



modern ménage

VERY BOLD SPACES IN VERY COOL PLACES

BY JESSICA GRUTKOWSKI // PHOTOGRAPHS BY TIM LENZ





COLORFUL COLLECTION
 The foyer is lined with abstract black-and-white wallpaper (Tempaper) and adorned with a curvy brass pendant light. In the living room, plaid and zebra area rugs somehow coexist peacefully. A mix of antiques and midcentury style furniture set the stage for curated collections of vintage barware and great art. The family's favorite conversation starter: a painting of red balloon animal dog doing his business.



Discovering one's true path in life is often a circuitous route. Diane Rath, a small-town upstate New York girl, never imagined she would live in Fairfield—let alone reimagine her career to become an interior designer.

After college, Rath built her practice as a reading and learning specialist in Manhattan working with adults and children. With only a few months left on their apartment lease, she and her husband Niles, an Upper East Side native she met through a family friend, began to entertain the idea of life in the suburbs.

"On weekends, we would explore different towns like Redding," says Rath. "It had the right vibe, style of homes we liked, and property." The couple was open to purchasing a fixer upper; land and property size were more important.

"We discovered Fairfield by accident," she explains. "It was summer and there was so much activity and life. We went for a drive after house hunting one day, and ended up in Fairfield by the gazebo. After a nice lunch on the patio at Centro, we were in love."

It's now been three years since The Rath Project's inception, which has been lovingly chronicled on Instagram (@therathproject) for her 12,000 and



RETRO VIBE The Raths' family and friends gravitate toward the sunroom. The natural wood may likely be treated to paint in the future, but for now, it pays homage to the original style of the home. Natural light floods in through the wall of windows, making it a nice spot for her thriving forest of fiddle leaf fig trees. Adding to the midcentury feel, many original kitchen appliances remain, functioning better than some modern brands. And the bright yellow door welcomes guests.



growing followers. Now Rath is flipping other homes in town, and working on sponsored projects for *Better Homes & Gardens*, and collaborating with brands like Raymour & Flanigan.

"People are gravitating toward more functional, family-friendly spaces," says Rath. "Something that's not as precious and more colorful. It's a refreshing break from your typical coastal New England design."

The Rath family home breaks all the rules in the most refreshing way. The 1950s-style ranch is marked by an oversized glossy yellow door straight out of Palm Springs. Inside, Rath effortlessly blends pattern, color and texture with a mix of antiques, curated collections, name brand furniture and flea-market finds to create a stunning playground for the eyes.

"I love Jonathan Adler's funky style, and how he pays homage to mid-century design," explains Rath. "I'm also influenced by Miles Redd, a true lover of color who isn't afraid to add weird or fun elements to more transitional style rooms."

Structurally the home hasn't changed, but it required a major makeover. It needed new bones, central air, a hot water heater, and the pool practically collapsed on itself. "Basically all the expensive stuff you can't see at first," adds Rath.

Rath's do-it-yourself skills are enviable, but for bigger construction projects she





leans on Dierna Construction to get the job done. At first Rath was admittedly intimidated by the amount of designers locally who had proper design degrees, but she has clearly carved out her own successful niche in the industry.

“I learned that it doesn’t matter what your degree is, you have to have a creative drive inside of you,” she says. “You can train to be a nurse, but if you lack bedside manner, it’s not going to work.”

Rath works exclusively with realtor Andrea Viscuso, also known for co-founding the local chapter of Dames Collective, an all-female networking group for which Rath is an ambassador. All of Rath’s projects remain true to her style. “I would never install anything in a flip project that I wouldn’t put in a client’s home—or my own.”

Rath loves to hunt for new pieces at local favorites like Black Rock Galleries, Elephant’s Trunk Flea Market, The House of Michel, and the Fairfield Antique Center. But Rath isn’t averse to shopping at Home Goods, or even turning trash into treasure.

“When Zar was a newborn, we passed a discarded canvas on the sidewalk in Manhattan,” recalls Rath. “I dragged it back to my apartment, stroller in tow.” Rath painted over two of the elephants and the rest of the pink background in black to create a stammer piece that looks expensive. “It’s proof that you can find great things anywhere with a little imagination.”

Recently, the Rath family welcomed a new baby boy. While their home is far from complete, it’s perfect for their growing family. “Eventually, we would like to build an addition to accommodate family and friends visiting from out of town,” adds Rath. “But for now, it’s kind of perfect.” ■



GRAPHIC ORGANIZING The ceiling of the office, once the garage, is treated with geometric wallpaper. Rath chose Flor geometric squares (individual carpet tiles) for her bedroom floor. A tile can be changed out if it is soiled, rather than cleaning the entire rug.