

Hendricks Churchill

ELLE DECOR

## Eye in the Sky

*How do you cozy up a Manhattan high-rise? Call designers Hendricks Churchill*

By Camille Okhio  
Photo by Chris Mottalini  
Styled by Tessa Watson  
October 2024





# Hendricks Churchill

**T**he designers Heide Hendricks and Rafe Churchill are known for a visual language that pulls the past into the present. Call it Shaker with a twist. Based in Connecticut's rural Litchfield County, their ELLE DECOR A-List firm, Hendricks Churchill, is a go-to for renovations of period architecture—updated country farmhouses, prewar city apartments, 19th-century brownstones—in fusing them with a traditionalism that works in a contemporary context.

But to judge from their latest project, the duo—who are a married couple—aren't afraid of jumping out of the history books and several stories off the ground. When a young family approached them to decorate their apartment in a new-build high-rise on New York's Upper East Side, all they could think of was the modernist architecture in Ayn Rand's *The Fountainhead*. "It was a space that could have been designed by Howard Roark—and the polar opposite of our style," Hendricks says. "It was almost surreal."

The clients, who have three young children, were determined. They first read about the designers in a 2021 story in ELLE DECOR and were drawn to the warmth of their spaces as well as to their sustainable approach to design. At the time, the family was lumbering through the pandemic in a monochromatic apartment in Lower Manhattan's East Village. They found a spectacular apartment in a luxury tower designed by the developers DDG in Carnegie Hill, a neighborhood more known for townhouses and Gilded Age mansions than soaring spaces with floor-to-ceiling glass windows. They were attracted to the brightness and high-tech features of the new building, but the atmosphere was far from homey. As soon as they closed on the apartment, they knew just whom to call. "We had worked with designers who can make your place look great in pictures," the husband says. "But it takes a different level of experience to make a good-looking home that is also functional. Heide spent a lot of time with our family to figure out how to make this an embracing home for us and our kids."

As you step out of the elevators and straight into the foyer, the husband's study, with its unobstructed views of the city, is the first thing you notice. To the left are the bedrooms, and to the right is the living room, which opens directly onto the dining room and kitchen. Each room flows into the next, physically and visually, to allow the family to be together as the day and its activities shift. The living room is the home's focal point: It's here, in this

The dining room's eclectic mix includes a Swedish midcentury sideboard in the style of Josef Frank (left), a custom walnut dining table from Fern, and an Apparatus chandelier. Antique Swedish cabinet (right). Montage Antiques; vintage Henning Kjønnell Razor chair; rug by Marc Phillips; rugs; 1950s abstract painting.



shared space, that the wife plays her Yamaha piano, with her daughters occasionally accompanying on their toy flutes.

Hendricks sheathed the study's walls in painted tambour paneling, a design device with a double-duty benefit: It both provides sound insulation and has a ridged surface that echoes the chunkier ones in the living room's walnut sideboard by Stephen Bukowski. "We spend a lot of time together in the living room because it's connected to my study," the husband explains. "The girls' toys spill into the room when I leave the doors open. And because the kids are always complaining about my phone calls, Heide insulated

the room, so my voice doesn't travel throughout the house."

Florals are a Hendricks specialty. She used Gucci's Chinese landscape-inspired wallpaper in the primary suite and a Josef Frank fabric for the wall behind the beds in the daughters' room. The starting point for her design scheme, though, was not flowers but fruit, in the form of Jennifer Shorto's strawberry vine wallcovering, which wraps the walls of the kitchen. Meanwhile, the living room armchairs are clad in a Dedar floral, and even the dining room's cabinet sports a botanical pattern.

Hendricks Churchill chose a palette of oranges and

pinks as a unifying color, from the kitchen's apricot to the deeper mauve tone in the foyer, which lends a softness in a space that sees less natural light. In the dining and living rooms, Hendricks employed a visual trick: She elongated the baseboards and painted them in dusty lilac. The gesture is one of many design techniques that ground this high-flying family home, bringing it back down to earth. Even up in the sky, Hendricks Churchill's saturated Shaker aesthetic feels at home, proving the truth behind the Shaker wisdom: If you focus more on how you work rather than where you work, the results will speak for themselves. ■

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In the kitchen, a Flos pendant hangs over a custom Malm island. Appliances by Gaggenau; bar stools by Nickey Kehoe; wall-covering by Jennifer Shatto; counters and stone wall in Statuario marble.

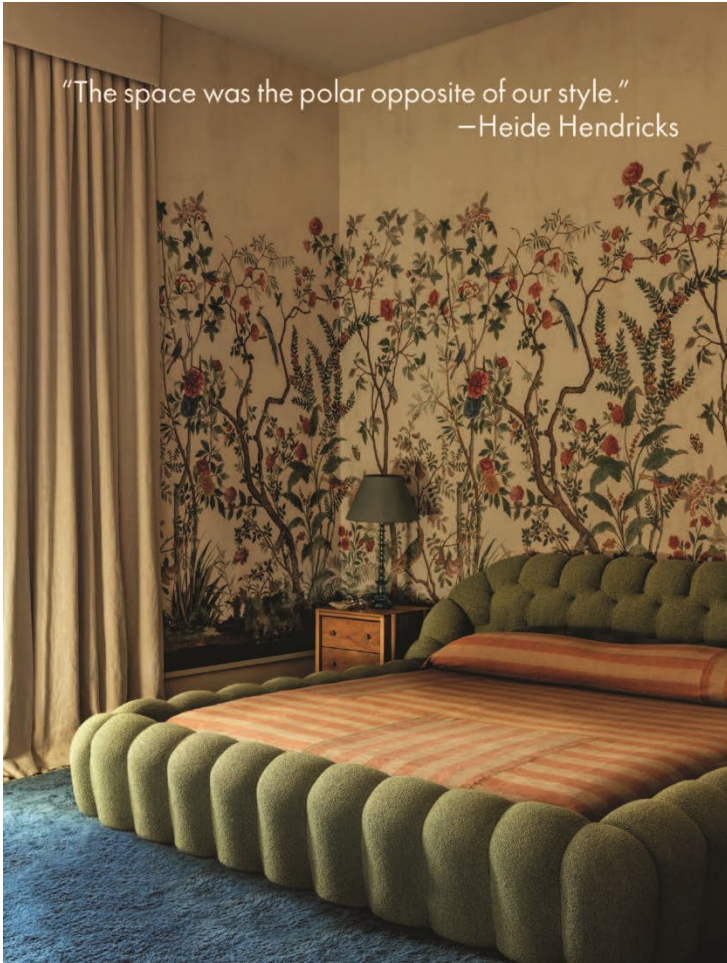
OPPOSITE: The breakfast nook's midcentury Danish sofa is in a Rose Uniacke fabric. Bleached-maple table by Brian Parsico; vintage Paul McCobb chairs, sourced by Hester Finch; artwork by Lizzie Gill.



ELLE DECOR 43

# Hendricks Churchill

"The space was the polar opposite of our style."  
—Heide Hendricks



Hendricks Churchill

ELLE DECOR

## That Spartan Spark

*The simplicity of the Shakers provides endless inspiration for Heide Hendricks of ELLE Decor  
A-List firm Hendricks Churchill*

As told to Camille Okhio  
Photo by Michael Freeman  
October 2023



MY KIND OF ROOM

An 18th-century  
Shaker office at the  
Fruitlands Museum  
in Harvard,  
Massachusetts.  
[thetrustees.org](http://thetrustees.org)



## THAT SPARTAN SPARK

The simplicity of the Shakers provides endless inspiration for **Heide Hendricks** of ELLE DECOR A-List firm **Hendricks Churchill**.

"Rafe Churchill, my partner in life and work, introduced me to Hancock Shaker Village in western Massachusetts about 20 years ago, when we were researching New England vernacular architecture for our first home. While there, we became obsessed with the level of craftsmanship and thoughtfulness in the work of the Shakers. For instance, many of our projects favor a contrasting color on the trim, a nod to their ingenious use of paint to make a room feel cozy. I liken it to eyeliner, but for interiors. The Shakers' practice was founded on principles of utility: Eschew artifice and excess; make what you need and build it to last; if something doesn't exist, design and build it from scratch. This philosophy always shapes my perspective when I'm finalizing proposals for clients." —As told to Camille Okhio

MICHAEL FREEMAN

Hendricks Churchill

ELLE DECOR

# How A Ramshackle Barn Was Reborn As A Chic Guesthouse

*Hendricks Churchill gives new meaning to a barn raising.*

By Catherine Hong  
Photographs by Chris Mottalini  
March 16, 2022





## Hendricks Churchill

For plenty of homeowners, this 100-year-old barn in the Hudson River Valley might not have been deemed worth saving. With its soft walls and partly rotted foundation, the structure was in such poor shape it was barely suitable for storage. “The ground floor was mud, and the upper level was infested with bats,” says the owner.

The barn is just a stone’s throw from the property’s main house, an 1815 farmhouse the homeowner had previously renovated with the help of Heide Hendricks and Rafe Churchill, the wife and husband team behind the Connecticut-based architecture and design firm Hendricks Churchill. If anyone could rescue this ramshackle barn—the owner’s hope was to use it as an entertaining space and guest quarters—it would be them. “Heide and Rafe respect the historic nature of these old structures while also bringing in a bit of modernity,” the client says. “It’s a perfect combination.”

Churchill, the firm’s lead architectural designer, immediately saw that a down-to-the-studs overhaul was the only path forward. He fixed the foundation, stripped the house to its timber frame, and proceeded from scratch, incorporating insulation, plaster walls, radiant floors, more than a dozen windows, and a raised sleeping loft. However, he kept the barn’s most charming original elements—those timber posts and beams, some still studded with ancient hooks and nails, and the rough weathered ceiling—intact. “There’s no way to re-create the beauty of this type of old ceiling,” explains Churchill. “So we built a brand-new roof structure over it.” (The couple did much the same with the roof of the 1871 home they share in Sharon, Connecticut.) To round out the barn’s creature comforts, he also added a full bathroom, kitchenette, and, on the basement level, a garage and sauna.



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Hendricks, the firm's lead interior designer, notes that the barn's warm, rustic 1970s-inflected decor is a collaboration between herself and the homeowner, who has "a great eye for furniture, art, and textiles" and brought many pieces to the project. In fact, the vintage Togo sectional in dark brown leather, which dominates the space and sets its retro-relaxed vibe, was something the homeowner purchased before the barn's demolition even began. ("I had wanted a Togo for years but never had a space large enough for one," he confesses.) The barn's earthy palette of caramel browns, charcoal, and pink highlights the interior's many tactile elements, from the reclaimed oak floors and plaster walls to the wicker dining chairs and Japanese boro textile displayed on the wall. The walls, Hendricks points out, are not pure white, which would have felt too stark. "We tinted the plaster for the effect of an aged patina," she says. The kitchenette's cabinetry, meanwhile, she painted a muddy pink (Farrow & Ball's Dead Salmon), adding an unexpected blush to the dining area.

Accessed by a zigzag staircase constructed of oak, the raised bedroom loft overlooks the living room through a clear glass railing. Beside the window at one end, Hendricks placed a vintage table and stools to offer guests a cozy, secluded work space—in effect, a getaway from their getaway. As the designers explain, they deliberately pulled back on extras such as window treatments, built-ins, and other accessories. To wit: Instead of drapery, they installed motorized shades. In lieu of a traditional bookcase, they added a compact vertical one. Even rugs were employed sparingly, allowing the plain oak floors to take precedence. "As with many of our projects, I think the success here lies in what is left out," says Hendricks. After all, it's still a barn at heart.

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## Where the Wild Things Are

*James Soby, the pioneering modern art collector and critic, once hosted guests like Alexander Calder, Joan Miró, and Salvador Dalí in this Connecticut Greek Revival. Now a museum curator and his young family are breathing new life into its storied, charming good bones.*

By Catherine Hong

Photographs by Chris Mottalini

March 2021



# WHERE THE



# WILD THINGS ARE

James Soby, the pioneering modern art collector and critic, once hosted guests like Alexander Calder, Joan Miró, and Salvador Dalí in this Connecticut Greek Revival. Now a museum curator and his young family are breathing new life into its storied, charming good bones.

BY CATHERINE HONG  
PHOTOGRAPHS BY CHRIS MOTTALINI

100 ELLE DECOR



An antique copy of a painting by Poussin hangs over the original granite mantel in the sitting room of Margaret Heiner and Oliver Tostmann's Greek Revival home in Farmington, Connecticut, which was renovated by Heide Hendricks and Rafe Churchill of the firm Hendricks Churchill. **OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:** The couple's children, wearing home-made papier-mâché fox masks, in the sitting area of the kitchen; the sofa is from Hammertown Barn and the side tables are by West Elm. Heiner and Tostmann in the library. The classical exterior of the 1833 house.

## Hendricks Churchill



**ABOVE:** In the front sitting room, the sofa is upholstered in a Kravet fabric, the chair (right) is by Gustav Stickley, the cocktail table is a Chinese antique, and the 18th-century English tea table (right) is from Montage Antiques. The chandelier is by Circa Lighting, the curtains are of a Carleton V floral, and the rug is an antique Henz.

**T**HE CENTRAL CONNECTICUT TOWN OF FARMINGTON is best known today—if it's known much at all—as home to the Otis elevator company and the exclusive all-girls private school Miss Porter's. But in the 1930s and '40s, Alexander Calder, Joan Miró, and Salvador Dalí knew the town, which is just outside of Hartford, as the location of their friend James Soby's country home. A critic, collector, and influential early champion of modern art, Soby regularly hosted his circle of art-world intimates at the stately Greek Revival house, which he purchased in 1935. Snapshots from the era (now in the archives of the Museum of Modern Art, along with most of his collection) depict Miró and Yves Tanguy smoking in the living room; Calder on the patio, dancing to an accordion; and Soby and Le Corbusier standing on the roof.

"There was dancing, drinking, dressing up, outrageous parties—not exactly the mundane life we lead today," says the house's current owner, Margaret Heiner, who, with her husband, Oliver Tostmann, moved here seven years ago, soon after he became curator of European art at Hartford's Wadsworth Atheneum. Both art professionals (Heiner

owned a contemporary art gallery in Washington, D.C.), they loved the home's unique history as well as its unusual design, encompassing gracious formal rooms with 10-foot-high ceilings in the front and an airy, sun-filled modern wing in the rear. "We had looked at a lot of older homes in the area that felt too cramped," says the German-born Tostmann, who stands six foot five.

By the time the Heiner-Tostmanns purchased the property in 2013, the house, while structurally sound, had accumulated a surfeit of carpeting, built-in cabinetry, and chair molding. "We wanted to return the house to more of its original simplicity," Tostmann says. Exposing additional blank wall space would also allow them to hang their art collection more freely. Also on their list: an overhaul of the dismal kitchen and a gut renovation of the detached garage, which the couple converted into a guesthouse and studio. "We wanted to work with someone local who had a taste for New England tradition, and that's how we found Heide and Rafe," says Heiner, referring to Heide Hendricks and Rafe Churchill—the married principals of Hendricks Churchill, an interior design and architecture firm based in Sharon,

## Hendricks Churchill



**ABOVE:** The kitchen's custom cabinetry is fitted with soapstone counters, and the island's maple countertop is by Brooks Cabinetry. The 1940s industrial pendants are English, the vase is from the End of History, and the curtains are of a Clarence House fabric. In the dining room, the Louis Philippe-style table is from Robuck, and the ladder-back chairs have custom blue-leather cushions; the artwork is by Eddie Martinez.

Connecticut, that specializes in historic restoration. "We loved the simplicity of Rafe's designs," she adds. "And Heide's taste and color sense are brilliant."

The result is a sensitive refresh of the 1833 home that takes into account the house's history and location, as well as the couple's art collection (including both Old Masters and contemporary works), eclectic furniture, and two young children, ages six and eight. A major alteration was the widening of the doorway between the formerly closed-in kitchen and the dining room. "I had wanted an eat-in kitchen, but Heide and Rafe convinced us that we'd be happier eating in the dining room and using the kitchen's windowed nook as a lounging area," says Heiner. "They were totally right." For the kitchen itself, Hendricks chose a moody color scheme—slate blue industrial lighting, dove gray painted cabinetry—and butcher block counters to evoke a cozy "downstairs *Downton Abbey*" vibe.

Other elements of the house required only the barest assistance. Throughout, the worn oak floors were simply sanded down and given a matte coating so that they appear "freshly scrubbed," says Churchill, who believes that the

imperfections and "even the awkward repair patches" of old floors help "tell the story" of a house. The firm's philosophy, he explains, involves thinking just as much about "what we're not going to change" as what they will. The study, for example, was transformed by the use of monochromatic color. "The millwork was there, so we just painted everything an indigo gray for a cocoon-like feeling," he says.

Perhaps the most liberating area to reimagine, say the designers, was the sprawling family room in the rear, an addition that Soby commissioned as a gallery for his Calders, de Chiricos, Rousseaus, and Matisses. Unlike the older rooms in the front, which are furnished with antiques, this bright, expansive space is punctuated with seating by Saarinen, Thonet, and artist Rob Pruitt; a work table from Blu Dot ("it's the dining table from our old house in D.C.," says Heiner); and a profusion of ceramics and houseplants. Its easy comforts—conducive to family movies, papier-mâché crafts, and remote schooling—have been welcome during these past months of quarantine, say the couple. With any luck, when things finally go back to normal, they'll be able to throw some art-world parties there too. ■

## Hendricks Churchill



**ABOVE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:** In the library, the live-edge wood desk is custom, and both the Eames chair and George Nelson floor lamp are vintage. In the children's room, a vintage Jenny Lind bed is topped with a Garnet Hill Kids quilt, the bunny lamp is from the MoMA Design Store, and the sconce is by Matt Alford Studio; the artwork is by John Borden Evans. The family room's Saarinen chair and Moroccan pouf are vintage, the yellow table is by Muuto, and the artwork is by Afifa Aleiby. **OPPOSITE:** In the guest bedroom, the bed and lamps are family heirlooms, the vintage chair is in a Castel velvet mohair, the wallpaper is by Lake August, and the Beni Ourain rug is vintage. For details, see Resources.





Hendricks Churchill

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# Exposed Beam Ceilings: What You Need to Know Before Committing

*Should you? Could you? Wood you?*

By Katy Spratte Joyce  
Photographs by Chris Mottalini  
September 25, 2023



Exposed beam ceilings have become a popular way to add dimension and character to many styles of homes, from traditional to Scandinavian to farmhouse and beyond. When done well, this approach can elevate any space and pack a major design punch. “In different ways, beams can be successfully integrated into nearly every traditional and modern design style as each style has its own way of using them,” explains Steven Ginn, principal at Steven Ginn Architects in Omaha, Nebraska.

To learn the basics of exposed beam ceilings, we tapped Ginn and another seasoned architect: Rafe Churchill, cofounder and creative director of Hendricks Churchill, an ELLE DECOR A-List firm. Read on for their expert tips, plus pros and cons of this design decision.

### What Are Exposed Beams?

Essentially, exposed beam ceilings are those that have some kind of exposed structural element. “Historically, most floors and roofs were framed with wood beams, and then the floor or roof was placed on top of the beams, which were left exposed. It was straightforward and economical,” says Ginn. “Today, we leave the beams exposed as an expression of structure. These exposed beams can give us a more comfortable feeling of a secure shelter. It can also add architectural interest and be more pleasing to the eye.”

Joists, on the other hand, are there only to support a floor or roof, versus beams, which enable the building to stand up. “Joist ceilings are simply the narrower framing members that span across a ceiling,” Hendricks explains. “They are typically hanging or sitting on a beam. It is possible to fully expose the supporting beams that support the joists, but most often only a portion of the beam is exposed, while most of the timber is actually within the wall and contributing to the overall structure.”

### How to Build an Exposed Beam Ceiling

Basically, there are two ways to get the look of exposed beams. Churchill shares: “My preferred approach is by simply exposing the actual framing of a structure. This can be done with the post-and-beam frame of a building, or floor joists, ceiling joists, rafters, or simply wall framing.”

Another option is to apply reclaimed materials to replicate the look of exposed timbers. “This second approach is increasingly common but unfortunately not always done well,” cautions the architect.

Homeowners can consider exposed beams whether they are building new or refurbishing a historic home. Regardless of your renovation, the conversation needs to happen early on in the design process. “If the beams are structural, they are solid members that are actually doing the

work of holding up the house,” says Ginn. “If they are aesthetic, they are typically hollow and composed of several pieces of wood to make them look like solid beams.”

Homeowners should work with their contractors and/or designers to best handle common concerns for converting to or incorporating exposed beam ceilings, such as HVAC and plumbing placement, wiring, and insulation. “While electrical wiring can be easily concealed with little compromise, it’s the HVAC and plumbing that present the real challenge,” Churchill adds.

He elaborates, “It can be easier to use exposed timbers in a new construction [build]. One way to do this is by selecting framing members that will actually be part of the primary structure but also be exposed. This approach can be done with newly milled framing that can either work as an actual structure or be applied as an entire layer of decorative framing.”

This approach also works for reclaimed timbers or aesthetic beams, though reclaimed wood will always tell multiple stories. Overall, “it’s all about the selection of materials and workmanship,” Churchill says.

#### Pros and Cons of Exposed Beam Ceilings

To better understand exposed beam ceilings, let’s explore some of the positives and negatives for both structural beams and nonstructural or aesthetic beams.

#### STRUCTURAL EXPOSED BEAM CEILINGS PROS AND CONS

##### Pros:

- They contribute to a rustic, time-worn look.
- They are honest and beautiful. “If it is natural and honest, it will inspire for generations to come,” says Ginn.
- They’re low maintenance. “If the beams are in good condition and have been cleaned and installed correctly, there’s little to worry about regarding structure and or dust/shedding,” adds Churchill.

##### Cons:

- They’re more challenging to erect, so skilled contractors with experience in timber beams is a must.
- They’re more expensive (but will typically look great for years to come).
- Working wiring and HVAC around the beams can be challenging, but solvable with skill and creativity.
- Modifying beams for a future renovation can be a challenge.

## FAUX EXPOSED BEAM CEILINGS PROS AND CONS

### Pros:

- They're less expensive than structural beams.
- Many contractors can provide and install faux beams.
- Because they are typically hollow, it is easier to work with electrical and HVAC.

### Cons:

- Beam seams can open up over time to reveal cracks.
- If they are improperly sized and constructed, they can look artificial.
- It can be more difficult to successfully pull off the beam "look" in terms of the overall design.
- They're purely decorative.

"What people need to understand is that replicating the look of authentic timbers requires a high level of skill and understanding," says Churchill. "To truly pull off an applied timber, the selection of material is key. You'll need to select the right wood species, dimensions, and condition of the material. Compromising during the selection process can result in what will look like a decorative ceiling."

Overall, exposed beam ceilings—whether real or faux—can be an amazing way to add a sense of history to your home's spaces. Just be sure to work with a skilled team for the best possible end result. As Churchill reminds us, "Well-considered design and execution are the most important part of the process."

Hendricks Churchill

ELLE DECOR

## Inside a Serene Country House Updated By Hendricks Churchill

*The design firm crafted a welcoming, clean-lined weekend retreat for a New York City couple  
with young children.*

By Dennis Sarlo | Chairish  
Photographs By Amanda Kirkpatrick  
June 26, 2018



## Hendricks Churchill

When a New York City couple with young children turned to architects Hendricks Churchill to update their weekend retreat, the firm gutted two thirds of the interiors to create a new layout that respects tradition, but also features the open spaces and flow that families prize today.

The renovation involved tearing out the main stairway, reorienting the foyer, installing extensive custom millwork and a dozen new windows, lowering the floors of the kitchen and pantry, and creating a spacious addition to the kitchen. Working with interior designer Kathryn Fagin of KJ Designs, the firm has crafted a home that is understated and clean-lined but still warm and welcoming.

Originally built in 1830, it was recently renovated by the architectural firm Hendricks Churchill; the interiors are by Kathryn Fagin of KJ Designs.

The foyer has stone tile floors; the light fixture is by Urban Electric.

The living room's custom sofa by Montauk is upholstered in a Holland and Sherry fabric; the chairs and rug are vintage. New white oak flooring was installed throughout the house, and the walls, paneling, and trim in each room is painted in Farrow and Ball colors.

The dining table, benches, and chairs are by Sawkille, and the pendant light is by Apparatus Studio.

A view from the dining room into the kitchen; the sconces are by Workstead.