I come home," says Rob. "I think Jenny feels the same way. Either that, or she's just glad for all the renovations to be done!" he adds with a laugh. "Now," says Rob, "I'm anxious to start working with Garrison on our next project!"

A pool house at left provides shower/bathroom and kitchenette for a full day of play at the pool. The master bedroom's newly added porch provides a covered patio below. Umbrellas give pops of color around the pool. BACK OF HOUSE The uncovered patio area features thick cushions by Brown Jordan (Fremont Collection). Updated cement and side tables from the Urban collection from Kanna keep the patio area open when hosting lacrosse teams or friends for dinner.



BUILDER
5k Development, 5kdevelopment.com

ARCHITECT
Michael Smith Architects
michaelsmitharchitects.com

INTERIOR DESIGN
Garrison Hullinger Interior Design
garrisonhullinger.com

CABINET HARDWARE
Chown Hardware, chown.com

PROJECT SOURCES
Kitchen Tile Backsplash: Pratt and Larson;
Kitchen Appliances: Sub-Zero, Wolf,
Meile, Ge Monogram; Plumbing Fixtures:
Kallista, Silgranite Rondo, Waterworks