

february 2020

# Livingetc

live  
life  
well

the sleep edit  
FINISHING TOUCHES FOR  
DREAMY BEDROOMS



home is happiness

INSIDE INCREDIBLE HOUSES, FROM LONDON TO NEW YORK  
DECORATING TAKES A BACK-TO-NATURE TWIST  
STYLE EXPERTS ON CREATING A HEALTHY HAVEN

US\$9.99 CA\$10.99 AUS\$10.75 NZ\$13



£4.99  
recall 30.01.20

# the good life

The interiors of Robert and Stefanie's idyllic clapboard house were inspired by the great outdoors



PHOTOGRAPHY Matthew Williams/Photofoyer  
WORDS Jenny Tucker



houses



**LIVING AREA**

Beautiful wood pieces, including the coffee table that Robert made from a cot, reflect the house's country setting and the design style of its early American heritage.

The **chair** is a vintage Kaare Klint design. For a similar **plant container**, try Heal's



Once upon a time, this former workman's cottage in New York's Hudson Valley was a forlorn shell covered in asbestos shingle siding and bereft of attention. Today, it stands resplendent in five acres of extraordinary nature – a high-spec example of designer vision and a transformational renovation. When the owners, Robert Highsmith and his wife Stefanie Brechbuehler, bought the house eight years ago it served as a weekend bolthole from their busy lives as interior designers in the city. Then, in 2015, it was temporarily shifted to the back-burner when the pair moved to Charleston, South Carolina, to work on a series of exclusive design projects.

Just as life seemed to be rolling along, Robert and Stefanie discovered they were going to be parents to twins and decided to return to New York to renovate the house and live in it full-time. In summer 2018, with months to spare before the birth of their daughters, they set about rejigging the house to accommodate their family.

In the main, the couple kept their design to the compact footprint of the original property but the actual restoration reflects their reputation for expert detail and a high-quality finish. 'It was important to us to keep to the square footage, but we did carry out an extensive renovation on the interior,' says Robert. 'We refurbished the original flooring throughout and extended the ceiling heights to expose the beams.'

Inspiration came from early American architecture and design, which included Dutch and Shaker influences. The colour palette followed a neutral flow to create light, bright spaces, and accessories were sourced from local makers and craftspeople. 'We decided to renovate the existing house the same way we would for a client, but we also understood the necessity to be able to evolve with our needs,' adds Robert. 'We know that our next project will be a sunroom off the kitchen, which we will likely tackle this spring. If you drive around the Hudson Valley you can

see plenty of older colonial homes that have been added to over the generations. We love that feeling of a "rambling" house.'

As their family grows, there is a sense of let's-see-what-the-future-may-bring. 'It's an exciting time,' says Robert. 'The girls are crawling like champs, not yet walking but we are bracing ourselves!' There is no denying that toddlers can be exhausting, so ensuring a tranquil space was crucial. 'We spend a lot of time relaxing in our bedroom. We have an amazing plant that frames our bed – the room feels so zen and brings nature indoors,

even in winter when the trees are bare. As new parents, it was important to us to have a room that felt inspiring and peaceful.'

Being in the midst of this magnificent landscape is intrinsic to their existence, and living unplugged here means endless opportunities to walk the verdant hills, stare at the big skies and keep a keen eye out for the wildlife that shares the garden. This slice of nature is impressive and it gets under the skin of those who are part of it.

'We do a lot of walking and hiking,' says Robert. 'We also have a river on our property, which is the 30ft-wide Roeliff Jansen Kill, a tributary to the Hudson River. We own several kayaks, and plan to build a trail and platform along the river. Both Stefanie and I absolutely love this environment and we often host outdoor gatherings.'

With spring in sight, the milky sunlight has started warming the earth, encouraging the flowers to appear again. The cherry blossom will soon be doing its beautiful thing and the native American goldfinch will be spotted in the forest. 'We've planted 18 trees in the garden and we're excited to watch them grow alongside our girls,' says Robert. 'This is the house we have owned for the longest and it feels the most connected to a sense of place – particularly in the context of the Hudson Valley. That is very important to us.'

✕

See the couple's products and projects at [workstead.com](http://workstead.com)

## home profile

### THE OWNERS

**Robert Highsmith and his wife, Stefanie Brechbuehler, co-founders of Brooklyn-based interior-design business Workstead. They have one-year-old twin daughters, Ellsworth and Holland.**

### THE PROPERTY

**An 1850s clapboard house in the Hudson Valley, New York State. On the ground floor there is a kitchen, living and dining area, mud room and small bathroom. On the second floor there is the master bedroom, bathroom and the twins' nursery.**

houses

“There is a palpable creative community  
here for which we feel eternally grateful”

#### KITCHEN

The large island takes centre stage. The marble worktop and red-painted drawers are striking partners.

Cabinet drawers in Picture Gallery Red, Farrow & Ball. Ceramics by Ben Owen Pottery. The Rojo Alicante marble work surface was sourced in Spain.



**KITCHEN**  
Unframed panelled doors have a simple, rustic quality.  
Cabinets and woodwork in Farrow & Ball's Jinney



houses

#### DINING AREA

A modern light was chosen to counterbalance the pared-back, crafted feel of the table and chairs.

The table and chairs are vintage finds



#### home truths

##### HOW DO YOU RELAX?

When the twins are asleep! During the winter, Stefanie and I build a fire and switch off.

##### FAVOURITE SOUND IN NATURE?

Rushing water.

##### BEST WAY TO CLEAR YOUR HEAD?

Walking in the woods. It's so beautiful.

##### LONG HIKE OR A SWIM IN THE LAKE?

A long hike. We are both committed walkers.

##### TRAVEL PLANS FOR THE SPRING?

We have weddings to attend in Italy and want to visit the Nordic countries for the first time.

##### LIFE MOTTO?

Think hard to work less.



### TWINS' BEDROOM

The wooden animal puzzle on the wall was given to Stefanie by her uncle when she was a baby. It is based on a design by Enzo Mari.

**Walls** in Farrow & Ball's Setting Plaster, **Cots**, Micuna, **Mobile**, Ole Flønsted, **Wall lamp**, Workstead



“We wanted light, bright spaces to balance the weight and history of the home”

— x —



### MASTER BEDROOM

“We had to convert two smaller bedrooms into one and raise the ceiling to create the space we wanted, but the result has been worth it,” says Robert.

**Artwork**, Brandon Hinman

## STYLE TAKEAWAYS

# A natural beauty reigns in Robert and Stefanie's home



Gidu mid-century pull-chain ceiling **light globe**, £79.99, Homary



Mid-century pine **flooring** in Blackburn, £82.80sq m, The New & Reclaimed Flooring Company



Twist vintage two-drawer **bookcase** in Orange, £249, Maisons du Monde



6 x 3 **coffee table** in oak, £470, Petar Zaharinov at Praktrik



Squishmeister **sofa** in clever velvet in Steel, from £1,295, Loaf



Artificial autumn **leaves spray**, £9, Creatd Interiors



Executive cowhide lounge **chair**, £495, French Connection



Tabor **pot** in Orange, £92, Serax at Amara