

A FAMILY AFFAIR

Rui Ponte designs a bright and airy Cape Cod-style home to suit his clients' busy lifestyle

*By Sherry Crisp
Photography by Kenneth M. Wyner*

Whether it's the neighborhood baseball team, the preschool birthday crowd or a group of business colleagues, all feel welcome in the bright, inviting Bethesda home of Sue Hendrickson and Rob Kohn. Architect Rui Ponte planned it that way—he studied the couple's lifestyle and goals, and designed a house that seamlessly accommodates the two busy professionals, their three active children, a very large puppy and a full social calendar. Every inch works in their spacious, 7,000-square-foot Cape Cod-style home.

The home's blue shake and white clapboard exterior evokes Hendrickson's childhood memories of New England, where she spent time visiting grandparents and later attended college. "We

Architecture: Rui Ponte, AIA, Ponte Mellor & Associates, Bethesda, Maryland

Rui Ponte designed the home in a New England vernacular. Solid wood columns on the flagstone porch, copper chimney caps, eyebrow returns on the gables and fieldstone steps complete the look.

To bring the New England style indoors, Ponte chose a staggered white-box design for the front staircase (right). "It's an old trim detail used in the 1850s on the Connecticut coast, a way to dress up a stairway with a Puritanical heritage," he says. On the second-floor landing (below), he created a homework area complete with a window seat that's positioned where the eyebrow dormer extends over the front porch.



“We’ve had 50 people—we invite all the parents to our kids’ parties—or even 200 for our Christmas party, and it didn’t feel a bit crowded,” says homeowner Sue Hendrickson.



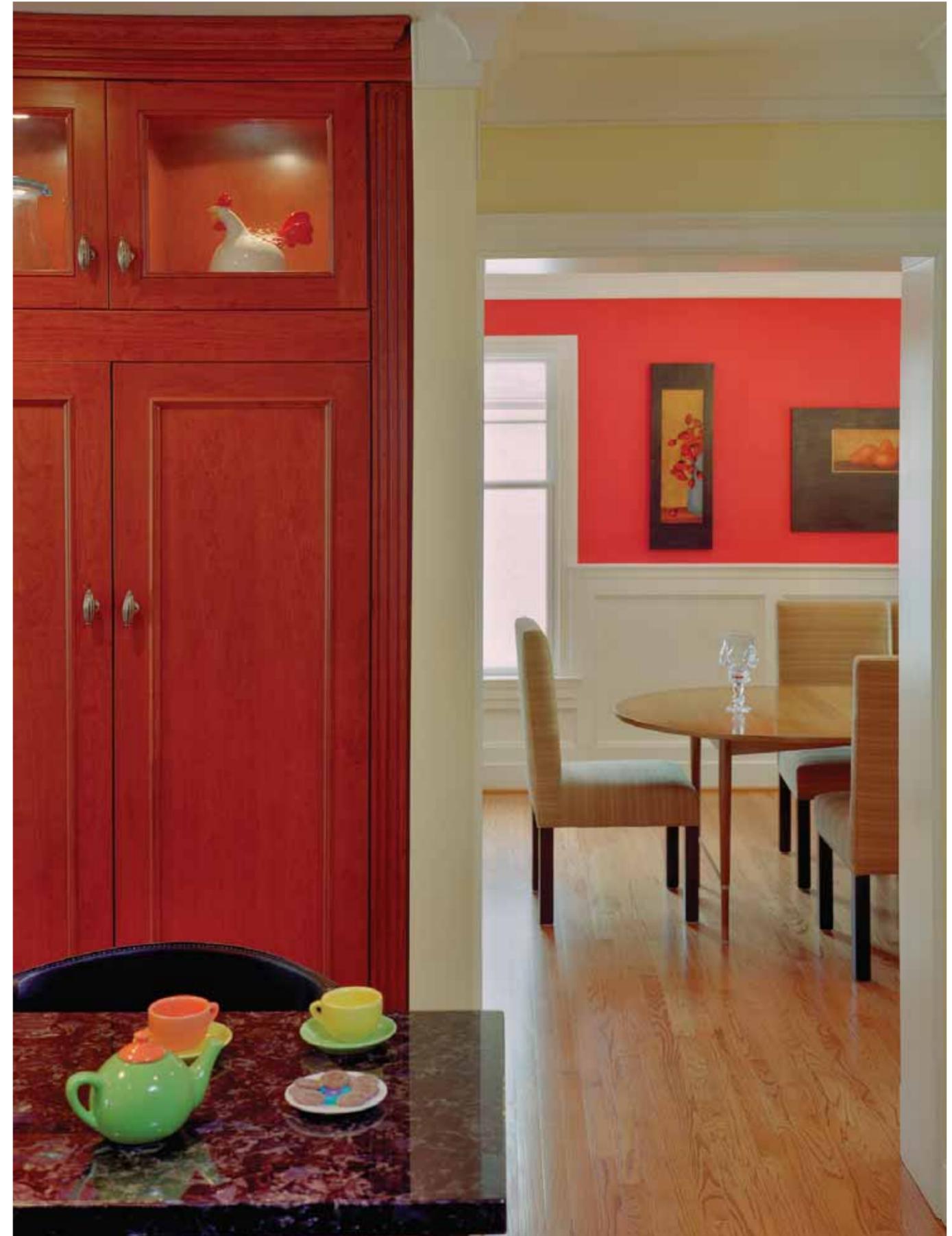
The living room (above) and dining room (opposite) radiate from the central kitchen. Oak floors with a cherry stain, white crown molding and white trim unify the rooms, which are all bathed in light. Hendrickson chose “happy, inviting colors,” honing in on shades of sage by Benjamin Moore, accented with dynamic Chili Pepper Red in the dining room.

wanted the colors to be consistent with the style of the house, so we looked at Benjamin Moore’s historic line, and chose Newburyport Blue, named after a town in Massachusetts,” she says. Kohn says that several times a month someone rings their doorbell to inquire about the unusual hue.

Ponte and his wife first met Kohn and Hendrickson in 1995, when the couples bought homes across the street from each other and began renovations at the same time. Kohn and Hendrickson initially hired Ponte to help them remodel their basement. But when their third child was on the way, they called on him to design a major expansion of their two-bedroom colonial, which was built in 1941. Once the project was underway, however, they discovered termite damage, water leaks and roofing problems so extensive that there wasn’t much to salvage. They decided to tear the house down and start over. In addition to more bedrooms, the new plan called for a large central kitchen, good flow for entertaining and lots of light. The couple also wanted to establish a sense of privacy in their densely populated neighborhood.

Recalls Ponte, “The challenge was scale: to do such a large home, to include all the space they needed and yet keep it in the style of the neighborhood they loved. We decided on a two-story with a finished, walk-out basement, purposely omitting the idea of an attic so the home wouldn’t overwhelm.”

To achieve the privacy his clients desired, Ponte designed the house in a





The family room radiates from the kitchen. Generous white cabinetry extends from the kitchen's dining area to the family room, storing toys, CDs and other necessities. "We wanted a kid-friendly home without toys everywhere," Hendrickson explains.

The spacious kitchen boasts an eight-by-nine-foot geometric island topped with a nearly seamless slab of Russian granite. The cherry cabinets by Wood-Mode provide plenty of storage. Ponte designed an unusual latticework hood over the stainless range, in a simulated white slate. Stainless-steel appliances and a Zebra slate backsplash in charcoal and blue add the finishing touches.





The U-shape of the house ensures privacy from the neighbors. The kitchen and living room spill onto a deck and surrounding fieldstone terraces. The family enjoys outdoor entertaining, whether they're hosting an adults-only dinner party or a kid-friendly marshmallow roast around the fire. Clare Siegel of Land Art Design in McLean, Virginia, designed the landscape.

U-shape. "Because of the angled windows, there is complete privacy," marvels Kohn. "Whether we are out on the terrace or inside, we don't see our neighbors' homes and they don't see ours." This set-up renders window treatments unnecessary. "We wanted the light, openness of a modern home, combined with traditional style," says Hendrickson.

Ponte designed all the ground-floor rooms to radiate from the kitchen. The dining room, foyer, library and "adult" powder room angle off to face the front of the house, while the family room, living room, mudroom, children's powder room and back staircase open off the rear of the kitchen. Oak floors with a cherry stain, white crown molding and white trim unify the rooms, which are all bathed in light. "In a large home, you want to bring daylight in; the back faces north, so there's no issue of sunlight, and having many windows allows for [optimal] views," says Ponte.

Hendrickson and Ponte worked together to design a large, open kitchen that any party planner would covet. Hendrickson loves to cook and enjoys having friends and family there to help. "I knew [designing] it would be challenging," she says, "because you can see the kitchen from everywhere. I wanted it to be neutral but interesting, since so much goes on here."

Ponte started with a striking, eight-by-nine-foot geometric island shaped from a nearly seamless slab of Russian granite. Black bar stools line one side of the island, and on the other, cooks enjoy ample workspace plus an elevated countertop for serving. Twin dishwashers hide under the counter

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behind handsome Wood-Mode cabinetry. The cherry cabinets surround the kitchen, floor to ceiling, providing storage for every imaginable utensil. Three gold pendants light the island, and selected cabinets also feature back lighting to showcase pottery and crystal. Stainless-steel appliances and a Zebra slate backsplash in charcoal and blue add the finishing touches.

The everyday family dining table faces a wall of windows overlooking the backyard and twin terraces. Generous cabinetry extends from the kitchen's dining area to the family room, storing toys, CDs and other necessities. "We wanted a kid-friendly home without toys everywhere," Hendrickson explains, "and we're not knick-knack people." Much of the decorative art comes in the form of watercolors painted by the kids, framed in primary colors.

"The family room is a place we all

spend tons of time in," says Kohn. And it's also great as party space, with a fireplace, a big-screen TV and a large brick-red sectional sofa. Even the adjacent living room was designed to be used—not roped off like many of its more formal counterparts. "We wanted it in the back, where it would be used, rather than a traditional front room," Hendrickson says of the inviting space; Chevy Chase designer Laurie Berk coordinated the colorful fabrics and furnishings in her client's favorite hues.

Hendrickson and Kohn agree that having all rooms branch off the kitchen has created a perfect flow: "We've had 50 people—we invite all the parents to our kids' parties—or even 200 for our Christmas party, and it didn't feel a bit crowded," says Hendrickson.

The focal point upstairs is a "home-work area" on the roomy landing. Hendrickson loves the wide window

seat, created where the eyebrow dormer extends over the front porch. The kids' artistic talents have room to blossom in the finished basement, which includes an arts-and-crafts activity area that would rival that of any school. "We wanted a space that would be fun for the kids, as opposed to a structured environment," explains Hendrickson. They have carefully planned the basement for the future, with wiring in place for an eventual home theater and a storeroom destined to become a wine cellar.

"My best success in this project is the fact that I can see the entire home working for them as a family, every day," says Ponte. "It's a great feeling." ❖

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