

THE WORK ISSUE

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Kelley Proxmire





Alisia Chesen and sons Jack, 14, (left) and Gavin, 11, with their dog, Marley, in the family's newly renovated Potomac home.



FAMILY *Style*

A new addition provides the perfect excuse for a Potomac family to update their home with bright colors and playful patterns

Kelley
Proxmire

By Jennifer Sergent

After more than a decade in their Potomac home, Alisia and Paul Chesen decided it was time to renovate. They wanted the house to feel more open, so they hired Gaithersburg-based Natelli Homes to combine their kitchen and family room into one large kitchen, add a new 350-square-foot family room off the back, and enlarge openings between existing rooms.

Alisia says she gravitates toward traditional styles, but with two sons approaching their teenage years she wanted to update her furniture and create a fresher, more casual feel. The Chesens turned to interior designer Kelley Proxmire to help them introduce pops of color and set a brighter mood.

Working within the family's \$75,000 design budget, Proxmire helped Alisia determine where to splurge and where to cut corners. Here's how the designer created a cheerful space to carry the family through its next stage of life:

family style



1 Start with a white slate

Proxmire says bright white—more than off-white or beige—is the best background for showing off color. “It’s fresh and light and crisp,” she says, adding that a bright white lifts the mood of an entire room. Another trick: paint the ceiling pale blue to make the room feel bigger. In the parlor, living room and family room, Proxmire used Benjamin Moore’s “cotton balls” in an eggshell finish for the walls and “white dove” in a satin fin-

ish for the trim; on the ceilings, she used Benjamin Moore’s “breath of fresh air” at 25-percent strength in a flat finish.

2 Focus on finishes

Choosing the right combination of finishes in a room is critical. “It adds interest and variety,” Proxmire says. “Finishes are part of the layering of a room, which, when done correctly, is very appealing to the eye.” In the living room, she purposely varied the paint on the wood surfaces, choosing a textured gray finish for

the end tables, smooth cream frames for the armchairs and an attention-grabbing green hue on the secretary. Likewise in the dining room, where she paired the sleek veneer of a table from Restoration Hardware with the distressed wood frames of Wisteria dining chairs.

3 Consider rug remnants

Area rugs, especially for large rooms, can be costly, so ask to see a carpet store’s remnants instead of just shopping what’s



on the floor. Proxmire made several lucky finds at Carpet Palace in Bethesda—she had remnants cut to size and bound for the living room, dining room and family room. “We got a whole-room rug for \$1,000, where a custom rug could be up to \$5,000,” Alisia says.

4 Rethink the art display

“I love to take everything off the walls and start over,” Proxmire says. She asked Alisia to show her every piece of art she had in the house—including artwork

by the children. Proxmire framed and hung two pieces by the kids: a playful papier-mâché flag in the stairwell and a homemade color wheel in the hallway. She grouped still-life paintings in the dining room, and hung several

antique bird prints from her own inventory around a silver branch mirror in the parlor. Another tip: use colorful porcelain plates and platters as inexpensive but impactful wall art, as Proxmire did in the living room.

family style

5 Use expensive fabric sparingly

Rather than reupholstering all of the fabric on the dining room chairs, Proxmire added a lively pattern from Schumacher, the high-end fabric house, to just the seat backs. The blue throw pillows in the living room bear hand-embroidered swirls only on the front, because the backs aren't visible. And instead of ordering dozens of yards of designer fabric for the dining room draperies, Proxmire used inexpensive burlap trimmed in rich navy velvet.

6 Combine custom with catalog

It's smart to go custom on the pieces that get the most wear and tear, and to shop catalogs for accents. For the new family-room addition, where everyone spends a lot of time, Proxmire ordered a sectional sofa from Lee Industries and armchairs from Hickory Chair. She found the room's accent table at West Elm and green gourd lamps at online retailer Lamps Plus. In the lesser-used living room, she ordered armchairs from Ballard Designs, and reupholstered the seats in a blue and white fabric for a more distinctive look. The matching end tables in that room came from Home Decorators Collection.

7 Make new from old

Local vintage shops and auction houses are great sources for affordable secondhand pieces that can be personalized. Proxmire found a secretary and a chest at Sloans & Kenyon in Chevy Chase, both of which she had painted. She chose a vivid green for the desk and added white scrolling to its drawers to echo the ornate traditional hardware. The chest, which now sits in the entry foyer, was painted a soft gray and accented with oversize swirls of white paint and new hardware. Giving new life to old pieces, Proxmire says, gives a space great character.

8 Shop your closet

The Chesens thought they would have to get rid of all their existing furniture to make way for new pieces, but



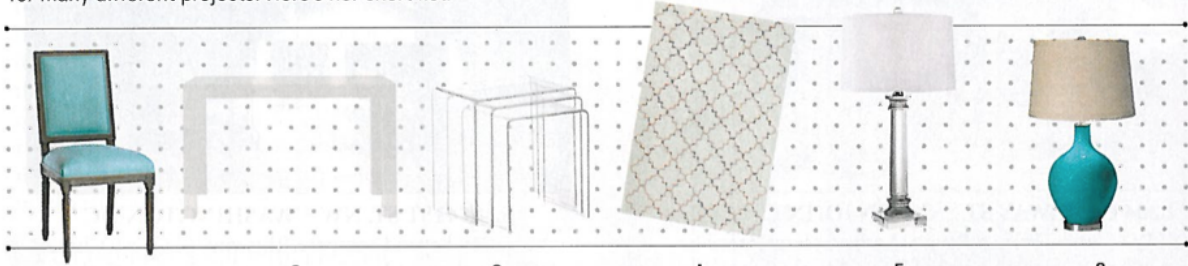
Proxmire convinced them that some items were worth keeping. She took matching French armchairs—which sat unused for years in the family's living room—and had them painted and reupholstered in a crisp white with navy trim; they're now the focal point of the parlor off the entry. Proxmire also resuscitated a demilune wood table from Ethan Allen with new paint. Alisia says giving old furniture a facelift allowed her to spend strategically on other key items. Case in point: a new armchair in the living room by Lee Industries that Alisia got upholstered in an exuberant green and white ikat pattern from Schumacher. ■

Jennifer Sergent is a home and design writer based in Arlington, Va. To comment on this story, email comments@bethesdamagazine.com.

family style

Cheat Sheet

Homeowners often turn to interior designers to help them find custom-made furnishings, draperies and upholstery, but just as much skill is required when choosing ready-made items from a catalog or website, where you can't touch or sit on anything to try it out. Bethesda designer Kelley Proxmire says she often customizes a catalog piece by reupholstering a chair seat or back, or painting a table. She has several go-to pieces, however, that need no work, and she finds herself returning to them frequently for many different projects. Here's her short list:



1
The Chateau Dining Chair from Wisteria
"It's a classic French design that will never go out of style. The finish may change, but the lines are timeless."
www.wisteria.com

2
The Parsons Desk from West Elm
"This table is classic, utilitarian and versatile in that it can be used as a desk, console, sofa table—you name it."
www.westelm.com

3
The Peekaboo collection from CB2
"I love to mix traditional and modern, and one of these pieces in a mostly traditional room is the perfect addition—not to mention inexpensive."
www.cb2.com

4
Dash & Albert rugs
"Dash & Albert has a fun, fresh look that's perfect for overlay on top of a large neutral rug. And many are indoor/outdoor."
www.dashandalbert.com

5
The Vienna Crystal Column Lamp from Lamps Plus
"I like to mix materials—ceramic, wood and glass—and this lamp is perfect because of its classic lines."
www.lampsplus.com

6
The Color Plus line at Lamps Plus
"The line is great because of its selection and ability to customize. You can choose from so many different shapes, colors and shades."
www.lampsplus.com