



DISCOVERIES

AD VISITS

If the Shoe Fits

Updating a Connecticut home for her growing family, sartorial sensation *Eva Chen* finds she's a country girl after all

IN THE DINING ROOM, ANTOINETTE POISSON WALLPAPER, APPARATUS CEILING LIGHT, AND TABLE AND CHAIRS BY O&G STUDIO.

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The algorithm doesn't lie. Slowly but surely, the Explore grid on Eva Chen's Instagram feed morphed from shoes, bags, and beauty serums into ceramics, mirrors, and house tours. Meanwhile, words like *patina* and names like *Paul McCobb* began to pepper her conversations and thoughts. All signs pointed to her latest project: the renovation of a Connecticut country home for her young family.

For Chen, a born-and-raised New Yorker and sartorial superstar who now works as Instagram's Director of Fashion and Shopping Partnerships, these newfound fixations marked an even larger shift. "I grew up a first-generation American in Greenwich Village and didn't know a landscape beyond Manhattan," she reflects. "To me, nature was Washington Square Park." A weekend at Troutbeck hotel with her husband, Tom Bannister, an advertising creative director, introduced her to the low-key delights of that sylvan stretch where upstate New York meets Litchfield County. Suddenly the consummate city girl had her sights set on the simple life.

"We fell in love with the quietness and with the landscape, which was wild and not groomed to perfection," she says, adding that, with two young kids, Ren and Tao, "we needed a break from the weekend birthday-party, playground, park-sprinkler grind." (The couple recently welcomed their third, River.) After a search that Chen, also a celebrated children's-book author, likens to the story of Goldilocks, they fell in love with a contemporary Cape Cod house on nearly 10 untamed acres of land. "Some homes were too big, some were too small, but this one felt immediately right," she recalls of its 2,800 square feet. "The bones were good. The energy was good. I could tell another family had been happy here."



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1. CHEN WITH REN, TAO, AND RIVER (ON THE WAY).
2. IN THE LIVING ROOM, CB2 SIDE TABLES, A VINTAGE PAUL MCCOBB COCKTAIL TABLE FROM CHAIRISH, A LAWSON-FENNING SOFA, STONE AND SAWYER TABLE LAMPS, VITSOE SHELVES, AND A WORKSTEAD GLOBE LIGHT.



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1. ABOVE THE COUPLE'S LAWSON-FENNING BED IS AN ESTATE-SALE FIND. 2. THE KITCHEN'S PLAIN ENGLISH ISLAND, BERTAZZONI RANGE, AND WORKSTEAD PENDANTS; PAINT BY BENJAMIN MOORE. 3. A B&B ITALIA CAMALEONDA SECTIONAL AND FAYCE TEXTILES WALLPAPER IN THE ATTIC PLAY AREA. 4. NELSON THIN EDGE BED FROM DESIGN WITHIN REACH.



At the recommendation of their real-estate agent and friends, the couple enlisted the Connecticut-based design firm Hendricks Churchill to update the home. “I introduced myself over DM, my primary form of communication,” Chen jokes. “Heide [Hendricks] and Rafe [Churchill] really understood how to unlock the potential of the house, to make it warm and elegant and not too precious.”

Down came a wall, opening up the living room to allow for several seating areas, with ample space for Ren and Tao to build forts while mom and dad, both avid readers, bury their noses in books. In the kitchen, the removal of partitions yielded an equally multipurpose space, with a dining area, fireplace, window seat, and new beadboard walls that satisfied Chen’s call for coziness. And the conversion of the attached garage into a bedroom anticipated visits from her parents, now regular guests. Throughout the home, meanwhile, Hendricks Churchill updated windows, details, and finishes for optimal light and visual cohesion.

“Our goal was not to reinvent the house but to make it work better,” notes Churchill. Adds Hendricks: “It all just sort of flows.” She also worked hand in hand with the couple to furnish the rooms, pulling together sturdy, stylish pieces that could withstand the rhythms of their rowdy brood. Some come from showrooms Chen has long admired, places like Plain English, ABC Carpet & Home, and Apparatus. Others were sourced at estate sales or Reservoir, Hendricks Churchill’s own trove of antique treasures. And many were online discoveries, from art-works seen on Tappan Collective to vintage finds on Etsy and 1stDibs. “I’ve always loved the thrill of the hunt,” Chen notes.

Since the family moved into the home in the summer of 2020, the slog of urban parenting has given way to long, happy country days, as Ren and Tao splash around the pond and survey the grounds, looking for newts, dragonflies, geese, turtles, and bunnies. “Losing structure has been the greatest gift,” says Chen. “I never thought I’d be that person in gardening clogs.”

—SAM COCHRAN