

# DESIGNERS' OWN HOMES

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DESIGNERS' OWN HOMES ISSUE

# Lorraine Levinson

Her renovated home embraces **NATURAL COLORS** and **MAXIMIZES THE VIEWS**

INTERVIEW WITH LORRAINE LEVINSON, LORRAINE LEVINSON INTERIOR DESIGN | PHOTOGRAPHER JANE BEILES







The black-framed windows in the family room accentuate the views. "It feels like we live in a treehouse," Levinson says. The soft Holly Hunt Great Outdoors fabric on the sectional won't fade in all of the natural light.

**opposite** The powder room is papered in Philip Jeffries's Enchanted Woods cork wallcovering, and the black marble sink and unlacquered brass fixtures are Kalista. Levinson removed the old Colonial-style spindle staircase and devised a "floating" staircase made of glass and rounded wood rails. The runner is from Carpet Trends, and the Hanley light fixture is by Arteriors.



The designer commissioned the oil-on-linen painting by John Harris over the fireplace to mirror the view outside. The vintage leather chairs are from Istodis, and the snake and lions are from Arteriors Home. **opposite bottom:** The Restoration Hardware light fixture in the family room is made of natural unlacquered brass.



**You've been living in this home for almost two years. What led you to it?** Our family lived in Rye for twenty-one years in a wonderful neighborhood that was terrific for raising kids, but when our youngest son was about to graduate from high school, we were looking to make a lifestyle change. Given what I do, I wanted to find something I could fix up because it made more sense for us financially, and of course, every time I walked into a house I wanted to change everything! This house is in a marshy inlet and part of an Audubon preserve, and we get wonderful water views at high tide. It's also close to downtown Greenwich, so we can walk to

restaurants and the movies, and take the train to New York and the ferry to Island Beach. Everything is very close by.

**Tell me about some of the renovating you did before you moved in.** I felt like this house needed to be more modern than our previous home, which was more traditional. It had a very quirky layout. The first thing we did was gut most of the first floor and take out the wall between the kitchen and family room. The crown molding and chair rails were removed, and we took out a staircase going up to the second floor and one going





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—LORRAINE LEVINSON



down to the basement. We also relocated the kitchen, and most of the bathrooms in the house were gutted and renovated. We reconfigured a full bathroom into a powder room on the first floor, replaced the wood flooring on the main floor and refaced the fireplaces.

**What inspired that fabulous bookcase in the family room?** The bookcase is all new. My husband is a real book collector, and he has a special feeling about books that he's read. He keeps them all, so we needed a place to store all those books! This house is more open than our previous home, where we had room for lots of bookcases. Originally, there were stairs to a balcony leading to double doors to the master bedroom. So instead of taking out the doorway and removing the balcony and leaving a plain wall, I decided to turn that wall into bookcases, which was a challenge for our builder.

**How did you overcome that challenge?** With a lot of drawings and measuring and figuring out how much to recess it. I also researched and found a company out of Germany for the ladder, because most ladders in the United States weren't tall enough—it needed to be sixteen feet tall to reach the top of the bookcase. The ladder is on a track and very easy to move, but we crossed our fingers that after everything was built and the ladder arrived, it would fit at a certain angle; otherwise, we wouldn't have had room for furniture. Thankfully, it all worked out.

**What were your thoughts when choosing materials and fixtures?** Orange is my favorite color, and I also like natural colors and those that can't be easily defined. I'm drawn to materials and textures that really show their nature, like raw brass, iron and wood that isn't highly polished. I also like to mix old and new. The two leather chairs in the family room are vintage from Istdibs. They have an unusual "V" design I haven't seen anywhere before. The family room table is made of iron with Escher-inspired "tumbling blocks" of wood, and that pattern is repeated in the powder room floor. The sectional in the family room was custom-made to match the dimensions of a sofa we had in our Rye house, which my husband found very comfortable. The roller shades and Rogers & Goffigon drapes are operated with a remote.

**It sounds like the family room is your favorite space in the house. It is.** The giant windows make the room feel bigger, and we have a beautiful fireplace, so all year round we feel like we're part of nature. We see egrets, deer, hawks and all kinds of animals in the marsh, and we have water views at high tide. The view is really the main color of the room.

**How did you incorporate the outdoors into your living space?** The black around the windows in the family room and elsewhere is designed to frame the view; it looks like we live in a treehouse. The deck outside the kitchen has cable railings; we took out the original white spindles that would have blocked the view. In a more literal sense, the artwork over the family room fireplace was something I had commissioned, and it reminds me of the view outside. There are leaves on water, and it looks very sun-

**right:** Levinson designed these unique bookcases to display her husband's treasured book collection. The extra-long, stainless-steel sliding ladder was made in Germany by MWE.













**right:** One of Levinson's golden retrievers enjoys an unobstructed view, thanks to the cable railing on the deck; the bar area faucet is Karbon by Kohler, and the backsplash is handmade Moroccan tile from Mosaic House. **below:** The kitchen's dining area flows into the family room and is geared for entertaining. The zebra wood table was custom-made by The Finished Edge. **opposite:** Rye Marble supplied the Calacatta Lincoln marble hood and countertops in the kitchen. The hood and the wall behind it are from matching slabs, so the veining is continuous. Cabinetry by Studio Dearborn is finished with Linnea pulls.



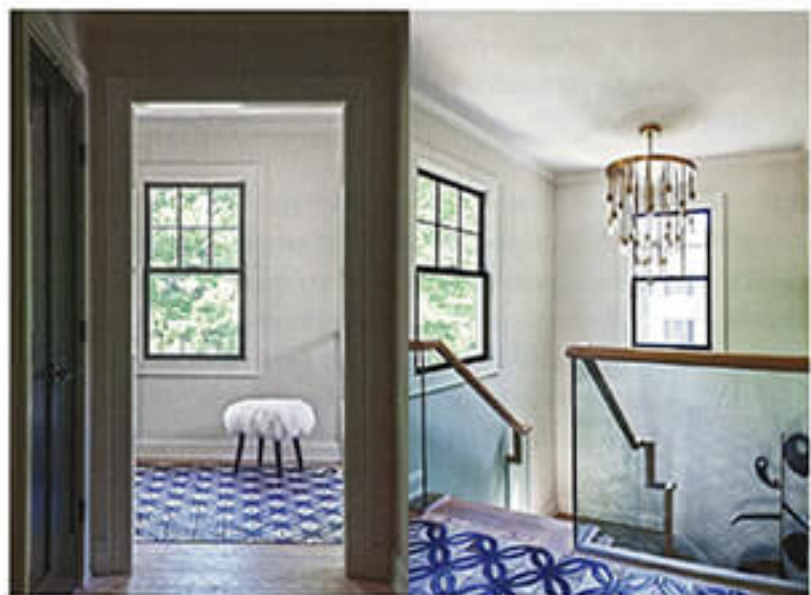








**left:** The cozy dining room is perfect for smaller dinner parties. Pierre Frey's Kopokier linen wallpaper adds texture, and artwork by Evan Roberts was an inspiring touch. **below:** Painting the window frames black allowed Levinson to update the house without spending money on new windows. The light fixture is from Emporium Home.







**this spread:** In the master bedroom, Levinson had the channel-back bed custom-made to blend with the rug that she brought from her former home. She chose the black-and-brass Dax chandelier from Arteriors and repeated the square motif in the nightstand lamps. The drapery fabric is Holly Hunt's Great Plains.

dappled. The artist's name is John Harris. I met him at the Bruce Museum art show, and I fell in love with his artwork.

**How did you redesign the kitchen?** The kitchen flows right into the family room, and it didn't before. There was originally only a small, regular-size door opening into the family room. Because our entertaining is usually more on the casual side, that space seemed more suitable for a larger kitchen table. I designed the table, and it was custom-made by The Finished Edge. It's a beautiful zebra wood done with a Danish oil finish. Zebra wood is typically shiny, and I wanted more of a matte finish on it. The hood in the kitchen is made out of a slab of marble, and it looks like the marble vein is traveling up the wall. That was another challenge for the builder because we needed to make sure it was properly supported and didn't fall down.

**Is this where you do most of your entertaining?** Yes, we created that dining area to be more of an entertaining and serving area. The cabinets are all for barware and glassware—the doors are stainless steel, and there's a beverage fridge and a wine fridge. The appliances are in the working part of the wide galley kitchen. We tried, but there wasn't room to do an island. I expected to have an island, which is where people typically sit and entertain, but I actually like this layout better because our guests end up sitting at the table to eat, the food and bar are right there, and they're away from all the cooking mess that's taking place in the kitchen. It actually works quite well.

**How did the dining room come together?** It's a small space that seats six people. We wanted a place where we could have cozy dinner parties. We took out the original chair rail, and I used a linen wallpaper from Pierre Frey. I balanced the artwork with the only window in the room.

**What is the story behind that painting in the dining room?** It's by Evan Robarts. The painting is actually done by putting pieces of linoleum on a board, and the paint is put on using a mop. Apparently, he had worked as a janitor at one time while he was in art school, and this method of painting is his homage to the work he was doing as he was studying to be an artist. I thought the whole feeling of honoring that kind of work was something our family would value, and I found that very inspirational.

**Is this home all that you wanted it to be?** Though I don't have an idea in my head of the ideal home, I did pay attention to the architecture, and I feel like I incorporated personal touches and a lot of the ideas that I wanted to execute. —INTERVIEW BY RISA GOLDBLUM

#### Resources:

Interior designer: Lorraine Levinson Interior Design, Greenwich: 914-393-6389;

lorrainelevinsoninteriordesign.com

Architect: Paul Shainberg, Paul Shainberg Architects, Rye, NY: 914-967-3474;

shainbergarchitects.com

Kitchen designer: Sarah Robertson, Studio Dearborn, Mamaroneck, NY:

914-815-2707; studiodearborn.com



