

House & Garden

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the new colors

jewel-box greens,
blues, violets and oranges



a provence farmhouse
gets a *fresh* look

THE OPENWORK PEDIMENT, an architectural remnant found by Lorraine Kirke, adds a flourish to the sleeping terrace off the master bedroom (though Kirke's builder was reluctant to install it). The bed is from Keystone, Hudson, NY. The rocking chair is from the Yard Couple, Sag Harbor, NY.

a fine madness

Chic and slightly crazy, Lorraine Kirke's family

summerhouse proves her axiom that perfect is boring

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LORRAINE KIRKE'S decorating style is a precise reflection of the woman herself: breezy, light-hearted, energetic, a little funky, altogether captivating. A designer by temperament rather than training, Kirke moved to the United States from London four years ago with her rock-musician husband, Simon Kirke, a founding member of the renowned band Bad Company, and their four children: Greg, 20; Domino, 16; Jemima, 14; and Lola, 8. The family had spent summers on Long Island in rental houses, but a couple of years ago, after they had settled in New York City, Lorraine began to look for a permanent weekend house.

She found a rambling, 14-bedroom shingle house, built about 120 years ago, and fell in love—though the realtor described it to her as a “teardown.” Let’s just say he didn’t understand what Lorraine had in mind. Who would? Hers is an enchanting approach. Imagination and an assured eye transport her family and friends into a magical, wild world where color reigns, paint peels, sconces don’t match, and few windows are left uncurtained. One of her friends calls the look “chic bohemian.” She is right on the button. As Lorraine likes to say, “If it’s perfect, it’s boring.”

Her first summer, with the help of artists Michelle Dovey and Lorraine Otto, Kirke says she “just painted everything white and started adding bits everywhere.” When the season ended, Lorraine got serious and teamed up with architect Sarah Calkins. “That’s when the big work got started,” she says. Four rooms on the second floor were turned into one big master suite, and a large

IN THE FREEWHEELING, bohemian spirit of the house, a sink and bathtub, from Keystone in Hudson, NY, were placed in the master bedroom. The wing chairs, from England, are covered in white cotton canvas; the bed coverlet and mirror are from Ruby Beets Antiques, Bridgehampton, NY. The folding screen is from Gray Gardens, NYC.



FLORALS AND STRIPES unite happily in the living room. The wood-frame armchairs are from Ruby Beets, Bridgehampton, NY; the wicker armchair and candleholders on the mantel are from the Yard Couple; the slipcover on the wing chair was made from fabric Kirke found in London; the striped fabric draped over the table is from Judy Greenwood Antiques, London. The paintings are, from left, by Michelle Dovey, Domino Kirke, and Jemima Kirke.

LORRAINE KIRKE GIVES EACH of her children plenty of room. It's one way, she says, to keep them around the house. Kirke is shown at top with, from left, Lola, Domino, and Jemima. **LOLA, LEFT,** stands on the foyer stairs. The console table is from the Yard Couple; the mirror, from Tobias and the Angel, London; the hanging lantern is from Gray Gardens.

terrace and sleeping porch were added; and a studio for Simon was built off the kitchen—itsself carved out of four small spaces. Down came the garage, up went a barn, which became a freestanding music room for the kids. "The more space you give them," Lorraine explains, "the longer they stay around."

Each of the girls got her own room,

with extra mattresses to accommodate sleep-overs. There are plenty of other places in which to loll about: a light-filled painting studio at the top of a turret, outfitted with wood-framed windows opening to the panoramic views; a living room where the TV attracts a crowd; and, in the center of the house, the huge eat-in kitchen. When

renovations were complete, the bedroom count was down to a mere eight.


All the while, Lorraine was shopping in the neighboring towns of Sag Harbor and Bridgehampton, as well as along Atlantic Avenue in Brooklyn. "I pick things up and never worry about where I'll put them," she says. "If I like it, I find a place for it." When she walks into a room that looks, to



the uninitiated eye, furnished to the brim — sofas piled with pillows, tables draped with quirky, richly textured textiles—Lorraine is apt to exclaim, "Ooh! That corner could really use another chair. We'll just move things around a bit." And so it goes. "If it appeals to the eye, I get it," she says. "That's what I think makes a home."

Though she's always decorated her own houses, Lorraine is now thinking about working for clients. "They would have to be on my wavelength," she says. No kidding. Her husband and children still look dubiously at the bathtub she placed out in the open in the master bedroom. But it may be Lorraine's chief talent that she sees the less-obvious beauty in objects. The house is filled with pillows she has made from interesting textile remnants and cupboards she scraped down to the original paint. In the kitchen, pots and pans hang from a rusty iron garden gate found in the basement.

Architectural fragments are her special weakness. Cornices, pilasters, leaded-glass overdoors, carved moldings all find their places in her rooms—some create fanciful frames for beds, others allow light to enter otherwise dark spaces. A few cause consternation. A huge openwork wooden pediment, for example, gave the Kirkes' ever-patient builder, Sag Harbor-based Bob Plumb, a bit of a start when Lorraine announced she wanted to mount it above the second-floor terrace. "I could see it there," says Lorraine, who made an eyeball calculation that it would fit the space perfectly. "But Bob thought it would just fall apart." Plumb gave in, of course, and came up with a solution by backing the fragile piece with a blue-painted panel. "It can all be done," says Lorraine. "I always think to myself, 'The Taj Mahal managed to get built.' Why should you make a big deal of these things?"

Why indeed? 

COLOR AND TEXTURE give the kitchen its homey look. The floor was hand-painted, and Lorraine collected the chairs from flea markets. The red cupboard is from the Rural Collection, NYC. The center island and lamps are from Ruby Beets; the stools, from Pottery Barn. The Sub-Zero refrigerator doors are covered with chalkboards from Pearl Paint Co., NYC. Sources, see back of book.