

Hendricks Churchill

CULTURED

An Interior Designer's Guide to Mixing Old and New in Greenwich, Connecticut

Heide Hendricks has acquired a taste for country living. The interior designer and her husband, Rafe Churchill, left city life for a quieter, more bucolic existence in a historic farmhouse in Sharon, Connecticut. Naturally, the two make frequent pilgrimages to Greenwich when in need of a dose of cozy, creative inspiration. For Hendricks, a visit to Greenwich necessitates a visit to J. Crew – the brand's relaxed, elevated styles are just the thing for a day of town-and-country traversing.

By Sophie Lee
Photographs by Jeff Holt
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Two decades ago, Heide Hendricks traded her Brooklyn home for a sprawling 1800s Connecticut farmhouse called Ellsworth. The interior designer took ownership of the historic property in Sharon alongside her husband, Rafe Churchill—the other half of the eponymous architecture and design firm Hendricks Churchill.

The two built the company in the secluded, charmed Northwest corner of the state, developing their taste for antiques and New England touchpoints from the aesthetics of neighboring towns. “I’ve had many clients in Greenwich over the years,” says Hendricks of one of her favorite Connecticut locales. “While doing site visits to these homes, I like to drive around Greenwich marveling at some of the historic properties, drawing on these magnificent homes for inspiration for my own designs.”

Greenwich was settled in 1640 and is about the size of a pin-prick in comparison to Hendricks’s New York hometown, but boasts its own film festival, symphony orchestra, and art museum, making it a destination for creatives across the region. It’s also the final stop on J.Crew’s Local Time Tour, a brand the interior designer turns to for pieces that will travel with her on her frequent drives across the rolling state. Here, Hendricks shares the best destinations—from a delicious midday lunch stop and a chilled glass of rosé, to a day-long museum tour that takes her from Connecticut to Massachusetts.



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CULTURED: Describe the moment when you realized you wanted to pursue interior design.

I grew up with parents who were artists in New York's bohemian art scene. My style and approach to design were greatly influenced by the way I grew up: in a home built from logs from our property in Woodbury and filled with an emporium of unique finds and treasures from thrift stores, estate sales, and flea markets. I don't think it was until I started renovating homes with Rafe in my 30s (while keeping my day job), that I realized that interior design would, and could, become a full-time career for me.

CULTURED: What are some interior and architectural trends you notice in your local surroundings?

Monochromatic beige decor has become a dominant trend in today's design industry, but to me these spaces feel impersonal. I marvel at the harmonious balance and deft editorial skills these interiors require, but I prefer a more eclectic, bohemian look. This deceptively carefree look is achieved through sourcing one-of-a-kind, rare, vintage, and antique pieces and layering colors and textiles.

The hard part about my job is making all these pieces look as if they were lovingly assembled and collected over time without losing the soul of the space, which unites all of these disparate pieces.



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CULTURED: What is your pick for a local restaurant that offers a great midday bite?

In Greenwich, Le Penguin is the perfect spot to enjoy a midday bite and a crisp, dry rosé. If in Sharon, go to JP Giffords or Le Gamin. Sweet William's in Salisbury is great for a sweet treat.

CULTURED: What is something someone can do, wear, or say to look like a local?

Dress in layers! This sartorial style, once mastered, will see you through all four seasons; springtime in Connecticut can sometimes have the weather fluctuations of all the seasons in one week!

CULTURED: Underrated Saturday afternoon activity?

Gardening while listening to a podcast.



CULTURED: Your ideal Sunday art-viewing itinerary?

Heading to the Bruce Museum in Greenwich, then to the Aldrich Contemporary in Ridgefield, Connecticut. If out in Sharon, it's always wonderful to go to Art Omi in Ghent or The Clark in Williamstown, Massachusetts.

Hendricks Churchill

CULTURED: What is the best place to shop for gifts? For yourself?

A gift for myself is likely to be an unusual find from Patrick Mele in Greenwich. If you're up near Sharon, try Montage Antiques, Cottage + Camp, or Hunter Bee in Millerton, New York.

CULTURED: What's your best tip for getting the most out of Greenwich?

Don't try to hit everywhere on your list. Take the time and go deep in certain places. Sourcing antiques requires patience, and a willingness to journey into basements and dusty corners where no one has dared to go before

Hendricks Churchill

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See Inside the Connecticut Farmhouse That Serves as a Laboratory for This Husband-and-Wife Design Team

*The architecture and interior design power couple Heide Hendricks and Rafe Churchill
gave CULTURED a look inside their serene country home.*

By Cultured Magazine
Photographs by Chris Mottalini
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Heide Hendricks and Rafe Churchill are not afraid of a fixer-upper. They are the brains behind Hendricks Churchill, an architecture and design firm dedicated to revamping Connecticut homes. Two decades ago, their shared passion for classic American architecture led them to revive a 19th-century farmhouse of their own—a departure from the Brooklyn townhouse where they had lived the decade prior. The couple used a mix of contemporary and antique furniture, eccentric wall coverings, and compelling works of art to transform Ellsworth into stylish and tranquil living quarters. This month, they released a book, *Our Way Home*, to offer a behind-the-scenes look at the process. Here, the couple welcomes *CULTURED* into their special corner of the countryside.

CULTURED: What inspired the move from Brooklyn to Connecticut?

Heide Hendricks: It was 20 or so years ago. We were ready to start a family and wanted to return to our semi-rural roots.

CULTURED: How did you first find the house? What drew you to it?

Hendricks: When we were trying to get our newborn daughter, Hollis, to sleep, we would often take long drives through Sharon and the surrounding towns. We frequently marveled at the Ellsworth home, which had fallen into disrepair. What really caught our eye was the setting. Significant maple and Japanese chestnut trees framed the porch and long stone walls bordered the land but were shrouded by overgrown shrubbery.

CULTURED: How did you both come to work in interior design and architecture?

Hendricks: I was raised by artists and grew up with an appreciation for curated environments and beautiful finds. Everywhere I went as a young adult, I would take note of spaces and objects and would venture to emulate or recapture those feelings in spaces.

Rafe was raised by builders and grew up with an understanding and appreciation for the built environment. He went to school for architecture and sculpture and made a living as a successful contractor. He'd eventually give up contracting in his early 30s to focus exclusively on design.

CULTURED: Where does the story of your personal art collection begin?

Hendricks: Our collection began when Rafe and I met. Rafe was an exhibiting artist at the time. We started collecting art from fellow artists at residency programs. I was also working for galleries and museums as a publicist and was introduced to a variety of emerging artists. And of course, we learned how to barter. Scouting and recognizing these finds would function as a scrapbook of our lives together.

CULTURED: How did artwork factor into your design of this new home?

Hendricks Churchill

Hendricks: I am not the kind of designer that selects artwork to match the sofa. Rather, I place the furnishings in the room and then bring in artwork that fits spatially and aligns with the emotions the space evokes. Of course, it is always thrilling whenever I know I have a large wall to fill.

CULTURED: What is the first piece of art you ever bought?

Hendricks: It's a funny story. The first piece of art that Rafe ever bought for me was as a birthday present. It was a contemporary photograph taken by Toni Hafkenscheid of a man in tighty-whities with his ear to the floor of his living room. This is sort of Rafe's sense of humor. At the time, we were renting an apartment on the second floor and getting daily visits from the downstairs neighbors asking us to stop clomping around in our shoes on the wood floors.

CULTURED: Which work provokes the most conversation from visitors?

Hendricks: In our kitchen hangs an antique saw that my father had covered with a Piet Mondrian-style design. It's a funny take on kitsch-country art. My father actually installed it in the first cottage that Rafe and I bought together, which was built in the 1920s. It was a fun surprise to come home to. Still is.



Hendricks Churchill

CULTURED: What factors do you consider when expanding your art collection?

Hendricks: We still like the idea of collecting emerging artists. However, now that our kids are young adults, we skew a bit toward their interests so that when they move out in the world, they can take (some of) the pieces with them. For instance, we recently purchased a Shantell Martin drawing for our daughter, Hollis, knowing that it will continue to appreciate in value. And also, we love the piece.

CULTURED: What was the most challenging piece in your personal collection to acquire?

Hendricks: We wanted a Bryan Nash Gill print but unfortunately the series had sold out. We were surprised, yet delighted, when the estate contacted us to let us know that they had found an artist's proof. We ended up being even more excited about the proof, so we bought it. Due to its massive size, we ended up paying twice as much for framing.

CULTURED: The book describes this property as a "continual work in progress." How do you know when a project is finished? Is it ever?

Hendricks: Our client's projects have a definitive end point and budget, but our house is more of an artist's canvas. The back sunroom was once a small barn attached to the house—it had a dirt floor, uninsulated walls, and limited electrical work. It was easy to cut it off from the main renovation and save it for the next injection of funds. One day, Rafe woke up and decided he wanted to be a vintage Range Rover dealer, so he needed a place to house them. Now we're building a garage behind our barn out back. By the time it's done, it'll be time to circle back to the beginning and make repairs to the original house. It never ends, but in the best way possible.

CULTURED: What influences and other projects did you pull from when conceptualizing this redesign?

Hendricks: Honestly, everything sort of came together the day we closed on the house. The design brief we ended up with after a two-hour walkthrough was remarkably close to the finished project. It not only had to work for our family, but also has become a billboard for our business. Having experimented with our own home, I can have the confidence to persuade clients to take the risk on a bold color, wallpaper, or piece of furniture. Lots of people are worried that they'll get sick of a bold pattern or color, but you can get sick of beige, too.

CULTURED: In what ways did the surroundings of this home influence your renovation of it?

Hendricks: Ellsworth is a farmhouse surrounded by fields that are still used to this day as hay fields for a local farm. Our wallpaper choices in particular were heavily influenced by the surroundings. The Mark Hearld Harvest Hare wallpaper in the dining room shows the wildlife you see outside in the fields. Our powder room has Marthe Armitage's Chestnut wallpaper, and

Hendricks Churchill

we have a Japanese chestnut tree in the front yard. In the living room, we have a pine wallpaper from Fayce Textiles that nods to some white pines that unfortunately had to come down to protect the house.

CULTURED: How do you balance each of your visions? Did you have any major misalignments?

Hendricks: There is a clear delineation between our work. Rafe does the architecture and the interior architectural trim and millwork, and I do the furnishings. We only overlap on finishes—paint, wallpaper, and tile. That's what has allowed us to stay married all these years.