

STEPHEN FOUND A SETTEE and ottoman large enough to seat both Jean and Eric comfortably.



See how Stephen's cottage makeover gave a Connecticut violinist and her son the private spaces they craved



“We had four days to turn two boring rooms into the heart of the house”

EVERY TIME I DESIGN A ROOM, I look for one object to inspire and guide me. At a Connecticut cottage, the inspiration came from a turn-of-the-century family portrait that had great significance for the homeowner. The elegant painting of her grandmother and great-grandmother had been passed down through generations, finally making its way to her. One of my challenges was to integrate this treasure into the home of a modern-day mom.

Jean, the young single mother of 5-year-old Eric, had just bought their first house. The >

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AFTER

INSTEAD OF USING a matching table and four-chair set, Stephen filled Eric's room with a combination of wooden chairs and benches. Eric uses them with his friends, and Jean can rearrange the furniture when she's entertaining a crowd.

ERIC'S WOODEN DRAFTING table (right) has a hinged top and storage for paints, markers, and papers under the drawing surface.



NEW STORAGE CUBBIES TOOK THE PLACE of corner cabinets that Jean wasn't wild about in the dining room. The new shelves hold baskets for Eric's toys.



BEFORE

1940s Cape Cod had good bones, great charm, and two rooms on the first floor for me to tackle: a large living room on the right side of the house and a smaller dining room across the center hall. Jean wanted to use the large room as a private getaway and a studio space for her violin students. She hoped I could turn the nearby dining room into a versatile haven for Eric and his pals. If I could provide mother and son with their own comfortable retreats, we'd all be happy.

TRANSFORMING THE LIVING ROOM Jean wanted to hang the family portrait in the living room, so we started there. My team and I had just four days to turn this project around, and our work was cut out for us.

The rectangular room was bland and basic. Since the core color from the painting was a deep red, I decided to use that for the walls. But they cried out for something >

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AFTER



STEPHEN LEFT THE EXISTING mantelpiece but gave it more prominence with new trim and molding on the fireplace surround. He used two tiny lamps to hide wall vents that bring additional heat from the firebox.



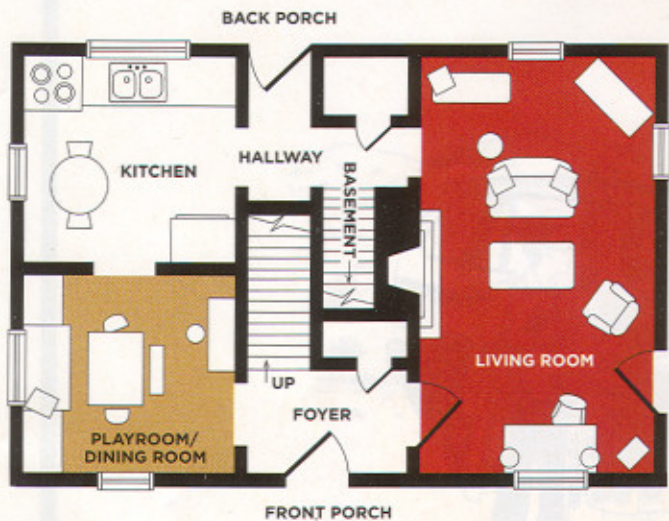
BEFORE

JEAN USES THE reproduction desk at the front window for paying bills and working on the computer. The upholstered chair nearby is her favorite spot for reading. Stephen added picture-frame moldings to the walls to give the room a historic feel.

special, some character. We decided to add picture frame molding in distinctive square sections, painted the same red color of the walls. The new architecture created amazing depth in the room without a big price tag. We then added painted white molding and trim to the simple brick fireplace. Once this was done, the room had a touch of elegance that was perfect for the portrait, yet still cozy and understated.

CREATING A HAVEN FOR ERIC Across the hall, Jean hoped I could transform the traditional dining room into an eating area and a creative space for Eric. They obviously needed a table and chairs but also required ample storage for toys and books. With that in mind, I designed an inviting window seat flanked by simple shelves for basket storage. We also found a table that expands with a hidden leaf for parties or projects that require extra table space.

On the opposite wall, we created a child's drafting table made from wood picked up at a local home center. (I modeled Eric's on one that I had as a kid.) Unfinished pine makes up the table and legs, and we hinged the top so Eric has plenty of space for storage. Once the table was attached to the wall, we painted it white for a clean, fresh look. I wasn't fond of the outdated wallpaper border that ran across the top of the old >



dining room, but it was virtually laminated to the original plaster wall. Instead of removing the border, we covered it with thin sheets of plywood and set off this new accent with a piece of trim just below. Painted white, it looks like expensive crown molding that encircles the room and contrasts with the warm sand color on the walls.

Now, both mother and son have their own spaces. When I brought them into the rooms for the first time, I stood back and watched their reactions. Jean was very emotional as she walked through the red room and saw her family portrait in place. Eric instantly made himself at home on his new window seat in the old dining room.

Just as I left, I heard Eric say to his mother, "This is real. This is my home." It doesn't get much better than that. ■

Simple ways to create a versatile playroom



- Use nontraditional seating and mix it up. Here I offer a window seat, chairs, and a bench for a comfortable and casual setting that's coordinated.
- Add quick and easy artwork. My wife's a talented photographer, and I needed something to fill space here. She stopped by with her camera and did a mini-photo shoot with Eric. With a black cloth as a backdrop and his face in natural light, the results look high-end. I printed the pictures on my regular printer and framed them.
- Try draperies when there's an area you want to shield from guests. I purchased store-bought draperies for the windows and bought an extra pair for the kitchen door. This balances the room and draws attention away from the kitchen.



JEAN INHERITED the large oil portrait in the living room from her grandmother.

5 Easy Ways To Liven Up a Living Room

- Add picture frame moldings. Transform walls dramatically and inexpensively with trim pieces from your local home center. Paint the trim and walls the same color (like the red shown here) and you'll instantly create a sense of depth in the space.
- Embrace bold colors. Behr Paint's "Red Red Wine" perfectly suited this living room. When you paint a wall a deep color, always remember to use a tinted primer first—it will cut down on finish coats you'll need to apply later.
- Mix fabrics, textures, and patterns for a lived-in look. To create this romantic space, I chose deep, rich colors and different fabrics for the draperies, the settee, and the side chair.
- Create a workspace. Make a vintage-looking desk into a home for modern devices. The piece shown on page 62 fits in a period setting and accommodates Jean's phone and laptop.
- Create inviting gathering areas. Try moving your furniture away from the walls and closer together. I placed the settee and oversize ottoman in the center of the room, allowing guests and family to move around freely.

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