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A photograph of a grand, circular staircase with a central chandelier and a colorful gift basket in the foreground. The staircase has a dark wood handrail and white balusters. The ceiling is a large, circular, recessed area with a chandelier hanging from the center. The walls are a light, neutral color. In the foreground, there is a large, colorful gift basket wrapped in red, green, and yellow paper, with a silver ribbon. The text 'Understated Elegance' is overlaid on the image in a white, serif font, following the curve of the staircase.

Understated Elegance

A 12,000-square-foot shingle-style home in Chappaqua is a savvy blend of high-end fixtures, catalog finds, and Home Depot bargains.

By Julia Lange



It's well known

that dressing these days is all about melding the high and the low—mixing, say, a Tory Burch tunic with a Target tote.

There's a certain household in Chappaqua that's seamlessly applying the high-low formula to its decorating scheme—with sophisticated, yet comfortable, results.

Sure, Karen Yarasavage's five-bedroom, 12,000-square-foot, shingle-style house boasts Osborne & Little wallpaper in the vestibule, Brunschwig & Fils velvet tapestry in the media room, and Stark carpet in the office and family room. But "then I let my wallet rest," Yarasavage says.

So a powder-room cabinet is from Fortunoff, the guest bathroom's stained-glass light fixture is culled from The Home Depot Expo Design Center, and a three-paneled dressing-room mirror is plucked from the Horchow catalog. (Tucked into that dressing area, incidentally, you're far more likely to find Merrells than Manolos.) The master bath's cabinet knobs come from Klaff's. "I just went down there and said, 'Oh, this'll do,'" says Yarasavage, 42, who stresses that the room's fixtures are "definitely not Waterworks"—just Waterworks "knockoffs." The only reason she reached back into her wallet to splurge on Waterworks? The kids' white bathroom tile.

The girls—Kelsey, 9; Kathryn, 7; and Kaylin, 5—are partly to thank for their mom's informal approach to outfitting a home. "We knew it had to be comfortable and not fussy with three young children running around," says Elizabeth Hendee, a decorator who owns Greenwich-based Chequer Interiors.

Hendee began working with Yarasavage in 2003, while the house was under construction and Yarasavage was pregnant with Kaylin. The family (Dad works in finance) moved in a year later. "Karen was shopping for tile with Kaylin when she was three days old," says the house's designer, Ken Andersen, a principal at R.S. Granoff Architects in Greenwich.

With her children's needs always top-of-mind, Yarasavage nixed adding a sink in the kitchen island to ensure enough counter space for undertaking big baking projects with the girls. (A kitchen sign reminds residents and guests that "Life's short...eat cookies.") The stone surrounding the pool, which sits on two and a half private acres, is eramosa, a Canadian limestone that won't scorch tender feet, which is important, since the children regularly seek refuge in the pool after soccer practice. High on Yarasavage's wish list was a large family room (it's also airy, boasting a 12-foot ceiling, and cheery, with its blue-and-yellow plaid upholstery) to the extent that she wanted to forgo a living room. "But you have to do it," she concedes.

"I think she wanted it to look not decorated, not like a showcase," says Hendee. "That's just not her style. I don't think she's flashy in any way. She's understated." So it's no surprise that the house is devoid of fusty features. "I am not a knick-knack person," says Yarasavage. "I can't stand clutter. When it came to the part where we had to buy accessories for the house, I started to twitch. Accessories? That's just dusting junk."

Hers is very definitely—and literally—a hands-on house. The dining-room walls are covered in crimson Ultrasuede. "That was something to give it a warm feel," Hendee says. "To

(Previous page) A circular staircase winds its way upward; (Opposite page) Pool and back view of house; (This page) The dining room features stone pillars, reclaimed barn beams, 24-inch white pine boards, and a rustic, wrought-iron chandelier; the walls are covered in crimson Ultrauede.





(Opposite page) With three daughters, Yarasavage decided against installing a sink in the kitchen island to ensure enough counter space for undertaking big baking projects; The outdoor fireplace extends the season for the honey stone porch.

(This page) True blue is the theme for the master suite, inspired by a set of Delft tiles edging the fireplace; the bath's fixtures are "Waterworks knockoffs," Yarasavage confides.



But the stars are incorporated into another, older theme: Americana. Still, this is patriotism with a patina—and panache. The dining room features stone pillars, reclaimed barn beams and, underfoot, 24-inch white pine boards stained the color of the Mayflower. A rustic, wrought-iron chandelier dominates, as does a painting of Old Glory waving from atop a white porch, along the ocean. Yarasavage dubs it "the Revolutionary War tavern"—if, Andersen reminds her, Benjamin Franklin or John Adams "had velvet on their walls."

Another decorating theme evokes Americana in a slightly different way—paying homage to an American institution, Yale, and its color: blue. Yarasavage and her husband met as undergraduate athletes in New Haven; he played soccer for the Bulldogs, she played basketball and softball. Yarasavage insists that she's always loved the color, not just out of duty to her alma mater. "Blue's easy," she says. "It goes with everything. It's a comforting color." (Outfitting her bedroom began with a set of blue Delft tiles for edging the fireplace and spread to

me, when I see Ultrasuede on walls, it's immediately tactile." (Yarasavage's girls must agree: chair seat-high handprints mark the fabric. The matriarch can brush them out for dinner parties.)

The kitchen table chairs are upholstered in a laminated Beacon Hill multi-colored plaid "so the kids can spill on them and not worry about it," Hendee says. Likewise, the media room features warm but dark colors—cranberry, navy, and hunter green, plus a tartan rug—to allow for food and drink mishaps.

The preponderance of plaid was a Yarasavage request, likewise a smattering of stars. For example, stars dot the navy dining-room chair seat upholstery from S. Harris (the nail-head chair backs are covered in a complementary plaid). "When she said 'plaids and stars,' I tried to turn those into a theme that was fresh and light and new, sort of reflecting a young family," Hendee says.

a blue rug and blue plaid chairs.)

Nonetheless, Yale pride is evident from the outset. Instead of flanking her driveway with a couple of lions, New York Public Library-style, Yarasavage positioned a pair of stone bulldogs. (Once, when Harvard friends came over to watch the infamous Harvard/Yale football game, the mischievous Crimson cohort dressed the Bulldogs in Harvard hats and T-shirts.)

Also marking the exterior of the property are five doormats emblazoned "Five K Corral," with K signifying the first initial of each family member's first name. Their provenance? As down-to-earth as the doormats themselves: "Doormats.com," says Yarasavage, grinning.

Julia Lange frequently writes about architecture and interior design.