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Cape Mod

Traditional on the outside, edgy from within, a Pacific Palisades Cape Cod house plays by its own cutting-edge classic rules

By Audrey Davidow | Photography by Peden + Munk

There's something about a gray-shingled Cape Cod that begs for the Nancy Meyers treatment: a seaside makeover full of grass rugs, woven baskets and bleached coral accessories. At least that's the decorating drill most folks would follow.

But when Brian and Kristen Kaufman bought their beachy charmer in the Palisades in 2008, they knew they wanted something different, something, as Kristen—an assets manager who works from home—puts it, “Not quite so expected.”

Sure, the two-story, 6,400-square-foot house first attracted the couple with its traditional, East Coast feel. To say nothing of those shingles, turrets and wide wooden porches that reminded Kristen of her grandmother's place back in Hingham, Massachusetts. All of which was a good thing. To a point.

“I wanted my home to remind me of my grandmother,” says Kristen. “Just not too much.” What the couple really wanted, explains Brian, who owns his own private equity firm, was a place that would be both traditional and modern, a place intimate enough for family but also big enough for entertaining, a place that was serene, but still filled with pops of color and whimsy.

To meld those opposing visions and bring them to life, the couple hired their friend and owner of West Hollywood design firm Jackson Paige, Kristine Kamenstein. A designer whose style is all about mixing and matching—the old with the new, the expensive with the affordable—Kamenstein took on the task of creating a sophisticated home that's traditional on the outside and loaded with surprises from within.

QUIET RIOT In the living room of this Pacific Palisades home, Kristine Kamenstein kept the palette soft and soothing with a pair of Barbara Barry chairs for Baker (covered in Lee Jofa linen) and a sofa and armchairs upholstered in gray velvet. She topped it off with a shot of acid yellow Douglas fabric on a 1960s Lucite bench.





"I really wanted it to reflect their personalities," says Kamenstein. "And for me, that's an elegant but approachable interior that doesn't take itself too seriously—something edgy within a traditional framework."

To get the ball rolling, Kamenstein and the Kaufmans set about updating the rustic country bones of the interior. They began by replacing slate floors in the kitchen with walnut and added architectural details like molding and wainscoting throughout.

Then came the fun part—coloring in the newly designed lines. Fortunately for Kamenstein, who wanted to steer clear of that clichéd blue and white beach palette, the Kaufmans aren't at all color-shy. "My husband is obsessed with red," laughs Kristen, who prefers more muted tones. "He can't have enough of it."

Instead of swathing entire walls in a too-bold color that the couple may have easily grown tired of, Kamenstein went with a palette of warm grays, but made sure to include pops of orange, red and acid yellow throughout. From the red claw foot tub in the master bathroom, to the orange window seats and linen ottomans in the family room, to the ruby-hued Murano glass lighting fixture hanging over the breakfast nook, the bright jolts of color are splashed throughout to bring in that element of warmth and whimsy the couple wanted. "Red and orange just make a room feel happier and alive to me," says Brian. And who doesn't want a happy home?

Though the homeowners, a couple of self-professed design junkies, came to the table with many of their own ideas (Kristen found vintage glass pendants for the master bedroom at Paul Mara and scored a statement-making woven crystal chandelier in the entry at Minotti),



Clockwise from upper left: In the family room a Williams Sonoma Mesa desk is paired with a vintage chair upholstered in Gorgina fabric; the master bedroom's headboard, done in Royal Textile's Ocean Flowers in Paveria, gives the room a dose of red; a chandelier from La Marina Lighting hangs in the breakfast nook. Opposite page: The Rag Company's Cowhide Flower Rag brings understated texture and pattern to the entryway.



"That bird wallpaper lets people know, from the very first second they walk in the door, that this is not your typical Cape Cod," says designer Kristine Kamenstein.

Kamenstein was there to help them gently push their own design boundaries.

Case in point: that flying bird wallpaper in the dining room. "I would've been way too nervous to try that without Kristine assuring me it would be amazing," admits Kristen. But Kamenstein knew it would make the kind of statement the Kaufmans were after. "That bird wallpaper lets people know, from the very first second they walk in the door, that this is not your typical Cape Cod," says Kamenstein.

She also took some of their old pieces and gave them a new lease. The curve-legged, cream-colored Donghia sofa? Kamenstein cut off the legs, recovered it in a soft gray velvet and set it on a wood inlaid platform for a more modern look in the living room.

One thing the clients knew for sure was that they wanted their home to reflect them, and not just another page in a designer's portfolio. That meant finding a place for the one-of-a-kind finds they've brought back from their many travels. "It's that classic case of 'I lugged this thing halfway around the world, now where am I going to put it?'" says Brian.

So Kamenstein found a place for the 60-pound stone fertility statue from Bangkok next to the living room fireplace, while the silver leaf bench from India sits just in front of the French doors leading outside. But the couple's most prized possession has to be their impressive wine collection, made up of vintages from all over the globe.

A pair of spirited wine lovers, the homeowners never cottoned to the idea of stashing their 2,000-bottle collection away in a cellar. "For them it's more like art," says Kamenstein, who was determined to get the bottles out of the basement. With that in mind, the designer transformed the butler's pantry, just off the kitchen, into a wine hallway, where prized labels could take the starring role, quietly supported by custom-lit, floor-to-ceiling cabinetry.

For the Kaufmans, an easily accessible wine cellar not only makes breaking open a bottle a more common occurrence, but the wine also serves as a constant reminder to have friends over for a drink. And why not? That's exactly what they had in mind when they designed the place. ■

From left, Designer Kristine Kamenstein; the nursery gets its dose of yellow with an Arco Jacobson-inspired Egg chair. Opposite page: In the dining room, Frank wallpaper's leaf/001 bird pattern is used for maximum impact. Baker dining table and chairs from the '60s, purchased at Rumba; chandelier from Misotti.

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