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SHELF LIFE
FALL INSPIRATION

Leslie Cohen



With a nod to the historic village of Southport, the designer infuses a 1980s farmhouse with a **CLEAN AND MODERN** aesthetic that still boasts a **TRADITIONAL** side

INTERVIEW WITH LESLIE COHEN, LESLIE COHEN INTERIORS | PHOTOGRAPHER AMY VISCHIO



above: To add interest in the newly opened-up family room, Cohen added decorative beams to the existing vaulted ceiling and painted the windows black. A nude bronze sculpture by Patricia Pickman Udell rests on the coffee table. **right:** Cohen in her foyer. The stair rails are painted in Farrow & Ball's Strong White in high lacquer.



DESIGNERS' OWN HOMES ISSUE

You've lived in this house a little over a year. What drew you to it? This is a 1980s home modeled after an original few-hundred-years-old farmhouse, and it was quite beautiful and very traditional. It was modeled to fit within the village of Southport, which my partner and I loved, and it was off the beaten path a little bit. The homes are all old, and I love old homes. I walked inside and thought, "This could be great!"

Was a renovation in order? Yes—we spent four months renovating the house, which wasn't very long, and it looks completely different now. My goal was to keep the bones, and I was on a strict budget. I didn't gut walls or anything like that; I kept a lot of original elements that were done very nicely. It wasn't all my style, and if I had had a bigger budget, I probably would have done more, but I think it was a great experience for me to hold back on things, to not overspend or go crazy.





this spread: The original L-shaped kitchen was transformed into a chic yet functional one with no upper cabinetry. RW Guild NYC brass light fixtures hang above the long, narrow island, and the teak counter stools are from Bungalow in Westport. Oak-and-leather Mogens Koch dining chairs from Carl Hansen line the table in the breakfast nook.







above: The kitchen and adjacent family room were completely gutted, and a wall separating the two rooms was removed to create one light-filled space. Cohen kept the home's original old pine floors but sanded them and changed the color and finish. The floor refinishing is by Green Wood Guys. **opposite:** The butler's pantry, where Cohen cuts her flowers, has a French feel and more traditional-leaning cabinets. The custom cabinetry throughout the home was designed by Cohen and built by Sterling Custom Cabinetry.





this spread: The spacious dining room, furnished with vintage iron-and-leather dining chairs, exudes a bit of a darker vibe yet feels cohesive with the rest of the house.







above: In the living room—one of two sitting rooms sited in the front of the house—a Jacques Guillon Cord chair sits beneath a Jean-Marc Louis painting. **opposite, top:** On the left of the sofa, a vintage metal lamp is paired with a metal table designed by Lukas Machnik for Michael Del Piero. The custom coffee table was crafted from old plank doors, and the white terracotta sculpture on top is by Michele Raymond. **opposite, bottom center:** The powder room, which relates back to the dining room with its color and depth, has a clean-lined custom concrete vanity from the Concrete Shop.

So what changes did you make? The house hadn't been touched since it was built. It was pretty compartmentalized, like a lot of old homes are, but the one place we did open up was the kitchen and family room. I added some structural beams and other beams, and I gutted the bathrooms but kept everything in place. I didn't change the actual layout of the house except for the kitchen and family room, and the room sizes all stayed the same. I replaced the windows and the back doors and things like that. I also liked that the ceilings were nine feet high, which you wouldn't typically find in an old house, and the home feels fresh and new because of the ceiling height. We lived in one bedroom for four months with an old bathroom and no kitchen, but it was actually nice because you realize you really don't need that much!

What else did you keep from the original home? We kept the floors—they were old, old pine, and we sanded them and changed the color and

finish. Some of the rooms had paneling colors and doors that we painted, but the doors themselves didn't change. Everything was very clean and simple. The moldings were nice, so I didn't have to touch them, which was wonderful.

Did anything in particular launch the aesthetic you were after? No—when I walked into the house, I had an instant visual of what the house could be that appealed to my aesthetic, which is more clean and modern. It's always a feeling for me, an intuition, and it's not that it was so creative. I just knew immediately, for example, that I didn't want light floors. I wanted this house to feel like it belonged in this area, that it would feel historical (even though it wasn't), that it was a modern version of what a Southport village home would be. The kitchen and butler's pantry feel modern, but some elements are more traditional, like using more brass and French marble and marble that is busier and fun. The bathrooms are very

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—LESLIE COHEN



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this spread: For the front sitting room—which was originally covered in dark brown wood paneling—Cohen painted the bookcases white and the inside of the fireplace black. A glass turquoise Bell side table by ClassiCon sits on one side of the sofa, while a Lindsey Adelman standing light fixture sits on the other. A pair of vintage 1960s Italian chairs in white shearling flank the fireplace.

modern, yet all but the master have wood floors. Knowing what I wanted to do with the house was a fairly quick process. I decided to go with some darker brass, brighter brass and darker elements. There are things I would have done that would have been more modern, but they would have been over the top for what I needed to do here. The big thing was keeping it on the traditional side yet still making it modern. I used some plasters and a lot of concrete in the bathrooms, elements I felt were clean and simple. I always do my homes in a way that feels timeless, like anyone could live there. I have yet to do my super-modern home, but I will some day!

How did you choose your furnishings and colors? My homes are always pretty serene. But I am a recycler, a collector. I love to collect beautiful things, and I always hope to keep reusing them. In every home I've had—and there have been quite a few—I take pieces and either put them in a different place or change the fabric. I'm very passionate about buying the right pieces and using them over and over, and then filling in with some new pieces. Color-wise, I actually do like color, but I tend to go more neutral—it's just quieter for me—with some pops here and there.

Did any new pieces make it into the design? I did buy a few things, maybe a sofa or some chairs that I found. I do love the hunt; it's so much fun. I have a lot of things that I started out with. A lot of pieces I'll sell, or a client will buy, and then I'll buy something new that will change up the feeling of the house. I have a lot of pieces from my mom, and my children

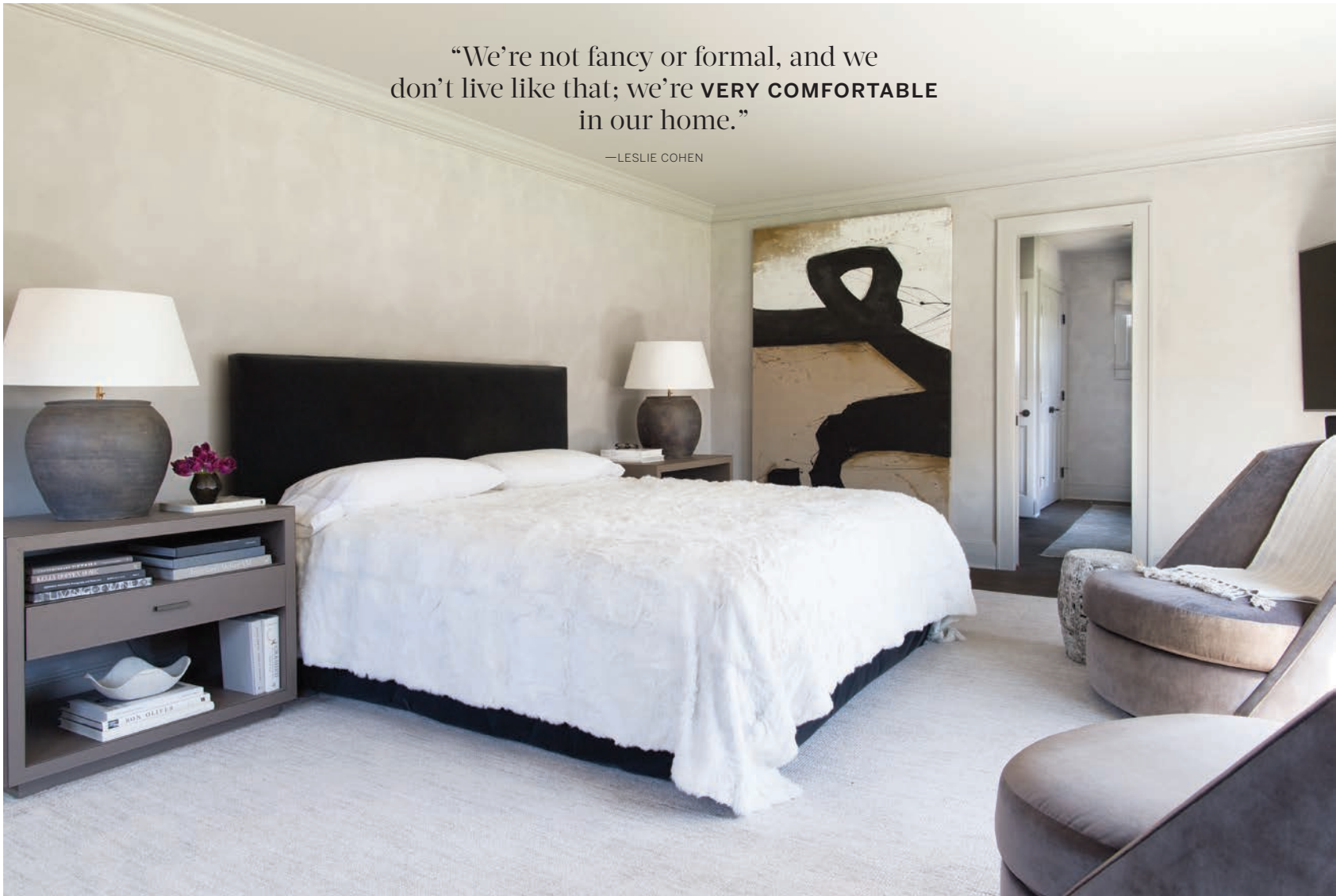
have some of her things in their homes as well. I definitely added new pieces here and there, but very few.

Your new kitchen is beautiful—do you spend a lot of time there? I love cooking, and although I don't cook as much because my kids are out of the house, I always know in my mind how the kitchen will function. This was a trickier kitchen in a way, and it's not a huge working space, but it turned out really functional. The kitchen is about ten feet long, so I wanted a long, narrow island because I work at it, eat at it, live at it. The backyard is quite pretty, and we're right by the water and get beautiful sunlight. There were old 1980s sliders in the back, so I put in really tall doors. Everyone just loves to spend time in the kitchen and family room. We're not fancy or formal, and we don't live like that; we're very comfortable in our home. The rooms may look like they're not lived in enough, but they are.

So how did you transform the family room? There was a wall separating the family room and the kitchen, and a tiny doorway led from one room to the other. The biggest change was opening up this space, and it came out great; my builder was fantastic. The wood beams were there, and I just encased them in old wood. The ceiling was already vaulted but I took off the existing trim, and I kept the existing windows. I put decorative beams in the ceiling for interest, and we put a few beams in the kitchen to make that feel good. I added black sashes on the windows because white wasn't pulling me in. I wanted this area to feel a little more fun, and you can

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above: The master suite benefits from beautiful water views from the bed. A very soft plaster wraps the walls, and custom Italian leather nightstands are topped with metal lamps from Bungalow. **opposite:** A high marble backsplash, traditional wall faucets and a black marble herringbone floor are just some of the compelling elements of the master bath. A painting by Meighan Morrison presides over the tub.

actually see through the windows better. I love it when you’re at the front door, and you can see down into this space.

Your dining room has a moodier feel than the others. I actually don’t like dining rooms, and this is a big one, and I had to think about what to do in here. I wanted a really sexy space where I could either work or dine intimately with friends. It feels a bit different than the other rooms yet is still cohesive with the rest of the house.

I see you have two sitting rooms. How did you design these? From

the front door, the first room is the one with the bookcases. It had dark wood paneling, and though it was quite nice, it wasn’t my style. Without spending a lot of money, I painted the bookcases white and the inside of the fireplace black. It’s our reading room—it’s really cozy, and there’s no TV. Since it’s at the front of the house, we love reading in here and watching people walk by. I’m not big on window treatments, and I enjoy the room without them. The other sitting room connects to the family room and kitchen, so we’ll end up in there sometimes, too. It’s more of a formal living room. Since the house has a formality to it, it was important to me to make it feel informal, like you could sit anywhere in the house.





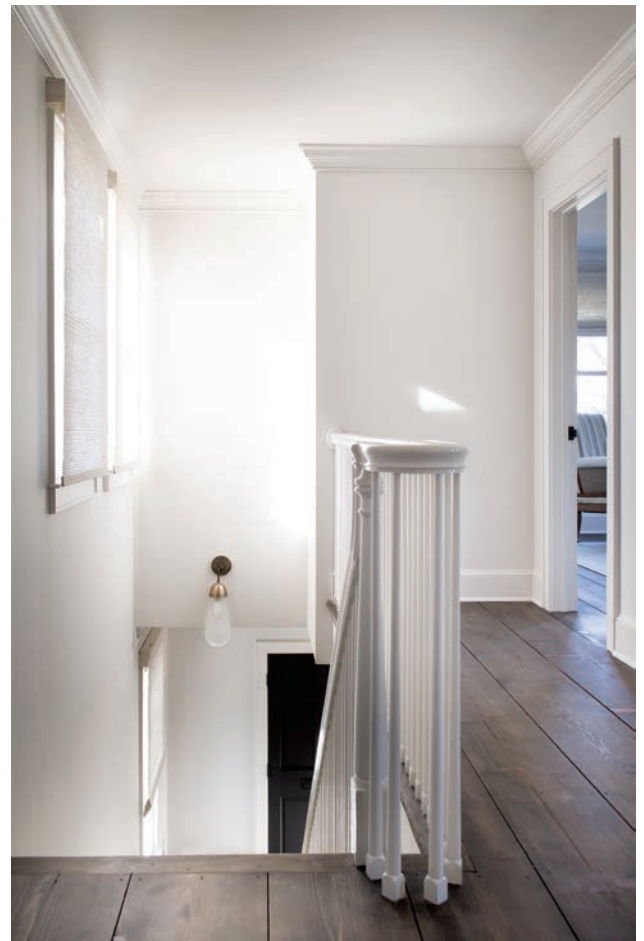
opposite: This en-suite guest bedroom, one of three in the home, is casual, earthy and carefully edited. Cohen updated all of the guest baths to achieve a more modern look and put in high backsplashes and wall faucets. **right:** The designer's personal office and workspace on the second floor was created from part of an existing study.

How did you redo the master suite to fit your needs? The biggest issue was that there were no master closets—just a little hallway with four tiny, narrow closets—so I turned the old laundry room into the master closet. This really updated the house because now we have the four closets plus the big one. We kept the bath simple and used old marble to give the vanity a traditional edge. The bath isn't fancy, and it still feels pretty earthy. The tub was a must—my partner loves taking his baths! *[laughs]* I also kept the marble up high on all of the bathroom backsplashes, and I wanted all wall faucets because they remind me of the old days.

Are the three other bedrooms for your kids when they visit? That's exactly what they're for! For some reason, I keep thinking my kids are coming home. *[laughs]* I wanted the bedrooms to feel casual, and I love buying textiles and throwing them on the beds or using them in other ways. I don't like an overly decorated house, so the rooms are quite sparse, and they relate to each other. They're all en-suite, which was another thing the house had that was really nice.

What can you tell me about the artwork? I bought a couple of pieces from Meighan Morrison. I don't usually buy more than one piece from an artist, but she's great, and I like to support local people. Some of the other pieces are from Europe, and some are from my mom when she passed away—she curated a lot of nice, modern art. It's a mix of what I had before and what just works. I'm really starting to get into art seriously for the first time.

How does this house differ from your previous ones? Each one of my homes has been very different, but this is more of a family home—not more than my first house, but definitely more than my last few. It's more compartmentalized, and it feels more like an older home with an incredible sense of old and new, like with the beautiful old staircase and beautiful old floors mixed with this airy, modern feel. The neighborhood is quieter, and it's very communal and friendly.





this spread: With complementary looks, the other two guest bedrooms relate to the first thanks to soothing textures and lush textiles. All of the baths except for the master have wood floors and concrete sinks for a rustic touch.

What is it like, designing your own home? I started doing this when I got divorced. I bought my first house and did my first renovation, and it became my career and a great passion of mine. I especially love taking older homes and changing them up. There's something fun about taking a space that's not quite right and making it better rather than starting from scratch. This house was on the market for a long time, and though a lot of people liked it, they didn't know what to do with it

or knew they'd have to update it, which people don't always want to do anymore. But I absolutely love this home. It feels peaceful; it feels good.

—INTERVIEW BY LAUREN FETTERMAN

Resources:

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Builder: Tony Ialleggio, 203-981-3200

