

# *The Element of* **SURPRISE**





A Connecticut antique takes a few unexpected turns in the hands of an interior designer and her photographer husband

Dine-In Delight Old plaster walls trimmed with red paint endow the dining room with character and warmth. Eighteenth-century prints, which appear to hang from faux-painted ribbons, and a nineteenth-century English portrait enliven the room. Kelly integrated blue-and-white transferware plates into the schema to vary the geometric rhythm of prints and to introduce more color and pattern. See Resources.

By SUSAN SULLY  
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TONY DUQUETTE



Living History (shown  
PAGE AND ABOVE) In the living  
room, an antique demijohn  
catches the light. A tufted  
ottoman and new wing  
chairs soften rustic wood  
and plaster surfaces. Toile  
pillows combine with the  
striped carpet, inlaid box  
and wool throw to add  
graphic energy. White  
bowls, shells, eggs and  
coral branches mingle with  
books on well-curated  
shelves. See Resources.

## WHEN INTERIOR DESIGNER

and author Annie Kelly and her husband, photographer Tim Street-Porter, decided to buy a second home, they started their search in Paris. "We were looking for an eighteenth-century apartment that would offer a contrast to our house in Los Angeles," says Kelly. But when a friend pointed out that there were plenty of eighteenth-century houses on the East Coast, they reset their sights on Connecticut. Before long, the couple acquired a farmhouse in Litchfield County with all the quirks of age: wide floorboards that creak a bit, old plaster walls that are slightly out of plumb, and original mantels that lean a little to one side. "It was the right size and the right period," says Kelly, who liked the fact that the building predated the American Revolution and would have housed English or European settlers.

One of the designer's credos is to furnish a house appropriately to its period and style. Then, she says, the interior will harmonize with its setting. "That's not to say you can't add pieces from different periods to contribute character and make things more interesting."

Her Connecticut cottage is a perfect illustration of this philosophy. Although the first impression is one of stepping back in time, something slightly unexpected appears in almost every room. A Doric column topped with a bronze finial stands just inside the front door—a salvaged bit of classical architecture contrasting with the interior's rustic simplicity. In a living room with hand-hewn ceiling beams and a primitive pine mantel, a black-and-white striped carpet provides an island of contemporary style. Slightly brighter than the pea-green shade popular in colonial America, chaise longue curtains add another up-to-date touch. While the English and European furniture is in sync with the house's period, a giant, sun-bleached elk horn poised on a low stool intersects a modern, almost sculptural element.





**Good Mornings (his and hers)**

Simple but well-crafted furnishings in the breakfast room include a gateleg table and a Swedish china cabinet. A stenciled border adds a rural charm that contrasts with full-length tulle curtains. Making Connections (p. 100; see) A "married piece" combining a seventeenth-century chest with an eighteenth-century base conceals a drinks cabinet in a corner of the living room. The high-backed chair and column function as a subtle divider between the living room and the entrance hall. See Resources.

The couple's penchant for unlikely pairings of the high and the low, the natural and the hand-crafted finds full expression in the bookcases framing the entrance to the dining room. On their shelves, books rub shoulders with antique children's toys, coral branches and shells, porcelain bowls, wooden boxes and architectural fragments. Nearly all come from local antiques shows and flea markets. As a photographer, Street-Porter often finds inspiration in these places where, he says, "I'm always discovering combinations of things that are completely arresting because they are so unexpected and so unplanned." The local antiques scene is equally inspiring to Kelly: "If you want to find something fresh, lively and individual, flea markets are the best places to look."

For the dining room, Kelly bought chairs in different but related styles, one associated with Yorkshire County and the other with Lancashire. Framed prints depicting English cultural and political figures appear to be hung on ribbons matching the red trim, but in reality Kelly painted the faux-ribbons to add a touch of whimsy.

At first, Kelly resisted the blue-and-white china so readily and cheaply available in the local shops and flea markets. But finally she succumbed, amassing a mix-and-match collection of English and Chinese transference to complement the pieces her husband inherited from his English family. She likes to introduce an element of surprise by using empty decanters like obelisks to add height and glitter to table settings or mixing tinted modern glassware with finer crystal. "You should never be afraid to use something that's not 'correct,' especially if it captures your eye and your imagination," Kelly explains. "Otherwise things become too serious." ❀

