

SIMPLIFY IT

GO FOR
CLASSIC
WITH
EASY,
UNFUSSY
DETAILS

In the living room of a 19th-century farmhouse in upstate New York, a burley-oak wallcovering by Elizabeth Dow and painted pine plank wainscoting replace the character that had been stripped out in previous renovations. Designers Jesse Carrier and Mara Miller customized Crate & Barrel's Metropolis leather chair with a fabric cushion and updated vintage lamps with chic red shades. Recycled sofa by Eco-texco, octagonal ottoman by Carner and Company.



CHRISTINE FITTEL: Very brave for a husband and wife to work together.

JESSE CARRIER: We're so much in sync, it's rare that we completely disagree.

MARIA MILLER: There's no hierarchy and no knock-down fights. We both want to do our best.

You've had a stellar rise, with Anna Wintour on your client list.

JC: She was the cornerstone of our business—she was our first client. And she's been incredibly gracious in terms of promoting us. What better call tag?

I'm struck by how you've given this old farmhouse a modern take on Americana. I can almost hear the opening chords of *Appalachian Spring*.

JC: Well, it's not far from the Appalachian Trail. It's on 50 acres of green rolling hills in upstate New York. The whole theme here is very American—apple pie and everything.

Down to the red, white, and blue that runs through the house.

JC: That only became apparent to me after the fact. It just sort of came together that way.

MC: The clients had already furnished it to a degree. They're a young couple who live in New York City, and this is their country house. They lived here for a year before they decided to go for a full-blown renovation.

What was the main problem?

JC: It had been added on to over the years, and it was shockablock, not to mention stripped of character. The living room was long, narrow, asymmetrical, and open at both ends, with a fireplace in the middle. Here's the challenge: How do you bring the two ends together, and make it cozy enough for two but also big enough to host as without blocking the flow of traffic?

I give up. How?

JC: We did it with a large octagonal ottoman in front of the fireplace. It's about 50 inches wide—it had to be big enough to connect the two separate seating areas.

MC: Other people might have put a pedestal table there, but this is more accommodating; you can sit on it in front of the fire, throw things on it, and pull it over to either sofa when there's a large group here.

Such a quick, simple solution.

JC: Here's another one: Reversible pillows. Because this is a year-round house, we have them on the sofas in the living room. You have your summer pattern, then flip them to the other side, to velvet—something richer—for winter.

Was the seat on that leather chair so cracked that you had to replace it with a fabric cushion?

MC: No, we remade it so you would think it was an old chair that had worn out.

JC: I love the practicality of it. You don't respoilster the whole thing.

MC: It's actually more comfortable to sit on a fabric seat. You don't slip out of it. Especially with new 'old' leather. And it's just a fun opportunity for us to do something like that, since our style is typically clean, simple, spare. We don't add extraneous details. We tend to edit out rather than put in.

JC: We even eliminated the coat closets in the entry. There are just hooks now. Everything is exposed, as it's intuitive for guests.

MC: And in the kitchen, we created a guest bar with everything they need to make breakfast, so they don't have to rummage through every cabinet looking for a coffee cup or a spoon.

JC: No tipping around, peering in closet doors. There are no places that feel off limits, no secrets. I think there's a level of comfort in that plainness. What you see is what you get.

It doesn't get any plainer or simpler than these curtains. They're mostly just a gesture.

MC: The window treatments were actually supposed to be temporary until we did the next layer. And there never was a next layer.

JC: They're a bit Andrew Wyeth—ragtag, sheer, blowing in the wind. In the dining room, I think of them as dishrags on cup hooks. They're Sunbrella panels that we just tacked up to shield the room from the sun. In the evenings you just take one of the corners off, and it drops.

And the same idea in the office upstairs?

MC: Same idea, but full height. We call them handkerchief panels. They have little grommets in the corners that you hang them from. For the living room, we just ordered cotton voile café curtains online, from Country Curtains, and hung them with clip rings on a tension rod. Couldn't be easier.

Can you give us three quick-change curtain tips?

1. Hang sheaths or valances—pre-hemmed—on hooks from one corner of the window, handkerchief-style. Or recycle old curtains: Just measure and cut them into squares, adding buttonholes in the corners.
2. Drape a piece of fabric over a rod and let it fall naturally on each side to make a casual hang.
3. If you already have full-length curtains on a rod, add tiebacks. Place them higher for a Swedish look, lower for a Persian effect.

LEFT: "I didn't want another white country kitchen," Carrier says. Benjamin Moore's Coventry Gray on the walls and Kendall Charcoal on the island add softness and age. Jessie's Steam Valve faucet looks old but has a modern pull-off spray. The wide-plank floor was salvaged from a barn; the butcher's block dates from the 18th century.



1. The custom corner sofa had to have "newspaper potential"—it's deep enough to be down on and read the paper. 2. A Dutch door leading to the dining room adds farmhouse charm. 3. Another Dutch door off the living room opens to a closet-size serving bar, built from vintage light from Historical Maconville. 4. In the guest bed room, an antique clock by Kathryn M. Ireland is a modern take on an American classic. A child can learn on the daybed. Old-fashioned candle sconces from Lighting by Hatterbarrow. 5. In the master bath, a Restoration Hardware washstand retained a blocky vanity. Walls are Farrow & Ball's Barnwood Light, welcoming in Benjamin Moore's Dove Wing. 6. Honeydew Cornish stone on the kitchen counter has ledgers to the stone patio outside. 7. A built-in bench for dining room chairs slips over them in vintage green wax. "These all came from John Deane's Carrier team. "He has a beautiful eye and just picks through, or you can find them at flea markets. They're not fragile. Just throw them in the wash." Brackets wherever available from In2it.com.





The guest bath is as simple as it gets. Oversee Aisa tub by Victoria + Albert. Old-fashioned shower curtain ring and showerhead from Sunrise Specialty. Rug by Dash & Albert. Industrial metal stool from Hammerman Barn, circa 1910. The vanity landing doubles as a work space. "The 19th-century folding table is an old country piece, but as modern as its lack of ornament," Carrier says. Desk chair and lamp from Hammerman Barn. Kravet Sabell's Charter is made into handkerchief-style curtains. FOR MORE DETAILS, SEE RESOURCES.

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