

Comfortable Mix

Kerry Hanson, a local designer with a busy practice who was trained by a master of interiors, combines **elegance and ease** in her family's New Canaan home



by JUDY OSTROW • photographs by STACY BASS

This is my favorite space,” says Kerry Hanson as she points out her study, tucked into a corner of her gracious home. With its deeply comfortable upholstered pieces, thoughtfully chosen appointments and perfectly finished draperies, its atmosphere is as calming as a warm summer day—despite the chill outside.

“I think I like it best because it reminds me of San Francisco,” says the designer. A decade ago this East Coast native had transplanted herself in the city by the bay following post-college stints at several Manhattan-based magazines. The location became the scene of a life transformation for Kerry. She had made a career switch from publishing to a brokerage house and moved with the company from New York to San Francisco. Her niche was fixed-income assets, but after six months on the trading floor, she knew that finance was not her calling. “My boyfriend, who could see I wasn’t feeling satisfaction from my work, encouraged me to take the opportunity to explore something I really enjoyed.”

The advice turned out to be a game-changer. She had always been drawn to beautiful furnishings





TOP: Architect Louise Brooks designed a new front entry leading into the house from a courtyard by Peter Cummin. RIGHT: Kerry Hanson concentrated on the home's interiors, warming the double-height foyer with soft green Colefax and Fowler wallpaper and an antique center table.



and spaces, and Kerry had a knack for decorating that her friends and colleagues had noticed. It made sense, then, when she enrolled in the architecture and interior design program at Berkeley. When she finished her studies, she landed a job as a design assistant with Ed Lobrano. He had honed his craft and reputation in senior design positions at the prestigious New York-based firms of Bunny Williams Inc. and David Easton, and then went on to establish an independent practice with offices on both coasts. Kerry's introduction to the business under the tutelage of this master professional with an international portfolio of clients rewarded her many times over.

"It was a great experience to work with Ed," she says. Her employer's encyclopedic knowledge of design and significant database of sources, plus his high-profile projects, provided her with an invaluable foundation for future successes.

After several years at Lobrano's firm, Kerry—who had married Mark Hanson, the boyfriend with the wise advice—decided it was time to start up her own practice. She and Mark were expecting a child, and the timing seemed right. Not long after, she got her first big break: designing a 350-acre family ranch in northern California's Anderson Valley for Mike Wood, CEO of Leap Frog. With





this plum project, Kerry Hanson Design was launched.

As her family and design practice expanded, Kerry and Mark decided to move back East. The pair house-hunted in Fairfield County, finding a lovely property in a woodland area of New Canaan. “I knew the town because I’d had many classmates who grew up here,” she says. “And even though I’d always loved old houses, we felt that this new one had the layout and the amenities that would work for our family.”

Going back to the initial comment about her study, Hanson notes that it is the smallest room in the 5,800-square-foot house. “The study’s proportions are similar to those in the rooms in the apartment in Presidio Heights that Mark and I renovated before we moved East. It immediately felt familiar and comfortable. However, the house overall presented some challenges because, like many houses its size, the rooms are large, so you need to create interiors with some warmth.”

The house became a canvas for Kerry to apply her professional experience. Her training taught her that working with a team from the start of a project will provide the best results, so she chose professionals to redo the approach, entry and landscape of the house. They would craft the exterior while she addressed the interior spaces.

“When we bought the house, the driveway led directly into the garage,” she recalls. “Without an orientation toward the main entry, this path provided no sense of arrival. Our landscape architect, Peter Cummin,

completely changed the approach so that you arrive by car at a courtyard in front of the main entrance.” Architect Louise Brooks, who is based in New Canaan and known nationally for her elegant work, remade the entry, flanking it with classic columns and removing a balcony over the front door, giving it better scale and presence. The home’s improved façade makes a perfect introduction to Kerry’s interiors.

Step inside and Kerry’s light touch and refreshing palette are immediately apparent. The double-height foyer, papered in a pale green Colefax and Fowler print, proves that elegance and warmth are not mutually exclusive qualities. Throughout the house, Kerry’s inspired use of color enhances a charming mix of traditional furnishings with modern accents.

“Ed Lobrano really helped me understand color,” says the designer. Her mentor’s meticulous attention to detail—furnishings are expertly executed with the luxury touches of fine trims and borders—trained her to create a

ABOVE: Kerry is very comfortable working with color, as you can see in the dining room (left) and the family room (right), where the designer added touches of red with draperies and accents.

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finished look. But his gift for color combinations taught her how to inject warmth into interiors that might otherwise feel overly formal.

The elegant dining room also is very comfortable, with its mix of cream and aqua in the choice of furnishings and fabrics. Rustic painted side chairs from Mecox Gardens and a painted chandelier from Vaughan add coziness to a space that makes its occupants want to linger over dessert and coffee.

Kerry's basics include beautiful upholstery from trade sources such as Atlanta's Travis & Company, as well as antique furniture that she has collected. Many of the



framed botanical prints throughout the house come from top-drawer specialist Arader Galleries. The major furnishings, along with the classic and well-crafted architectural details that were one of the home's selling points, create the underpinnings for Kerry's decorative hand.

Drawing thoughtfully from the resources she has accumulated in her years of design practice, tried-and-true fabrics from Scalamandre and Brunschwig & Fils merge comfortably with contemporary lamps crafted by noted ceramicist Christopher Spitzmiller. The walls of many rooms are adorned with photographs and paintings that resonate personally with the Hanson family history; San Francisco artists often take pride of place.

In the private spaces, good upholstery, lush carpets and—again—the use of color make each of the bedrooms enveloping and warm. The master bedroom, children's and guest rooms have warm palettes and furnishings that enhance their roles as restful retreats for the Hansons, their four girls and any lucky visitors who happen to stay overnight. Central to the upstairs layout is a sitting room where the family loves to gather in the evening. With Stark's soft and playful antelope-patterned carpet and a big sofa, Kerry confesses it's a magnet for the family. "After supper and baths, we gather here to watch a movie. We all appreciate how quiet and cozy it is."

A Roberto Dutesco image of two wild horses happily nuzzling each other completes the space over the sofa in the sitting room. "It's called 'Love,'" says the designer—not a surprising choice for a home that's filled with colors and materials that are as comforting as they are beautiful. ■

THIS PAGE: In the master bedroom, Kerry used the draperies and headboard that she enjoyed in San Francisco. These pieces were custom-made in Lee Jofa fabric. The ottoman with Lucite legs (above) and the side chairs (left) are covered in a coordinating sky-blue Scalamandre plaid.

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