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RENOVATION STYLE

50 Best Ideas

*Create the Character
You Crave*

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GREEK REVIVAL
LOCUST VALLEY
NEW YORK



This Photo A restrained lantern, coupled with a new marble floor and wooden banister, brightens up the entry hall, which the previous owners appointed with dark, showy materials and textures. *Opposite* An antique French marble-top cabinet from the couple's former Manhattan townhouse functions as a living room bar.



Left A Louis-style cane-back chair and Gustavian sofa impart old-world charm to the living room. **Below** The original ranch home now telegraphs classic Greek Revival elegance. **Opposite** The living room's hearth-side seating balances upholstered comfort with European touches such as sunburst sconces, an antique limestone mantel, and a French seaside painting by Barbara Estes, the homeowner's mother.



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Spanish moss does not drape languidly from the trees surrounding this Locust Valley, New York, home. Massive antebellum columns support no grand plantation pediment. But once inside, the air of Southern gentility is unmistakable. "I chose her partly because she was Southern," says the Atlanta-raised homeowner Mettrie Lari of her interior designer, Meg Braff, who originally hails from Tupelo, Mississippi. "I knew when I was referencing what I liked that she'd get that—like the blue ceiling in the sunroom, which is what they do to the porch ceilings in Charleston, South Carolina."

Before Braff ever entered the picture, there was the issue of the house itself. Mettrie had been living with her husband, John Lari, in a Manhattan townhouse for years. As they hit their mid-30s, with a toddler daughter and a son on the way, the need for relocating became clear. John, a real estate developer, was born and raised on Long Island, and since his company was based there, it seemed the obvious choice. So he called local architect and friend Towny Gray and started house hunting.

Gray and John proved a proficient team. With his experience in the business, Mettrie says, "My husband brought a lot of knowledge to the table. He helped me understand what was an easy, quick fix when we were looking at houses and what would be hard or really expensive to do." Gray made things even clearer by sketching out renovation possibilities for each of the houses they visited.





BEST IDEAS

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For a historical look, minimize recessed lighting in favor of sconces, pendants, and other fixtures that add character.

16

A front hall's floor can make a real statement. Consider splurging here on marble or another dramatic material.

17

Edit details such as ornate moldings and pilasters. Too much can feel stuffy and grandiose for modern living.

18

Think of antique mantels like any other antique investment. They can change the feel of a room.

19

Whether custom-built or bought as is, banquettes save space in breakfast rooms and reduce the visual clutter of chair legs.



This Photo Slate floors and a beaded-board ceiling painted blue—reminiscent of Charleston, South Carolina, porches—impart a relaxed, beachy feel. The bold mix of patterns adds complexity to an essentially casual room. *Opposite* The dining room's English hand-printed wallcovering feels more like a documentary paper (a replica of a historic pattern), says interior designer Meg Braff, "similar to damask, with depth and great graphic impact, but younger." The rug, from the couple's first home, "keeps the room from being too monochromatic."





Left A trestle table (rather than a four-leg version) makes it easier to slide into the banquette. Coral prints inspired the color scheme in the family area. **Below** Marble counters and white paint transformed the dark kitchen. **Opposite** Braff reupholstered existing furniture in bright fabrics. An ottoman's soft edges are safe for the family's 1-year-old.



Though they looked at many homes, the one they eventually bought was the first place they saw. In an odd twist of fate, Gray had renovated that very structure some 15 years earlier, giving the dreary 1950s ranch a stately Greek Revival visage. What initially made the Laris uncertain were interior touches the former owners had added in the 1990s.

The foyer, for instance, boasted a slate floor (now marble) and an ornate metal banister (now wood). The entrance to the dining room was flanked by columns, and the living room was ringed in fancy crown molding, both of which are now history. A dome ceiling in the entry hall also went away. Finally, Gray reworked the back of the house, adding a mudroom off the garage and a guest apartment with a home office above it, bringing the square footage to 5,500. A new back hall connects them all.

For the interiors, Braff says, "Mettrie wanted a warm and gracious Southern feel that mixed old and new." Mettrie found pitch-perfect inspiration in a Savannah residence that had been featured in *Renovation Style*, coincidentally. "Whenever I felt we were veering away," she says, "I would always come back to those pictures."

Mettrie loves hot weather and the beach and wanted to be reminded of that, even in winter, as well as of childhood summers in the south of France with her grandmother. Having grown up around the South's bright, airy







Renovation Style editors get thoughts on furniture from interior designer Meg Braff, above.

Do you prefer to start from scratch where furnishings are concerned?

A. Why throw good furniture away? We used everything. The family room furniture, the dining chairs, and the living room bar all came from the Laris' townhouse. We just reupholstered some and repurposed other pieces. The old dining room table, for example, is now the desk in John's home office.

How did you adapt these furnishings for the homeowners' budding family?

A. The furniture in the family areas is commercial-grade, so it can take a beating. The chairs are washable cotton, and I laminated the banquette fabric. The indoor-outdoor carpet is very forgiving.

interiors appointed with timeworn antiques, Braff knew how to approach this. "What we did with the core of the house," she says, "was lightening, freshening, and editing—taking out elements that we found distracting."

Key blues and bright fabrics carried the seaside vibe throughout the public rooms. European furniture forms—gilded sunburst sconces and a mirror, chairs with French Louis silhouettes, and a Gustavian-like sofa in the living room, for instance—and French landscapes painted by Mettrie's mother, Barbara Estes, added the Provencal ambience. These were mixed with upholstered pieces to blend old-world distinction with modern comfort.

The miracle of the project—aside from the six-month start-to-finish construction and decoration schedule—is how adeptly it sidesteps clichés. Damask would have been an understandable choice for the dining room walls. Yet Braff's hand-printed English paper balances that pattern's level of sophistication with a younger graphic punch. The entry hall effectively references an antebellum foyer, but the absence of rugs, stepped crown moldings, or patterned wallpaper gives it a pared-down simplicity more in line with today's ideas about formal entertaining. And while the sunroom ceiling might be "Charleston porch" blue, its mix of Swedish-like florals and faux wood-grain fabric feels entirely modern.

The home's opposing influences—North versus South and traditional versus contemporary—work together in a surprisingly harmonious way. "The whole house strikes a balance," Braff says.

Voice of Experience

Ceiling heights play a big role in how your home feels. In this home, interior designer Meg Braff says, "We emphasized height to make the spaces feel more generously proportioned." In taller areas such as the sunroom, the ceiling got an attention-grabbing treatment: sky blue-

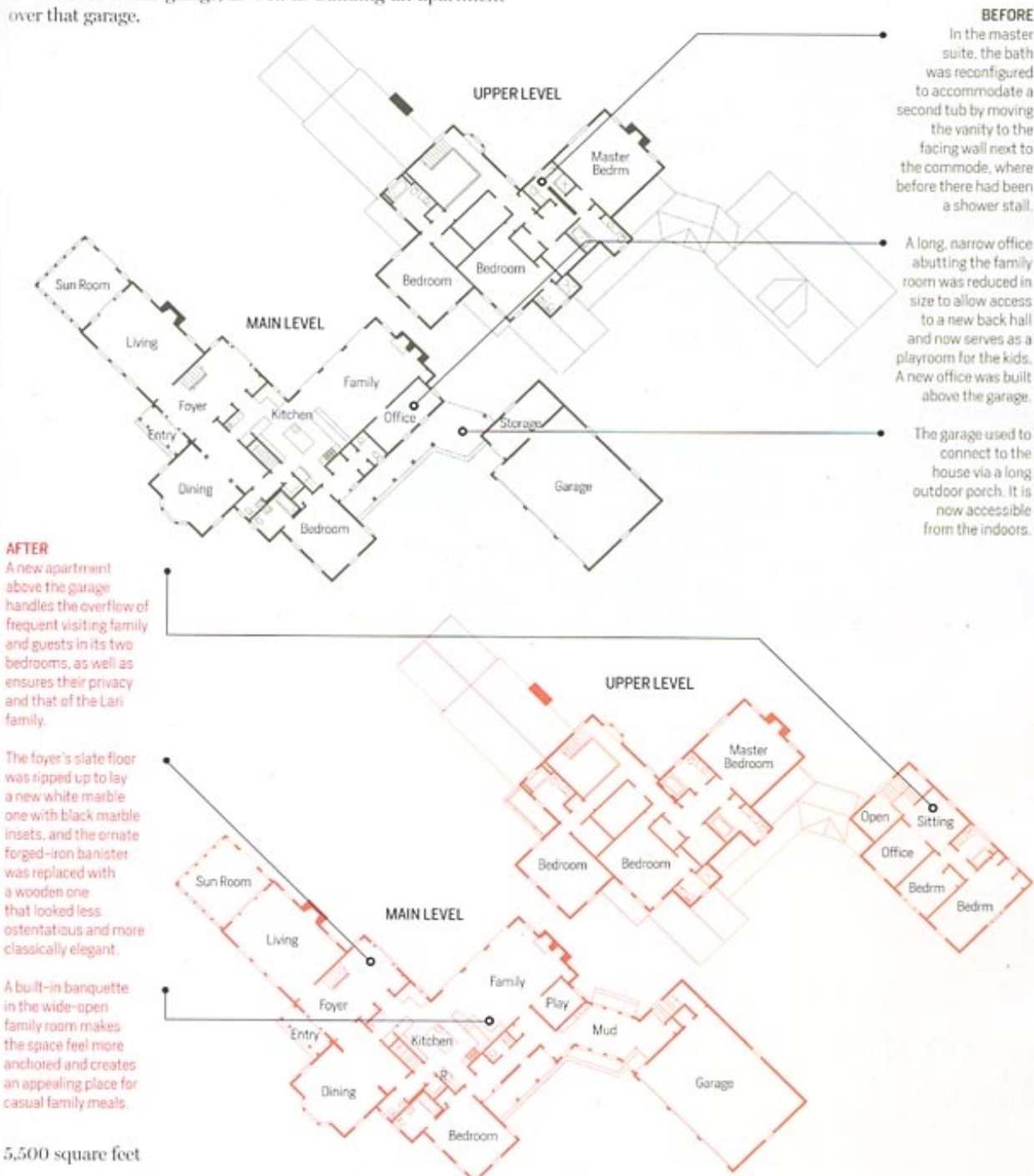
pointed beaded board. In the living room's low-slung space, Braff removed crown moldings "so your eye didn't stop at 8 feet," she says. Taking curtain rods to the top of the walls and hanging floor-length drapes from them further emphasizes the room's verticality.

Above Left "I wanted a calm, peaceful atmosphere in our bedroom," says homeowner Mettrie Lari. Braff responded with serene celadon and lots of comfortable upholstered pieces. Painting the tray ceiling white made it all bright and airy.

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The Plans, *Before & After*

The home's latest renovation (it had been converted from a ranch 15 years before) involved reworking and expanding a back hallway and constructing a mudroom to connect the main house to the garage, as well as building an apartment over that garage.



ARCHITECTURE AUSTENT, GRAY INTERIOR DESIGN MEG BRAFF LANDSCAPE DESIGN PAUL'S NURSERY