

New Classic

Interior designer Laura Urban puts a spin on traditional for a style that's all her own.

By Jaci Conry | Photography by Dan Cutrona

The great room, originally a patio, offers additional living space with a view that overlooks a backyard paradise.



Above and opposite page, top: Painted a black-and-white pattern, the kitchen floor is now an eye-catching focal point. Opposite page, below: In the living room, pale blue walls serve as a soothing backdrop for the room's large-scale furnishings.



Well before Laura Urban moved into her Harwich Port home it had iconic status. “The story is that it was built by the mayor of Quincy, who happened to be best friends with Howard Johnson,” says Urban, an interior designer based on Cape Cod. As the lore goes, Johnson frequently visited the house during his summer holidays. “Since we bought the home four years ago, we’ve had people come up to us and say ‘oh, you live in the Howard Johnson house.’”

The gray-shingled Colonial was built in 1945 to emulate the style of the 19th-century homes built throughout the Cape for prosperous sea captains. A cedar-clad roof, shutter-less 12-by-12-pane windows, and a modest front door are all hallmarks of the architecture 200 years ago.

The house beckons the passerby for a second look not only for its perfect symmetry but also for the lush, verdant plot it sits upon. “All of the home’s prior owners have been talented gardeners—each one made the landscape even more lovely,” says Urban, noting that the gardens have been featured in publications several times, including in a New York Times article published in August of 1972.





Above: Two upstairs bedrooms were combined to create the master suite, with a large walk-in closet and master bath. Opposite page: The master bedroom is texture-rich with grasscloth wall covering and shagreen door fronts on a pair of nightstands.

The home's history had great appeal to Urban, but when she purchased the house it was in need of some TLC. "No one had lived in the house for at least three years," she recalls. "It had good bones, but needed to be revived."

It was time for Urban to make her mark on the house, and so she got to work doing what she does best, overhauling the aesthetic. She chose a black, white and pale blue palette for the color scheme throughout the home.

In the kitchen, Urban kept the existing cabinets in place and had them painted a crisp white—they had been previously painted a pink hue that had to go. The wood floor didn't match the original wide-plank pine floors found in the rest of the home, so Urban opted to make the kitchen floor a focal point by painting it a black-and-white pattern.

Nearby, the great room resides in a space that was initially a patio. "Over the years it was enclosed, then heat was added," says Urban, who called for new windows to be installed and for a shingled wall to be dry-walled. Crown molding was also installed and the exterior roof was clad with copper to add interest from the outside. The home's signature black-and-white palette is reflected in several elements, including the sectional, a shag rug and two striped pendants above a new high-top table. The space is punctuated by pops of bright blue.

In the living room, coffered ceilings inset with bead-board paneling were installed along with crown molding and a chair rail, with wainscoting on the wall above the fireplace to evoke a refined aspect. Pale blue walls serve as a soothing backdrop for the room's large-scale furnishings.





Clockwise from top, left corner: To buffer the noise from Route 28, Artistic Grounds installed a waterfall as part of the backyard redesign; the home, as lore goes, was built in 1945 by the mayor of Quincy, a close friend of Howard Johnson, who would often visit during summer holidays; the homeowner wanted the landscape to have a classic English garden design.

The most substantial part of the renovation took place in the second-story master suite, where two bedrooms were combined to create a new sanctuary for the homeowners. A large walk-in closet was created along with a spacious marble-clad bathroom that connects to the bedroom. Grasscloth wall covering on the upper portion of the wall behind the bed adds textural interest as do the shagreen door fronts on a pair of nightstands. A black-and-cream striped upholstered headboard is a focal point. Similar hues are found in a jute rug and a striped chair and ottoman.

While the grounds of the home had been lovingly maintained and

expanded over the decades, Urban wanted to make her mark on the landscape as well. "The yard has some beautiful long-established trees and shrubs that provide a backdrop to wonderful, unique flowers that bloom during different seasons," says Urban. However, the backyard, where Urban spends a great deal of time, needed some adjustment.

Urban contacted Dustin Wolfe of Marstons Mills-based Artistic Grounds to reimagine the backyard. The new design centered on a brick patio with bluestone edges that encompasses two distinct areas: a place for dining and a seating area around a built-in fire-pit.

“We live on Route 28, so I wanted to buffer the noise from the road,” says Urban. To that end, Wolfe built a new pond with a waterfall behind the fire-pit. The rushing water masks the sound of traffic. New boxwoods were planted around both of the new hardscapes along with all-white flowers. In keeping with the architecture of the house, Urban wanted the landscape to have a classic, English garden design; the timeless plantings and traditional brick and bluestone materials honor that. “We use the patio at night, usually, and the white flowers show up in the dark. It’s very pretty,” says Urban. “It’s a wonderful spot.” ▲



In the living room, for a more refined look, coffered ceilings inset with bead-board paneling were installed, along with crown molding and a chair rail.

in the details



Grasscloth wall covering in the master bedroom is Phillip Jeffries Chevron Chic/Zebra Crossing.



Wide-plank pine floors in the kitchen were custom painted by Paul Forte with a black-and-white pattern designed by Laura Urban.



Drum Pendant with hand-blown glass ball and hand-painted shade is by Stray Dog Designs.

LAURA URBAN

ARTISTIC GROUNDS