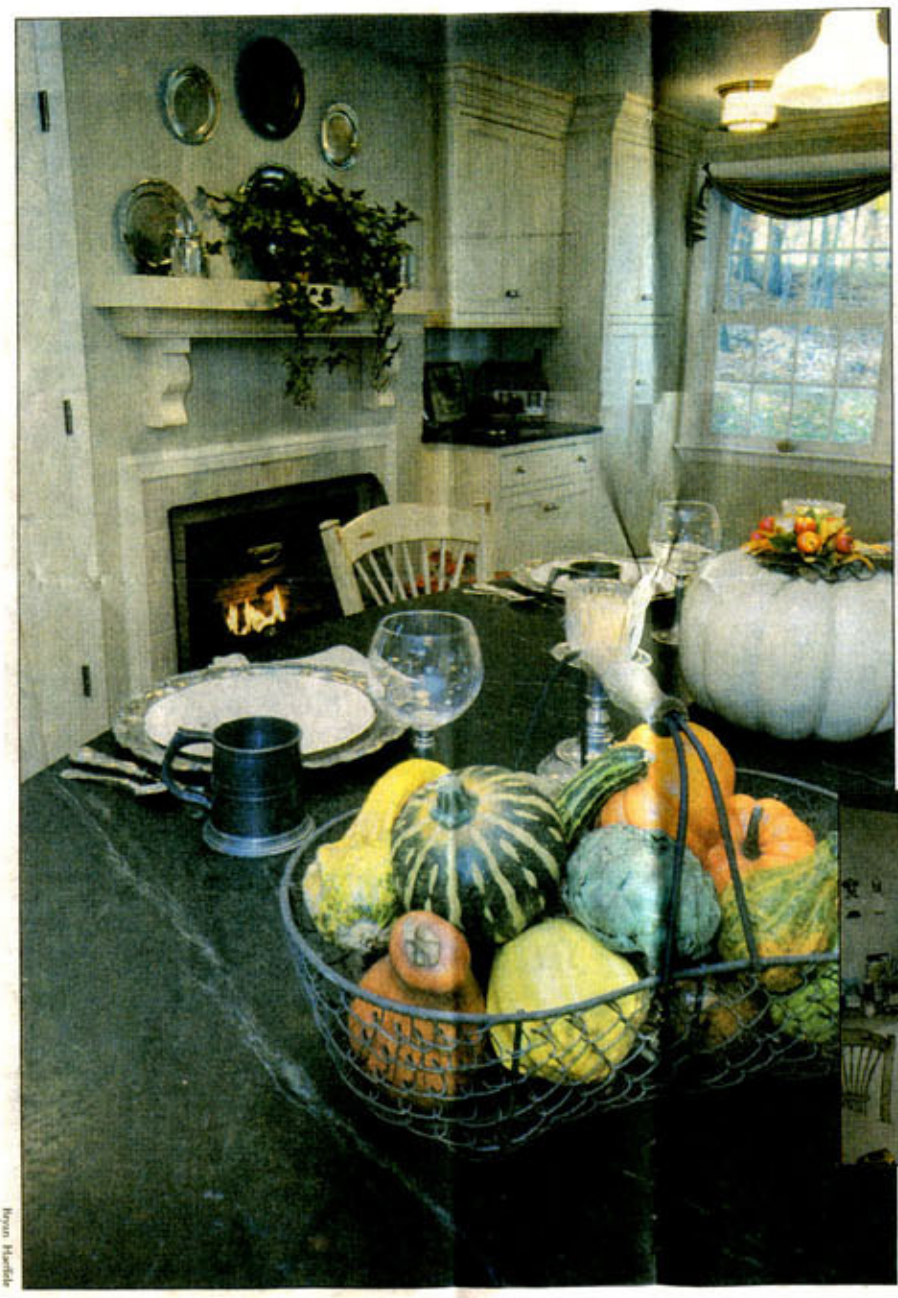
A PERFECT MATCH

Designer to clients

by Jane K. Dove



Bryan Hanlon

It's rare indeed when homeowners who commission a project end up becoming fast friends with the individual providing the service. But that's exactly what happened to Jay and David Hughes of Wilton and their decorator, Laura Robinson of Southport.

Not only did the couple forge an almost immediate bond with Laura, bringing their decorating project to a very satisfying conclusion, they now have a friendship they say is "for keeps."

Laura has been in the design business for about 15 years, specializing in period restorations. "I work mostly in Wilton, Darien and Weston," she says. "Most of my work is obtained through referrals from friends and clients, which is how I met Jay and David."

Decision To Renovate

Jay and David, now retired, have lived in their 2,500-square-foot home on Range Road since 1975. It was built in 1954 with nothing in particular to distinguish it, which, they say, was typical of the era.

"But we always loved the local community and the great lower Fairfield County location," David says. "After the kids were grown, we thought about moving to Florida, but decided to stay here and renovate our house, outside and in."

What was needed was additional square footage, and they chose Clark Construction as their contractor. "They did a wonderful job," Jay says. "We did a lot of work on the second floor, added a brand-new kitchen, changed the exterior appearance, put on a patio and an enclosed porch. Everything was completed about 18 months ago, and we realized we needed someone to pull it all together."



Because they loved the community, the Hugheses decided to remodel rather than relocate, and their collaboration with designer Laura Robinson resulted in a home they now love, as well. Before, above.



Bryan Hanlon

Clark Construction accomplished the appealing structural redesign, and Laura seemed to be a mind reader when it came to assessing the couple's lifestyle, needs and tastes. Before, below.



On To Decorating

That "someone" was Laura, and Jay says it was "love at first sight." Laura, Jay says, had an amazing ability to assess their lifestyle, tastes and needs, and made decorating recommendations that used a lot of the furnishings and decorative objects already on hand.

"This is the way I usually work with my clients," Laura says. "Many people have very nice items, and there is no need to go out and buy everything new. You can use what is there if you see things with a fresh eye and add some new items into the mix."

Laura says she and her clients decided on a soothing and low-key color palette with lots of soft off-whites, grays, beiges, and creams accented by a few more emphatic colors in rugs, upholstery and decorative objects.

Laura did the house room by room, starting with the bedrooms and then moving on to the major living areas – the living room, dining room and family room. "Jay and David had many beautiful pieces already and have excellent taste, so they were very easy to work with," she says. "I would make recommendations for something like a painting or a rug, and we would go out and find it, often in an antiques shop or consignment store."

The couple purchased only a few large items of furniture, complemented by new decorative items. One special investment recommended by Laura was the custom cabinetry by Scott Keller of Southbury. Mr. Keller completed some classic built-ins for Jay and David, and they blend perfectly with the home's architecture and ambience.

Jay and David say they left "injecting" color to Laura. "All the walls were basically white before she came," David says. "She got us away from that, but still kept paint colors on the neutral side."

Soothing Ambiance

Laura says that as soon as she met Jay and David and walked through their home for the first time, she knew they did not want anything "over the top."

"Some clients want trendy, bold colors and dozens of decorative items and lots of furniture in their rooms," she says. "I immediately knew David and Jay were not of that mindset, and instead wanted something that would produce a calm and harmonious effect."

A walk through the newly decorated home reveals the special attention to harmony, scale and soothing color that make it a warm and welcoming place.

In the living room, soft beige walls with crown molding are complemented by furniture and rugs with touches of peach and apricot. The bricks in the gas-lit fireplace are painted off-white, harmonizing perfectly with the rest of the room.

The striking center-island kitchen is Jay's new pride and joy. Totally transformed from its original "Leave It to Beaver" era and style, it is now painted in a lovely color called Coastal Fog.

The large center island has a charcoal-gray soapstone top that blends in with the black-granite counters, the latest stainless-steel appliances, a tumbled marble backsplash, and hardwood floors.

"My only regret about this beautiful kitchen is that my mother is not alive to see it," Jay says. "She would have loved it and been so happy for me."

Other first-floor areas include a dining room with cabinets by Scott Keller and a family room, both decorated with the help of Laura's sure hand and discerning eye.

Moving upstairs, off-white accented by soft colors predominates throughout. The guest bedroom, with its white lace curtains, has a Victorian flavor. The master bedroom is done in shades of cream and Wedgwood blue and features another Scott Keller custom cabinet to house, and hide, a television and computer.

All the home's bathrooms use cream-and-beige marble and granite to good effect, and the master bath features a spacious tumbled-marble shower.

Approach To Clients

From her fist meeting with Jay and David, Laura says, she knew the project was going to be very successful. "I knew it was a matter of simply helping them define the essence of what they wanted their home to express."

"Decorating for me is not about me and my style. It's not about what I want your house to look like. Instead, it's about drawing out the uniqueness of the people living in the home and the lifestyle they lead. It's blending these things together and creating a home that is an oasis for them – a place that feels like an 'exhale' when they walk in."

Laura says the friendship developed as the project moved forward. "We would go out looking for things together, having a lot of fun along the way," she says. "We found many treasures, including a 1700s grandfather clock and an incredible German "Wag on the Wall" (a grandfather clock without a case – just the face, weight and pendulum) from the late 1800s."

According to Laura, successful decorating is always a partnership that lets the clients become more and more comfortable with making their own choices. "I have the most fun with clients like Jay and David who want to understand and learn where we are taking the house and why. It's so rewarding when they are really proud of the results because they have been a part of it. It's a fabulous feeling to know people love their home."

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