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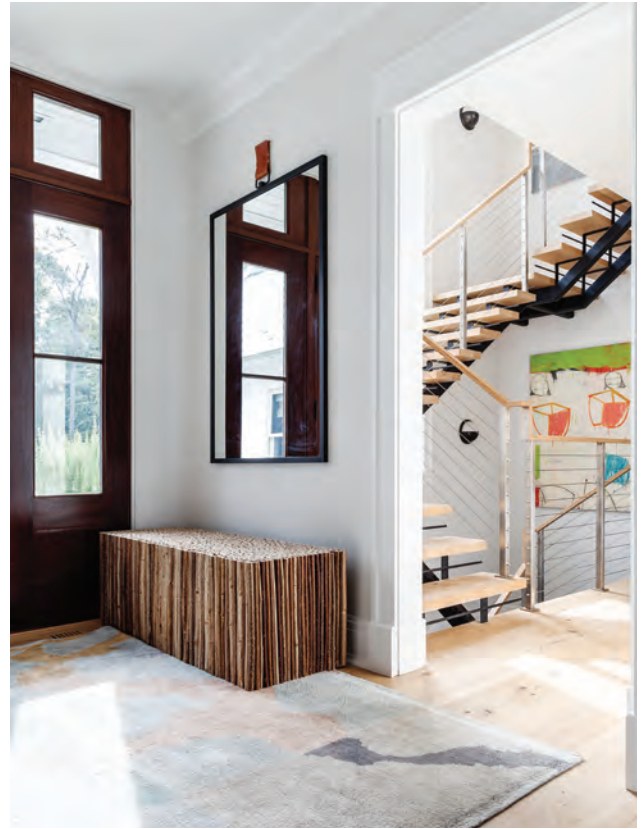
New Beginning

Amy Aidinis Hirsch Interior Design and Daniel Conlon Architects create a custom home that caters to a **FAMILY'S LIFESTYLE** and fulfills their **WISH LIST**

INTERVIEW WITH CHERYL HUFFMAN, HOMEOWNER | PHOTOGRAPHER AMY VISCHIO



this image: In the dining room, this chandelier was the first lighting option interior designer Amy Aidinis Hirsch showed the Huffmans. "At first, they thought it was too abstract. I showed them tons of lights thereafter, and in the end, they came back to this one, which was a lovely surprise. I think it makes the house." Embrace chairs from Suite NY sit at either end of the table, and Barnaby Lane's Tanner chairs in White line the sides.



right, top: "When you walk inside, you don't see the stairway; you *find* it. It's a space unto itself," says architect Dan Conlon. "The stairs are constructed of a self-supporting metal carriage with thick wood treads; it's contemporary materials and engineering with the warmth of the wood. The stairs also offer beautiful views of wetlands that the Huffmans restored with their landscape architect." Holland & Sherry's 100 percent silk Hinterland rug covers the floor. **right, bottom:** Most of the artwork seen throughout the home is from Diehl Gallery in Jackson, Wyoming.

Cheryl, what made you start fresh with this home? My husband Ted and I actually tore down our existing house and built this home on the same lot. We have nearly two acres close to town in Darien, and it's ideal for our three teenage sons and our younger daughter. While we really wanted to save our previous home, so many elements were inefficient—from the windows to the insulation to the materials—that it made the most sense to start over. We wanted to build more of a green home, and the overall goal of the new house was to promote an active, outdoor lifestyle for our family. We were making the transition from having small children to having older children, and focusing on simplicity.

How did you assemble your project team? Our neighbor had used Daniel Conlon Architects for a renovation project, and the working relationship was wonderful. Dan was remarkable—we explained to him how we wanted our home to feel and the way we wanted to live our life, and he

served it up in the first draft; it was incredible. The details he incorporated to make living everyday life easier were amazing. We then found Amy Aidinis Hirsch through Dan, and we worked very closely with her, too. Amy was phenomenal as well because, number one, she really listens; and number two, she takes your ideas and makes them a thousand times better. She communicates the feeling you wanted so much more than you ever anticipated.

What were some of your must-haves? One of our children is in college, and another will be going next year, so our family is actually shrinking. Knowing that, we didn't want the house to be too large. Not every bedroom has its own bathroom, and that was intentional. We would have enjoyed having more space in certain areas, especially with everyone living at home right now, but we were trying to be green and mindful of the future. I would also say the room we call the "adult room" was a must-





opposite page: Annie Sloan's Duck Egg Blue paint on the cabinetry was a driving force behind the kitchen. The doorway and the opening between the kitchen and dining room can both be conveniently closed when needed. "The pocket door is finished like the cabinetry, so it creates a solid paneled wall when closed," says Conlon. A Waterstone faucet from Torroco overlooks the backyard, and the cabinetry was built by JA Custom Woodwork. **above:** "I love the breakfast room, with Marthe Armitage's Jungle Birds wallpaper and that beautiful color on the mullions," says Hirsch. "We clad the ceiling with antique beams. The room wouldn't feel as warm and comfortable, or have the age it has, without that." The custom table and banquette are by Hirsch; the clay pottery is from Bungalow. **right:** The "business wall" of the kitchen, shared with the family room behind it, hides cooking activity from those watching TV. The Eddystone pendants are from Urban Electric.




have. When we began this project, our kids were at the age where our house was so active, and we wanted a place of peace for the adults. People laugh at us for calling it the adult room, but that really was a must-have, especially with the kids taking over every TV in the house!

What are some of the ways your home meets your desire for simplicity?

I can give you a few. There is an opening between the kitchen and the dining room, and when needed, that opening can be closed. A pocket door can also close off the doorway there, so you can be in the dining room and not see into the kitchen. The family room is also intentionally not open to the kitchen. The design of the family room is for community, so when you're in there, you're either visiting or watching TV, but you're not seeing the activity going on in the kitchen. I know that's counter to what many people do these days, but we really wanted to be either in the kitchen, cooking and spending time together, or in the family room, hanging out, and not have people spread out doing two different things in the same space. The family room sofa is a big U—it's literally the size of the entire room, and Amy had to push me on that! [*laughs*]*—*and we love it so much because with six people in our family, everyone has a great spot on it. And when we were talking about living simply, the adult room





opposite page, top: The family room ceiling is covered in Studio Moses's Diamond Cut wallpaper in Jade. "The family is in this room constantly, so why not show it off? Why not use something whimsical and energetic?" says Hirsch of the selection. A large, U-shaped Restoration Hardware sofa surrounds the room, and the concrete coffee table is a custom design by Hirsch. **opposite page, bottom:** The sconces are Gwenwood Wall lights by Urban Electric, and a mohair Moroccan rug from J.D. Staron is underfoot. **this page:** An Uma side table from Arteriors sits in front of a striking tree-like light, one of many tactile elements in the home.



left: Seated in front of a buffalo painting by Douglas Schneider, a Penelope sofa from Verellen is upholstered in Pollack's King Mohair in Peacock for the exterior body and C&C Milano's Ernesto woven fabric in Lake for the channelled cushion. In this living room, "nothing competes, and that allows the most important moments to speak for themselves," says Hirsch. "For instance, you don't notice that the buffalo artwork is there until you're physically in the room; you have to engage with the space to really understand the magnitude of it." **below:** The walnut and dovetail custom built-in by JA Custom Woodwork was designed by Hirsch. The wing chair fabric is a Nobilis deconstructed linen. **opposite page:** The orange vinyl artwork in the entry is by Derrick Velasquez through Nelson Macker Fine Art.





was a place we could go for some quiet. It's almost like a separate cabin for entertaining, and it has a historic feel with the large posts and beams from a 200-year-old barn in Pennsylvania.

How does your home encourage you to be outside? From the front door, you can see all the way through to the backyard. Along the back of the house, several sets of French doors provide opportunities to step outside. The breakfast room “juts” out into the backyard, with glass on two sides and this beautiful wallpaper with birds and butterflies, and it brings the outdoors in. There are also so many windows in the house—for example, the adult room is connected by a bar to the rest of the house, and across from the bar is this large, floor-to-ceiling storefront window. It's like a wall of glass, and the stair hall has the same feel. Everywhere you look, you're encouraged to be outside.

Tell me about the color you used for the kitchen. I loved that Duck Egg Blue color so much—it's an Annie Sloan paint, and it was also a must-

have. Real estate agents told me, “Everybody wants a white kitchen.” But I said, “I'm not building it to sell it; I'm building it to enjoy and live in.” A lot of designers would talk you out of that color, but Amy said, “I think we can really work with that.” When it went in, I was unsure at first and thought, *Ooh, that's really blue*, but Amy gave it life. The color went into the breakfast room, into the family room on the ceiling; she did a phenomenal job of tying it all together. The family room ceiling was one of Amy's “trust me” moments during the project—when she first suggested the wallpaper, I said, “I'm not doing that!” But Amy said, “Out of all of this, this is my ‘trust me’ moment.” From the minute it went up, it was exactly what we wanted. Everyone is blown away by how beautiful that ceiling is and the way in which it connects to the reclaimed wood ceiling in the breakfast room.

What drew you to mix rustic touches with more modern elements? I'm from Kansas, and Ted is from Arkansas. We wanted a modern home that illustrated the simple, active lifestyle we were after, but we also wanted the house to feel warm, not sterile, and we felt the wood really warmed it up.



“When you walk inside, there’s a collected, softer approach with the **TACTILE** selections we made. You might expect to see a white kitchen, but it’s not—it’s this really soft, **LUSCIOUS COLOR**. The artwork is stunning, and their **ANTIQUÉ PIECES** are a nod to their past and a way to bring in things that felt not-so-new. All of these elements are **SOMEWHAT UNEXPECTED** behind the door.”

—AMY AIDINIS HIRSCH



top left: A bar, facing a large storefront window, leads into the “adult room.” A Burton James Orion sofa through Schwartz Design Showroom is covered in Fox Linton’s Albemarle fabric in Charcoal. **near left:** “The adult room is a separate volume pulled forward from the house, with its own fireplace and antique beams,” says Conlon. “It’s at the quiet end of the house, all by itself, and it’s a little sanctuary. The Huffmans have a house full of teenagers, so it’s a good thing to have!” The window treatments are crafted from TylerGraphic’s Snakeskin fabric in Azure, and the shiplap and trim are painted in Farrow & Ball’s Studio Green. **right:** In one corner, CR Laine’s Brantley armchair in de Le Cuona’s Warrior Cloth fabric in Jungle cozies up to the fireplace.





above: "This bar is a real jewel, partially by our layout and partially by Amy's work with the wallcovering and finishes," says Conlon. The de Gournay hand-painted Fishes wallpaper in Blue Pearl on Lead Grey dyed silk with pearlescent antiquing was originally slated for the dining room but was moved to the bar to great effect. "The movement of the fish, how they travel from one space to another, leads you down this path," says Hirsch. Farrow & Ball's Inchyra Blue, applied to the cabinetry in a car finish, plays off of the cabinetry color in the kitchen and provides a transition into the moodier adult room. "Everything has this intensity of color, but it's all from the same part of the deck," says Hirsch.

Did you incorporate any of your existing furniture? We didn't start completely from scratch—we wove in a lot of older pieces, but we modernized them, whether by reupholstering them in a new fabric or changing up the cushion a bit. Ted's parents had a house filled with Southern antiques, and we incorporated a few of them. A lot of the pieces we have are from his mother. For instance, in the living room, the chest in the corner and the coffee table were his mother's. In the adult room, the tall secretary came from his family. We also re-covered some of the upholstered pieces, such as the wing chairs from his family that are in the living room.

In pre-Covid times, did you entertain a lot in your dining room? We did, and the sad thing is our house was finished right when we had to stop entertaining! The table is super long, and we love the size of it; it can

always hold an extra person or two. Amy sourced the table from Fallen Industry, and we love the story behind it. When there's a big storm and huge, 100-year-old trees fall down, this company removes the trees and slices them up. You then choose your slab, and they create the table. It's a live-edge table that is truly reclaimed, and it goes with the theme of the house, keeping it organic and green. This particular tree had been hit by lightning, and the crevices were filled in with resin, so you can see down to the floor in certain parts. And the chandelier above is so perfect for the space—the first thing anyone says when they come into the house is how much they love the chandelier.

Tell me about the artwork—you have some really great pieces. Our art consultant was Mariam Diehl of Diehl Gallery in Jackson, Wyoming. She consulted on most of the art in the home, and it came from her

“Everything in the house has a true meaning and **CONNECTION** to the family, whether it was from their past or due to an **APPRECIATION** for the artisan. ”

—AMY AIDINIS HIRSCH



this page: In the Huffmans' bedroom, painted Benjamin Moore's Van Courtland Blue, their existing black iron canopy bed is flanked by perfectly scaled nightstands. "We created these beautiful bleached walnut nightstands," says Hirsch. "We continued the walnut from downstairs up here, but we stripped it. It's the same language with the material but used in a different way." The settee, which has been in Ted Huffman's family for generations, was updated with new fabric, and a Hunt Slonem piece from Diehl Gallery presides over it. A Bandelier armchair from Safavieh is seated at the desk.



above: "What's really pretty about the Huffmans' bath is the floor tile, which looks like an old Turkish tile," says Hirsch of the Elyse Teal #28 tile from Greenwich Tile & Marble. "We brought up that color from downstairs, so that common thread traveled. The bathroom is very simple in many ways, but the tile makes such a statement." Watt sconces from Waterworks illuminate the vanity, and the couple's existing needlepoint antique slipper chair is an elegant perch next to Penhaglion's The Wokingham 68 cast iron French bateau tub in polished stainless steel.





this spread: In the rear of the house, a screened-in porch, with both seating and dining areas, connects to the outdoor living spaces and beyond. “What’s great about a space like this is that when you’re entertaining, you don’t have to go anywhere,” says Hirsch. “You can travel back and forth between the porch and the outdoor seating area. It doesn’t have just one purpose.” Says Conlon, “An indoor/outdoor flow was a constant goal from the beginning, and it all extends out to the beautiful landscape, pool and pool house.” The Restoration Hardware Havana sofa in Chalk features back cushions reupholstered in Pindler’s Noland fabric in Grotto and is topped with a pillow in Peter Dunham’s punchy Bukhara fabric in Blue/Green. Restoration Hardware’s Havana classic swivel lounge chair in Chalk offers additional seating, and the family enjoys a meal around Gloster’s Raw split dining table whenever the weather permits.

gallery, including the sculptures in the adult room. We did it all virtually, and each piece was chosen for the location that it’s in. It’s a wonderful collection with some newer artists and some more established ones. The more modern staircase Dan designed is almost like a gallery as you go up and down, so it was intentional that the stair hall be a separate space. The buffalo painting by Douglas Schneider in the living room was part of our existing collection, and we had gotten it from Mariam about nine years ago. Dan created the nook for it, and Amy designed the cabinetry. The book-matched walnut panel behind it was designed to best showcase the painting itself; that area was built for that piece of art. It all flows and connects, and it was built by this amazing carpenter. Mariam really pushed me on the art in a lot of ways, and she was such a pleasure to work with. We didn’t view the art so much as an investment, but more as pieces we truly loved and would appreciate on a daily basis.

Your bedroom suite looks so calming and peaceful. It’s just a wonderful, relaxing space. The iron bed was a wedding present from Ted’s family. It’s fairly large and high, so Amy designed the nightstands to be a bit larger so they would be the right height. Ted doesn’t have his own office in the house, so after he took over my office downstairs due to Covid,

we added a desk in here for me. The Hunt Slonem, sourced by Mariam, is such a happy painting and fun to wake up to every day. The sofa underneath the Hunt Slonem has been in Ted’s family for 100 years—we took off the English chintz and re-covered it in a very modern way, yet you still enjoy the antique aspect of the piece; it’s lovely. Everything isn’t all sterile and new, as if you could go buy it all; each piece in the house was thought out.

How does your home make you feel? It’s welcoming, and it gives me a sense of family. And the simplicity of it—there is a lot going on, but not in a busy sense. A lot of thought went into every piece of furniture and every piece of art, and it’s so meaningful to us. It’s such a change from the way we lived before—we’re in a new phase of life.

—INTERVIEW BY LAUREN FETTERMAN

Resources:

Interior designer: Amy Aidinis Hirsch Interior Design, Greenwich; 203-661-1266; amyhirsch.com
 Architect: Daniel Conlon Architects, Wilton; 203-544-7988; dconlonarchitects.com
 Builder: Paul Lima, L&L Builders; 203-794-1311

