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Rye Brook Reno

A home layout perfect for repurposed heirlooms

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Divine Providence

From a home layout perfect for family heirlooms to a client relationship-turned-friendship, this Rye Brook home reno was meant to be.

By Ann Loynd Burton

Photography by Lo Austin



Whether or not you believe in fate, many details of Andrea Sinkin's recent Rye Brook renovation project were serendipitous. First, the clients found her via word of mouth, and it turns out they even had some friends in common. It was lucky that Sinkin, of her eponymous Greenwich design firm, was free to take the job during the early days of quarantine, or "dark COVID," as she calls it. Also, the family had recently inherited a large assortment of high-end furniture from their parents, who, coincidentally, were moving at the same time.

Many of these pieces seemed perfectly crafted for the new space — like a massive dining table that would outsize most dining rooms or a sculptural horse head that fit snugly above a high fireplace. "The homeowner grew up with a lot of those pieces, and we were able to reupholster, repaint, and repurpose them," Sinkin explains. "We brought the past forward in a way that was more relevant for today."

Such was the designer's philosophy throughout the house as she updated each room with a light touch. "Every fixture and detail were top-of-the-line in the 1990s, when this house was built," she says. "The bones were there but needed to be modernized."

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Previous spread: In the den, vinyl shagreen wall-paper adds depth and texture where a vintage horse-head sculpture, sourced from a horse farm in the 1900s, takes center stage. The formal living room (*above and left*) features pieces passed along from the homeowner's parents, like sofas reupholstered in commercial-grade velvet fabric and a regal grand piano; graphic wallpaper by Laura Park Designs adds interest overhead.





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While a lot of pros might be tempted to take a sledgehammer to everything, Sinkin collaborated with her clients — working parents of two small children — to update the space without a gut reno. For example, the entryway felt dated, with its tiled floor and ornate iron-scroll banisters. “While I love a black-and-white-marble entry floor, this was off-white and just felt a bit stale,” she notes. “We replaced the stone with a chevron-patterned wood floor.” Throughout the home, Sinkin re-stained hardwood flooring from a dark brown to a more palatable light gray.

Then, instead of ripping out the entire staircase, Sinkin replaced the Tuscan-style railings with simple black-iron spindles. She kept the original handrails intact and refinished them in the floor’s light-gray stain and painted the newel post a high-gloss black. Finally, Sinkin covered the stairs with a plush, black carpet, installed by Turabian & Sariyan.

Another room calling for an update was the cozy den off the kitchen, with its awkward, narrow layout. Instead of knocking down walls, Sinkin commissioned a custom sectional. “The previous homeowners had one chair facing the television, with a sofa perpendicular to it,” she explains. “This sectional gives them ample TV viewing and better use of the space.”

And for the room’s pièce de résistance: a ceramic horse-head sculpture mounted above the fireplace, handed down from the client’s mother. “The fact that it fit above that fireplace was meant to be,” Sinkin laughs. “If it were any lower, you’d bonk your head on it.”



Sinkin updated the entryway (opposite) with new, minimal balusters and chevron hardwood flooring; a sculptural Kelly Wearstler lamp adorns the vintage Holly Hunt stone table, also handed down from the homeowner’s parents. In the den (above and right), Sinkin tackled an awkward layout by creating a custom sectional in performance Crypton fabric with a soft chenille texture; the cabinet under the TV doubles as toy storage.





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Clockwise from top left, across spread: In the dining room, Sinkin commissioned Fine Paints of Europe to refinish the 10-foot dining table in a mirrored aesthetic; chairs wear leather seats and Osborne & Little fabric backs. A RH bed anchors the master bedroom, where a faux grasscloth wallpaper offers both style and durability. Black-and-white palm tree prints wear bleached wood frames for a mature vibe. "When you lay back in a chaise, you feel like you're at a spa," Sinkin says of the room's custom extra-long chaise sofas.



In the dining room, another luxe hand-me-down, a 10-foot dining table, was a perfect fit. Sinkin brought it forward by refinishing the wood with Fine Paints of Europe and upholstering the chairs in leather. On the back of the seats, the designer included an Osborne & Little fabric panel, which adds a pop of interest while keeping the chairs durable and easy to clean — a must with a kindergartener and toddler at home. "You don't have to sacrifice on design to have safety and function of living," says Sinkin, who used performance fabrics throughout the house. In the formal living room, aqua sofas (also passed down) were reupholstered in a commercial-grade velvet. Similarly, the custom sectional in the den is finished in a soft chenille Crypton performance fabric.

Even the parents' master-bedroom oasis features stain-resistant finishes. "The wallpaper really makes the room, but my clients were worried about kids running their hands on it," Sinkin remembers. "We used a fake grasscloth, made from vinyl. It's beautiful, but you can wipe it down with Windex."

Wallpaper was a secret weapon throughout, and Sinkin loves its durability over paint.

The powder room got a sexy update, with moody, black wallpaper on the walls and gold overhead. Here, too, a little serendipity came into play. Once the design was completed, Sinkin discovered a stunning Ben Levy painting from the parents' collection that perfectly complemented the room. "It just fell into place," she adds.

In the den, a vinyl shagreen wallpaper lends warmth and depth yet is also durable. "It mimics the texture of stingray for a really tactile experience when you walk in the room and rub your hand along the wall," Sinkin says, noting that a touch of nature is always present in her designs — like notes of driftwood in the bedroom or the dining room's cork-wallpaper ceiling. "Even when it's super glam or elevated, I will mix in something organic, to give a more tactile spiritual connection."

Indeed, spirituality played a role throughout the home. "I totally believe in divine intervention and fate," Sinkin says. "These clients came to me as total strangers and are now very dear friends." 

Ann Laynd Burton is a writer and editor living in Fairfield County who specializes in design and fashion.