

DOUBLE-DUTY DINING

A seldom-used dining room is now a daily go-to place for gathering, relaxing, study time and more



before

Furnishings reflect a modern sensibility in a mix of styles and textures. Existing moldings shown in the “before” photo were removed. Hardwood floors were stained dark to blend with the new bookcase and millwork.



A comfy wing chair and ottoman — covered in gray leather with oversized nail-head trim — occupies a quiet reading corner. Walls, upholstered in a horizontally pleated gray silk fabric, “provide a luxurious look and sound absorbency,” designer Jo Ann Alston says.

A DESIGNATED DINING ROOM MAY BE A THING OF THE DECORATING PAST.

At least it was for one Warren family who used theirs only on holidays and other rare occasions. Most days it filled in as a landing area for toys and other paraphernalia.

Designer Jo Ann Alston addressed the family’s needs for the dining room, as she did in other areas of the home. “The main goal was to capitalize on the room’s underused space so it could be used on a day-to-day basis yet still operate as a dining room on special occa-

sions,” says Alston, a state-certified interior designer, allied member of the American Society of Interior Designers and principal of J. Stephens Interiors in Far Hills. Her clients—two doctors with preteen children—were looking to create a sanctuary with Asian influences, she says. They wanted space where they and their children could gather day or night to work on computers and read or enjoy a formal family meal when they preferred.

NEW YORK MIND-SET

Taking her lead from New York City apartments where space is at a premium and multifunction is key, Alston suggested the 200-square-foot dining room double as a modern library with a central table, built-in oak bookcase, secondary table with chairs and one corner for lounging. Central to the design is the bookcase, which incorporates a buffet for storing china and ample display space for books and collectibles. Halogen lights, set on dimmers, highlight an abstract painting, a focal point in the room.

“The strong horizontal design of the bookcase sets the tone for a clean, modern design,” Alston says. Its dark stain blends with new base, wall, crown and ceiling moldings. These linear design elements have a “slight Asian feel,” she says, and are repeated on newly installed custom French doors, Chinese fret-



The bookcase — designed with ample storage and display space — boasts strong horizontal lines that are echoed in the new wall and ceiling trim. Balancing those linear qualities are a circular chandelier and rosewood table, which doubles as a workspace when not being used for dining.

work chairs and the cream carpet's interlocking grid pattern. Guided by the principles of architect Frank Lloyd Wright, like her clients, "I'm a big fan of symmetry," Alston notes. "He [Wright] was influenced by Asian design" and used lots of oak as well as linear qualities to achieve balance, she says. "We used similar elements, but translated them in a modern way."

ART OF THE MIX

To complement the bookcase and provide texture and sound-absorbency, Alston upholstered the walls in a horizontally pleated gray silk fabric. "We really liked the idea of upholstered walls" to foster a quiet study space, she says.

Furnishings reflect the owners' modern design sensibility in an interesting mix of styles and textures. A modern circular rosewood dining table "balances the strong linear statement of the bookcase and doubles as workspace when not being used for dining," Alston says. Four gray linen velvet tufted chairs, which are slightly more traditional in feel—are detailed with brass nail heads that echo the finish on the brass ring chandelier.

A second seating area is positioned beneath a sunny window. The gray and cream marble-top table with iron base is juxtaposed with traditional Chinese fretwork chairs. Rich red/orange satin upholstered seats add a jolt of color, tones that are repeated on the lampshades.

"This area is used for morning coffee or to read," Alston says. The children also use both tables for homework at night. Tucked into a quiet corner is a third sitting area, "a favorite place for curling up with a good book," says Alston, who received a 2012 design award for the room from the New Jersey Chapter of the American Society of Interior Designers.

The family now uses the once underperforming, sole-purpose dining area every day, Alston notes, and consider it their favorite room in the house. **DNJ**

SOURCES interior design, Jo Ann Alston of J. Stephens Interiors in Far Hills; custom bookcases and millwork, Jerry Williamson of Lazarus & Williamson LLC in Ogdensburg; custom doors, Jaeger Home Concepts in Union; circular rosewood table, Bolier & Co. (T) in New York City; dining chairs, Owners Select (T), a division of Durable Fabrics & Furniture in Bayshore, New York, upholstered with gray linen velvet by Lee Jofa; iron and marble table, Murray's Iron Works Inc. in Los Angeles; fretwork chairs, Stately Homes Collection from Baker Furniture with silk satin cinnabar (Larsen) fabric from Cowtan & Tout; gray leather reading chair and ottoman, Ironies Inc./Jerry Pair & Associates (T) in New York City with leather upholstery from Spinneybeck Enterprises Inc. in Getzville, New York; chandelier, ILEX Architectural Lighting in East Taunton, Massachusetts; baton-style sconces on bookcase, Palmer Hargrave (T) in New York City; sconces, Vaughan Designs Inc. (T) in New York City; custom lampshades, Blanche P. Field LLC in New York City; window treatment fabric, Lee Jofa; abstract painting above buffet, Burnt Mills Gallery in Bedminster; carpet, J&S Designer Flooring in Morristown. T = To the trade.

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