



IN THE MIX The family calls their home design modern farmhouse because of the eclectic mix of furnishings and accessories.

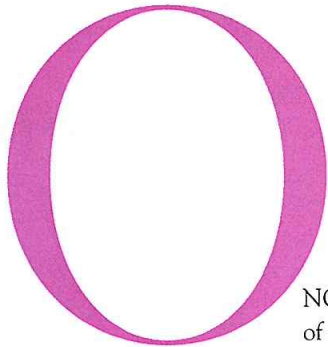
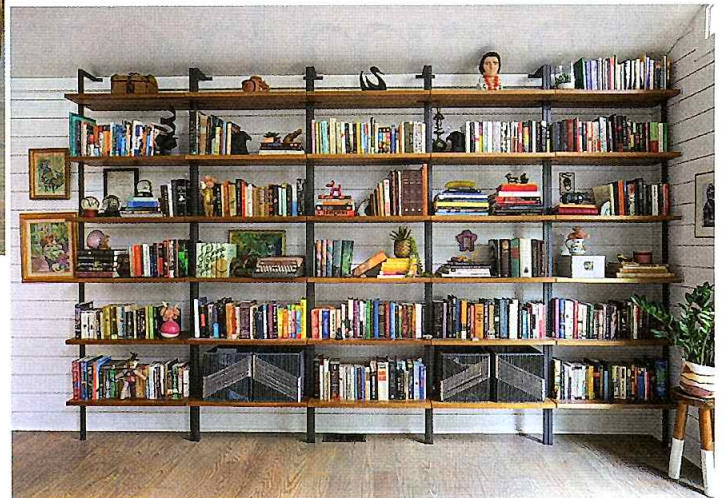


modern farmhouse

A BIG STEP, FROM BROOKLYN TO THIS RENOVATION



HERE AND THERE
Shiplap walls contrast with a contemporary bookshelves. Furnishings are both functional and attractive.



ONCE MICHAEL SWAIN REALIZED it was time to move from Brooklyn to a place with “lots of trees,” he knew it would be hard to convince his wife, Abigail Braden, to uproot their family. Swain grew up on 13 acres in rural New Jersey and didn’t feel quite at home surrounded by all that cement. Braden, who grew up in Rhode Island, wasn’t immune to the joys of country living, but she embraced city life and was reluctant to give it up. To top it off, the couple had just completed a renovation of their Bay Ridge home.

Swain needn’t have worried because Braden had already started thinking Brooklyn was not as “family friendly” as she had originally thought. The tipping point was the hour it took to travel only a few miles away for the children’s swim lessons. Soon Braden realized that the activity choices they were making for their two children were based on convenience rather than interests. The “last tethering to the Brooklyn area” came when Braden decided on a career change from law enforcement to interior design and no longer needed proximity to JFK airport.

Swain and Braden narrowed their house hunting to Connecticut because it was midpoint between Rhode Island and New Jersey, making an easy commute to see both sets of parents. Though they saw many attractive houses, it was a meandering, multi-level home in Ridgefield that ultimately captured their interest. The structure looked very much like a barn nestled in the woods.

Not that it was perfect—not by a long shot. Before they even closed, a deck built without the proper building permit had







THEIR OWN No space was wasted as the family transformed a former bedroom into an efficient work space. A closet was converted to a computer station and built-ins create a nicely organized mudroom.

to be removed. Previous owners had begun a renovation that had suddenly stalled. The kitchen was a dark, cave-like galley and the dining area, though ample, had low ceilings and felt too closed in.

There wasn't one room that didn't need either a complete redesign or a cosmetic lift. Add to that, the exterior also needed work.

But to Swain and Braden, it was an opportunity to make it their own and they came into it with what Swain calls a "renovation spirit." They hired local contractor and artist Chris Curnan, who had worked on the original halted renovation. Using the same footprint as the original house, they made interior structural changes that would open up the floorplan and add significantly more light to the main living space. To do this they added a vaulted ceiling and skylights to the kitchen/dining area to mirror that of the adjacent living room. They also reversed the two rooms to improve the flow. This was an important fix because their house is always filled with family and friends. On the exterior, they moved the front door to a more logical location and painted the house red, keeping with the barn-like feel. For the balance of the renovation, they decided to focus on the interior.

One of their huge stumbling blocks was that everything they wanted to do was expensive.

"I knew we couldn't afford everything, but I also knew I couldn't live with things undone," says Braden. Her solution was to spend hours on Internet tutorials learning how to do things herself.



FINAL TOUCHES The master bedroom was the last renovation completed. A much-needed closet was created below the loft. A window seat offers plenty of storage space. The room has nice light.



Braden was nervous at first, but she enjoyed the challenge and was proud of herself for accomplishing what she did. She tiled bathrooms and backsplashes; she installed and painted the shiplap that lines the walls in the living space. She and Swain created their own mantels from repurposed wood. She even suited up with masks and body cover while she gave existing bathroom tiles a recoating makeover.

For the upstairs remodel, which included the master suite, the couple tapped two other local contractors, Bob Frulla and Jim McKay. The first order was to remove a closet that awkwardly interfered with furniture placement. This opened the master up significantly and added much needed light. An existing loft had nothing below it and that space was captured for a new master closet. Additional storage was added beneath the wall of windows.

There are quirky things about the house that challenged Swain and Braden. A room with no purpose stuck at the bottom of the staircase leading to the main living space was cleverly transformed into a children's playroom. When Braden couldn't find artwork to support a *Where the Wild Things Are* theme, she purchased the Maurice Sendak book, removed the pages, and framed them. The wall is now a lively romp through the well-loved book.

With the interior complete, Swain says he is ready to tackle the untamed landscape. Already there are excavators at work from Mathew's recently opened equipment renting business, Valkerie on Route 7.

The renovations began in April 2017 and when the family moved in a couple of months later, the kitchen still wasn't installed. Surrounded by unpacked boxes, an unfinished kitchen, and living in a new town was stressful so they turned it into an adventure by exploring Ridgefield and learning as much as they could about the town they now love. As Swain says, "You get to know pretty much every restaurant when you eat out every night." ■

