





# Manor

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Interior designer Susan Petrie adds contemporary touches to an antique English home while respecting its roots.

By Ann Loynd Burton

Photography by  
Gross & Daley Studio

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Longtime Manhattanites John and Sarah Stephens\* knew it was time for a change, so when they decided to purchase a historic Rye home and leave their TriBeCa apartment behind, things moved fast. Parents to three young children, the Stephenses enlisted a dream team of sorts to make their new home a reality, and in just a few months. Architect Dipti Shah of Rye, interior designer Susan Petrie of Petrie Point Designs in Manhattan, and kitchen designer Karen Berkemeyer of Westport were tasked with making the rambling 7,259 sq. ft. space feel like home, all while preserving its early-20th-century heritage.

“I was immediately in love with the home. It’s a gorgeous English manor, but it needed a facelift,” explains Petrie. “It was dated and dark; that’s not their personalities. I knew it would be a fun challenge. Sarah’s aesthetic is a mashup of traditional with an edge.” Petrie was tasked with creating a design that could marry the couple’s collection of contemporary and refined artworks with their love for Mid-Century Modern furniture while making both elements feel cohesive in the circa-1905 Rye estate.

In fact, working in an old home presented more than one challenge for the team. “The house has gone through many design changes and additions,” Shah notes. What was particularly problematic, she says, was a pantry and powder room that blocked the views and “most precious real estate,” with a stone wall awkwardly placed between the two. By removing both structures, Shah created a more symmetrical design, which expanded the kitchen and opened it to the garden views.

“Dipti was able to open everything up and make it feel so grand,” notes Berkemeyer. “Once

*\*Names have been changed at homeowners’ request.*





*Clockwise:* In the living room, designer Susan Petrie restored the historic fireplace to reveal Delft tiles; blue Meg Braff grasscloth wallpaper in the dining room, complements gray Lillian August chairs; this sprawling English-manor home dates to the 1900s. *Opening spread:* Petrie balanced Mid-Century Modern furniture with the couple's contemporary-art collection.

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she gave them more space, everything fell into place.” Berkemeyer created a large island with seating and a formal butler’s pantry painted a deep, historic blue. She chose a rich taupe for the cabinets, paired with complementary white-marble countertops and subway-tile backsplash. The stone features antique surfacing that ties the new kitchen into the turn-of-the-century home.

With the “command central” taken care of, Petrie set out to create an oasis for each member of the family. “When I saw the library, with its incredible stone fireplace, I knew it was going to be John’s office-slash-man cave,” she says. To transform the dated wood paneling, Petrie suggested blue lacquer, a risk John was hesitant to take at first. “Once we did it — and it was quite a process — it completely elevated the room,” she adds.

Petrie finished off the space with a tufted-leather distressed sofa found at the Brimfield Antique Show. Procured from an early 1800s hotel, the sofa was the perfect addition to bring in John’s love of Old World history. “That was my grounding inspiration for the space, and I built things around that.” As it turns out, the risk paid off, as the room is now the couple’s favorite in the house. “It was difficult to get the paint just right, but it was worth the struggle in the end,” Sarah says. “It’s warm and cozy, with lots of character.”

With a space for him taken care of, Petrie was determined to create an area for Sarah, as well. She was intrigued by a room in the foyer with trellis a quarter of the way up the wall. By ripping up the carpet, restoring an existing palm-leaf fan, repairing the trellis, and adding a complementary grasscloth wallpaper from the Nicolette Mayer Collection, Petrie created a garden oasis that sets the tone right from the entry. “You walk in and see



Architect Dipti Shah opened up the kitchen to create eat-in space against walls of windows. *Below left:* An Arteriors chandelier makes an entrance in the entryway.




**Above:** Petrie painted the husband's library in a blue lacquer and furnished it with a mix of antiques, including a vintage leather sofa. **Below:** In the great room, Petrie painted vaulted ceiling beams slate gray for contrast.



this lovely garden room that brings the outside in," she says. "It has doors that lead out back to the garden and is the perfect space to just sit down and have a cup of tea."

For the rest of the communal spaces, Petrie was challenged with lightening up the historic shell, which felt dark and heavy. In the living room, the designer painted vaulted ceilings a light gray, with contrasting wood beams in a darker, slate gray. The result transitions the room from the kitchen, while plush sofas, pops of blue, and layers of textural throws make it feel welcoming. In the dining room, a beautiful grasscloth wallpaper by Meg Braff Designs is complemented by pops of cream and white in the window treatments and window seats.

Throughout, Petrie worked to incorporate the couple's existing "semi-eclectic" art collection and pieces of Mid-Century Modern furniture. "My husband and I wanted to preserve the charm of an old home but also have pops of color and more modern appointments where it made sense," Sarah notes. To bring contemporary pieces into a historic space, Petrie cautioned that they had to be careful in selection, so as not to seem haphazard. "It was all about balancing the colors and textures of it all," she adds.

Yellow wall-to-wall carpeting was the first to go in the master bedroom, which Petrie removed to reveal historic hardwood floors. The designer chose a palette of slate blue and light gray, accented by a Stark carpet to complement their reupholstered light-denim-blue bed. "I wanted to keep it serene," Petrie adds. "I said, 'Life is stressful. Let's make this a place where you completely want to relax.'" 

*Ann Loynd Burton is a freelance writer living in Fairfield County who specializes in fashion and design.*