

Hendricks Churchill

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Eva Chen's comfortable country cottage decorates by Hendricks Churchill

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FASHION PEOPLE'S HOUSES

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It's no secret that travel is a huge source of inspiration for many, and for Instagram's director of fashion partnerships and former magazine editor Eva Chen, a weekend at Troutbeck in upstate New York was the inspiration that led the born-and-bred New Yorker to embark on a country renovation in Connecticut. 'Given our jobs, my husband and I are always on and always on our phones, so we wanted a place that was completely disconnected,' she explains of the decision to buy a second home. The place they landed on is a late 1980s Cape Cod style house that, thanks to the work of interior design and architecture firm Hendricks Churchill, feels a lot older than it really is.

'Everyone told me to go with Hendricks Churchill – from friends to the real estate agent and people in the area. So finally, I went to their studio and I fell in love with their aesthetic. It reflects the soul of the area – it's modern and classic at the same time,' says Eva. Run by husband and wife team Heide and Rafe – she heads up interiors and he deals with architecture, though they overlap on finishes a lot – the duo were brought on to 'quiet things down and give it more of a consistent feel from room to room,' in Heide's words. Structurally, the house was in good shape, 'but it was owned by an older couple' explains Rafe 'and it evolved over the 40 years with layers and layers of band aids that needed undoing.'

An example of this was a makeshift partition and dark panelling in the kitchen, both of which were removed and beadboard installed instead. 'The gathering spot is the kitchen' says Eva, 'it speaks to my Chinese heritage where you sit down and celebrate with far too much food.' It also speaks to her love of literature and her husband Tom's English heritage, with a Plain English worktable taking centre stage. The Shaker style cabinetry was designed in collaboration with Plain English too, adding to the 'Jane Austen aesthetic' that Eva claims to love. The pandemic caused its share of logistical problems though, as Rafe details: 'Due to COVID we couldn't get the kitchen from England in time, so we designed it with Plain English and then my team made it.'

The kitchen flows into the dining room, which is where Heide pushed Eva the most on the decoration side; 'A lot of clients don't want to commit to pattern, but because Eva's interior scheme was leaning monochromatic, I wanted at least one space to be a little more adventurous for her,' says Heide. 'Rafe had opened the dining room up so it was architecturally distinguished as its own space but you could see it from all the other rooms – it was an opportunity to do a whimsical or energetic pattern as you're not in there a lot but it's always in the peripheral.' The pattern they landed on – after some admitted 'waffling' over it by Eva – is Antoinette Poisson's 'Jaipur' print. 'It's so different from my normal aesthetic,' explains Eva, 'but Heide really pushed me and I'm so glad she did. You want someone who can push you beyond what you know. I love that room now.'

As for the aesthetic generally, Eva describes the colour palette as 'like putting on a warm, grey cashmere sweater'; her preference leans towards blue, greys and soothing neutrals, which Hendricks Churchill executed with Benjamin Moore paints and a layered mix of vintage furniture. These are not heirloom pieces to be fussed over however, as Eva laughs 'We're buying not to collect, but to use. I have two rambunctious young children, who are very much children; they bring containers filled with ants and dirt into the house. I needed to design a space that was beautiful to satisfy my Libra tendencies but could be lived in and be broken in.' As such, the B&B Italia Camaleonda sofa in the guest bedroom is also used by Ren, six, and Tao, four, to build pillow forts, while a vintage coffee table has been co-opted by the pair for lego. Eva's Instagram has shown this reality without any filter, with tales of a bird flying into the kitchen, her son releasing a frog into the house and a lengthy search to find it and get it back outside and endless adventures watching wild turkeys, deer and even bears roam across the garden.

'It feels like you are doing a deep exhale when you look at the trees,' Eva says and the view across the garden has been maximised at every turn; window seats have been added to the kitchen and living room and the master bath is placed in prime position, though Eva admits 'I don't know in what life I would take a bath during the day but it would be the best view.' It's a big change for Eva, a born-and-bred New Yorker, (less so for Tom, who grew up in the English countryside); 'Growing up in the city, the most nature I knew was Central Park – my kids and I are experiencing this natural awakening together. It's been amazing for our kids to see how tadpoles hatch and to see baby newts and see the leaves come out and explain that process to them. I feel so happy when I am sitting at the window seat watching them holding sticks and looking for fish, trudging into the woods with buckets.' This doesn't mean, however, that the family are planning to make Connecticut their permanent home as for them, 'the contrast with the city is what makes it special'.

There's still work to be done, though not on the house itself. The five year plan for the land currently involves a potential swimming pool and perhaps a barn, which surely Hendricks Churchill would be brought back on for, so successful was the collaboration on the house itself. It was a new way of working for Heide, who explains that 'We could get a lot accomplished through text between 10pm and 11.30pm – what's fun about working at that time of night is you're a little bit more relaxed and off the cuff so I could be more candid in my reactions – it allowed us to be more frank with each other which led to a better understanding and relationship'. Similarly, Eva's references were from Instagram, naturally, and she created a collection of around 100 saved posts, shared that with Heide and used that as a jumping off point. 'She would DM me things she found – it was a good way to share work as we went on,' says Eva, whose 'Explore' page transitioned from Armani bags to Antoinette Poisson wallpaper.

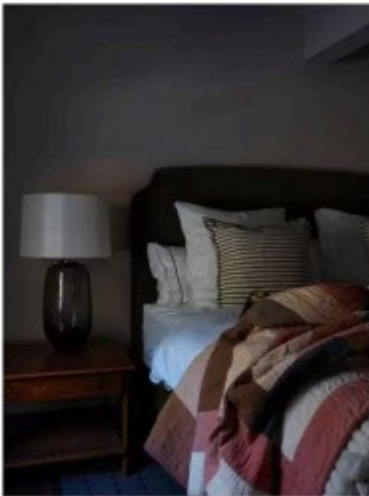
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By Charlotte Richmond
October 24, 2020

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BY CHARLOTTE RICHMOND
3 DAYS AGO

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HENDRICKS CHURCHILL

Hendricks Churchill creates traditional living spaces infused with modern touches and careful curation of colour. We love the vivid use of paint in this project, making a statement of the window frames against the white walls.