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Renovation by Color

A decidedly cosmopolitan designer transformed this suburban development house without major demolition.



A single saturated color dominates each room of the house. Walls and moldings in the living room were painted the same butterscotch as the sofa fabric and draperies; white accents help bounce light. The specific hue was chosen to pick up on the warm tones of the woods in the antiques that live beside modern pieces (the sofa and daybed are by designer Benjamin Noriega-Ortiz).



ike Rodney Dangerfield, the suburbs—at least in their Hollywood film manifestation—get no respect. Since their proliferation at the end of World War II, they've been maligned as enclaves of numbing conformity. But times have changed, and so have the kind of buyers who want to live near cities but not in them.

When Joe and Darci DeMatteo decided to raise their three children outside of Manhattan, they set their eyes on Westchester County, north of New York City. The house they bought was in a planned development, its design selected from a handful of approved models—although it's a whole lot nicer than the kinds of homes that used to go up like toadstools in the Levittowns of America. And the neighborhood was just what they'd been looking for. "You can't beat the fact that there are kids everywhere here," says Darci.

But leaving town didn't mean they were going to settle for safe, "suburban" interiors. Instead, they enlisted a designer with a gold-plated cosmopolitan flair: Benjamin Noriega-Ortiz. Happily, Noriega-Ortiz—working with associate Paul Latham—proved to be a master of redefining the interior architecture without lifting a sledgehammer or razing a bearing wall. If this wasn't the singular home of the young couple's design dreams, they could certainly enjoy some serious sophistication indoors. "It was like bringing the city to the country," says Noriega-Ortiz. Like *Green Acres*.

The designer also proved expert at marrying the divergent tastes of husband and wife. "This house is a real merge of what I like and what Joe likes," Darci says.

PRODUCED BY LINDA O'KEEFE. PHOTOGRAPHS BY PETER MURDOCK.
WRITTEN BY JORGE S. ARANGO.



For the dining room, deep red stimulates the appetite. The designer wrapped the walls in floor-to-ceiling draperies and left the hardwood floors uncovered. Opposite (clockwise from left): Pillars define space but do not block the light; the house's facade gives no hint of the renegade rainbow inside; the "palette-cleansing" beige sitting room upstairs features 1940s armchairs and ostrich-feather lamps.



To define rooms that are open to each other, Noriega-Ortiz chose deeply saturated tones of yellow, lavender, red and midnight blue—colors that might have made even Eva Gabor blanche. But Joe, a particular fan of bright colors, wears unusual clothing (like his pink brocade jacket), while Darci's romanticism is a bit more subdued.

"The colors help divide and define the rooms, which are very open to each other," explains Latham. "The central part of the house"—painted simple beige—"became the neutralizing space between those colors."

The living room was dressed floor to ceiling in butterscotch. "The scale of the room can handle it," says Noriega-Ortiz. But even with 16-foot ceilings, he explains, "when you use intense color, you need to bring light into the room." Ergo the white

accents: illuminated acrylic cube tables, glass lamps with feather-festooned shades and a highly reflective bone-finish table that, says Noriega-Ortiz, "is like adding a light source to the room." A large mirror between the two seating areas centers the room and bounces still more light.

The designers separated the living room from the foyer not with a new wall, but with sheer full-length portieres (those between-room draperies that helped warm up the typical Victorian home when made of voluminous velvet). The diaphanous quality of the interior curtain, says Latham, "creates a haze and gives you layers of color." Adds Noriega-Ortiz, "It also blocks out the busy architecture of the entranceway." Erecting a wall would have made the room claustrophobic and robbed the foyer of natural light.

Renovation Tip v

What the Pros Know About Upholstered Headboards


Extending the headboard from wall to wall, says Benjamin Noriega-Ortiz, "makes a bedroom look wider because you're drawing a long horizontal line. It's like having wainscoting." It also gives bedside tables a backdrop that shows them off better. And it's a fairly easy DIY project, he suggests. Have a piece of wood cut especially, or use two lightweight hollow-core doors cut to size. Cover with machine-washable fabric that's stapled to the back (padding the wood if you like the stuffed look), then hang them with Z clips from the wall. For easiest maintenance, slipcover the area just behind the bed in an extra layer of the same fabric. Paul Latham often installs uprights behind the headboard to create a romantic ambiance.



Noriega-Ortiz repeated the theatricality of floor-to-ceiling curtains in the dining room. The crimson draperies hide sharp angles at either side of the bay windows, giving the room a soft, continuous curve; they also create symmetry where there had been none. Chinese red is a classic dining room color choice, but it also serves another purpose: minimizing an enormous dining room table. "If you have a very large dark piece and you paint the walls a dark color, the piece recedes," observes Latham. "If you want it to come forward, you paint the walls lighter."

The table's volume is further disguised in several ways—with a runner down the center atop a sheer Noriega-Ortiz-designed tablecloth that blurs its edges and by interspersing four large chairs with low-backed settees (also Noriega-Ortiz designs). This latter strategy eliminated the forest of legs that would have cluttered a room with 14 chairs.

The designer played to both Joe's and Darci's tastes by mixing textures and periods throughout. In the media room, for example, deep midnight blue and chairs with Austin Powers-like twirl power pleased color-loving Joe, while the African coffee table added the texture and warmth Darci craved. Upstairs in the master suite's sitting room, the romance of Fortuny fabrics was sharpened with 1940s chairs and the hip accent of floor lamps with ostrich-feather shades. And in the master bedroom, lavender walls show off a sensuous gilded mirror and Japanese tansu chests. (The DeMatteos love the sconces' flashy disco shades.)

The result? A few green acres outside, and an inside that says, "Darling, I love you, but give me Park Avenue!" 
See Resources, last pages.

Like each room in the house, the master bedroom combines his love of assertive color with her love of antiques: Tansu chests and a gilded mirror are set against lavender walls. Opposite: The designers chose stock midnight blue soundproofing panels and bought matching fabric for the chairs and sofa. Dark colors tend to make rooms seem smaller, but monochromatic rooms expand the sense of space.

