



PHOTO BY CHERYL RICHARDS

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NEW ENGLAND MODERN

CONRY



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photography by MICHAEL J. LEE

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FEATURING 10 OF NEW ENGLAND'S TOP INTERIOR DESIGNERS

The past is everywhere in New England, especially in the architecture. Surrounded by all this history, is it challenging to create forward-thinking interior spaces? For a long time that was the case. But not anymore.

Residents now want their interiors to exude an innovative, worldly flair. They want their spaces to embody progress and technology, to exude a cosmopolitan spirit. Big sideboards and heavy chairs have been swapped out for elements that resonate with a cleaner décor. Formal rooms have been obviated with open floor plans. Punches of unexpected color, bold patterns, and layers of textural elements abound. While New Englanders previously clung to style selections that were safe and understated, interiors now feature dramatic elements, reflecting a curated mix of furnishings, modern assemblages of leather, glass, and steel, and other statement-making contrasting materials.

*New England Modern* highlights interiors created by ten New England designers that are bold and vibrant, with a modern feel and flow just right for today's homeowners.



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**LEFT:** The living room has a sectional designed by Georgantas that slides neatly underneath the windows. She also designed slim leather chairs, which can be easily shifted around the room. "I wanted the sofa to take up half the room and leave the rest of the space more flexible," she says. **ABOVE:** Just inside the front door, a floating glass table serves as a display area, as well as a spot to stash essentials in a pinch.



## Introduction

I grew up in a rambling white Greek Revival home built in the 1840s. Constructed for a sea captain-turned-farmer, additions were made to the back of the house as his family expanded and the farm grew. Early on, a sprawling barn was built out back. Apple and pear trees took root in the front yard, and two horse chestnut trees were planted, which would one day reach epic heights, blossoming each May with brilliant clusters of showy white flowers.

By the time my parents bought the house in the 1980s, ill-conceived renovations and cosmetic updates that clashed with the architecture had distorted some of its original character. But my parents saw past the drop ceilings, garish kitchen finishes, and fake wood-paneled walls. They'd been entranced by the house and couldn't imagine a place with more iconic New England appeal. Clad with clapboards and topped with a red cedar shingled roof, the stately black-shuttered, seven-gabled structure stood proud. The front porch beckoned to my parents with its sky blue painted ceiling and hand-carved scrollwork; they envisioned themselves lounging there on wicker furniture, reading the Sunday newspapers, sipping coffee, and taking in the neighborhood activity.

I was five when we moved in. It took my parents nearly a decade to restore and renovate the home, a process in which every room in the house was eventually transformed. An attorney with a passion for carpentry, my father spent his weekends working on the house. He patched, plastered, and painted walls, and stripped, sanded, and stained the wide plank pine floors. He built a new hallway, removed the living room's drop ceiling to reveal hand-hewn beams, and unearthed fireplaces that had been plastered over. While professionals did the major renovations, including the kitchen's dramatic over-

haul, my dad's most ambitious solo project was bringing a bedroom (which had been haphazardly transformed into a bathroom in the 1960s) back to its original incarnation. The weekend he maneuvered the old cast-iron tub down the front stairway, my mother opted to be out of town to preserve her sanity.

To be sure, fixing up that house was a labor of love. We lived constantly in a work in progress—there were months when there seemed to be a layer of dust on every single surface. But after each project's completion, the house gleamed a little brighter and my family's connection to it grew deeper.

Back then, I learned that houses have stories to tell. On our property, I found the edges and corners of the past: old coins, antique buttons, and yellowed newspapers from the early 1900s. Further evidence of the different lives led in our house came with the layers of frayed wallpaper and peeling paint, nicks in the moldings, and scratches on the leaded glass windows.

Watching my parents put their mark on our house instilled in me the notion that our homes are everything to us. Far more than just spots to converge and rooms to store our things, our homes hold our hearts. They protect and restore us.

Growing up, my dad taught me to recognize distinctive architectural details and how to spot shoddy construction. I acquired practical skills by observing him in his workshop out in the barn. As a nine-year-old, he let me strip paint off of some of those old doors, educating me about different types of wood grains. For some reason, I soaked up his home design insights far more easily than the math homework he tried to help me with at the kitchen table.



## Rachel Reider

On a trip to Thailand with her mother when she was in her mid-twenties, Rachel Reider was entranced by the region's handwoven textiles. "I loved the silks and the exotic cotton fabrics," recalls Reider, who was working in advertising at the time. "My mom recommended that I take a course in interior design when we got home." After a couple of classes in the continuing education course, Reider was hooked. She quit her job, enrolled in design school, and the rest is history.

Reider has run her own Boston interior design firm since 2006. In the beginning, she says that the design schemes she was creating were considered bold and cutting edge. Looking back on her early work, however, she feels her designs then were so much more reserved than her present work. "My natural inclination is toward color, but back then I was apprehensive about using it because interior design here was ultratraditional. People were so restrained with the elements they were comfortable bringing into their homes so, as a designer, you had to tread lightly."

While it hasn't done a complete 180-degree transformation, Reider is grateful New England's design atmosphere has considerably evolved. Her clients now seek spaces that "are soft modern and transitional. People are interested in having their homes accommodate their active lives, and contemporary family living plays a big role in many projects," she says, noting that native New Englanders tend to be most comfortable with houses that feature traditional architectural styles iconic to the region. "But they aren't comfortable with an interior that has the swag and colors they grew up with."

Reider's clients tend to have clarity about the aspects they don't want incorporated into their interiors, but are less clear about what they do want. "It's an exercise in understanding how much they want to be pushed. Often, we'll start with a versatile foundation and layer in color and pattern on smaller upholstered pieces," she says. "This way, by adding and subtracting layers, a room can be completely revived."

## Suburban Sophisticate

Moving to the suburbs from the city, the homeowners of this spacious home designed by Patrick Ahearn, an architect lauded for creating historically-motivated residences, strove to interject an urban experience into the interior. Reider was tasked with honoring the structure's timeless architectural detailing while infusing rooms with modern flair. "A young family lives here and they love color, so we wanted the house to have a youthful, informal mood while still feeling somewhat sophisticated," says Reider, who wove a palette centered on shades of blue and purple throughout the home.

The pairing of classic and modern elements is apparent in the office, where Reider painted the mahogany millwork and ceiling a vivid blue green. "The room was too dark and very traditional before," says Reider, who had a chair upholstered in a contemporary plaid featuring yellow, turquoise, and pink stripes. "We tend to think of plaids as being traditional English country style, but the bright coloring and the exaggerated scale of this pattern feels modern."

The blue and lavender tones in the dining room were pulled from the abstract painting that previously hung in the family's former home. While the wainscoting has a formal nature, the blue-metallic grass cloth wall covering is very of-the-moment. Similarly, the juxtaposition of brass and acrylic in the chandelier "makes the fixture feel very traditional-meets-modern," says Reider. The chairs look luxurious, but they are upholstered in stain-resistant

fabric, a necessity given the fact that kids' pizza parties have been known to take place in the space.

There's nothing too precious in the living room either. Curved elements, including the sofa, exude a soft appeal, and the wave-form of the alpaca wall covering has beautiful, natural variation. "The room seems very colorful. Yet when you pull back the layers, you'll notice that the foundation of the space—the rug, the buffet, the wallpaper—is neutral. Color is achieved mostly through secondary pieces," says Reider.

In the kitchen, where there is abundant white woodwork, Reider called for the island base to be painted blue and had the backsplash clad with miniature navy subway tile. "It's handmade, so there is a lot of textural variation," says Reider, noting that the Urban Electric pendant lights are rimmed with a band of navy blue that matches the tile.

There's more navy blue upstairs in the master bathroom, where the vanity proudly showcases the hue. The floor is made of a graphic-patterned Kelly Wearstler-designed tile, a shape that is mimicked in the drawer hardware. "In homes like this, you're constantly thinking about how to bridge the classic lines of the architecture and the interiors without following a traditional path, while still maintaining a cohesiveness between the two," says Reider. Here, while the mirrors and sconces have softer, updated curves, their shapes are traditionally inspired.

The homeowners' collection of glass vessels by artist Elizabeth Lyons on the dining room table is an ideal accent for the scheme of the room.



The Beacon Hill fabric on the den's Roman shades adds bursts of vibrant green and pink, colors reflected in more sedate tones throughout the room.

