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Previous page: Faux-painting techniques created the elaborate "tile" floor in the main entrance hall of The Manse. The former parson's office is now the formal dining room. Opposite: Marina's tribal jewelry and animal-print chair fit right in with the home's period décor.



# Dutch Treat

**Warwick's The Manse has been faithfully restored and creatively updated by its latest owner**

**G**eronimo slept here. Right there, near the fireplace on the hard library floor (the great Indian leader insisted), an invited guest of the Reverend Tabor Knox and his admirably broad-minded 19th-century congregation. More than 100 years later, just a few feet from that very spot, Marina Case Alario's 15-year-old son Andrew can be seen enjoying, somewhat less historically, a Saturday morning snooze on the family-room sofa.

That kind of contrast says it all about The Manse, Marina's 171-year-old landmark home in Warwick, N.Y. Once the parsonage of the neighboring Dutch Reformed Church of Warwick, The Manse today has been both faithfully restored and creatively updated by Marina, a professional decorator with a passion for historic homes and an eye for the unexpected. The result is a space where the broadest reaches of time and taste co-exist as harmoniously as the Apache and the parson did that one night long ago.

"Your home is the story of your life, and the story of your home," Marina says, explaining her decorating philosophy. "And that's really what's happening here. A big part of the *continued*

Story by **Patti Schuldenfrei** | Photography by **Oleg March**





The living room brings together elements including an antique French wallpaper border, a tortoise-shell mirror and side tables, Byzantine wall hangings, animal-print pillows, and the original hand-carved 1800s mantel.





**Opposite:** The butler's pantry preserves the period feel of the home while incorporating the kitchen's white cabinets and counter. It also features a window view into the glass-enclosed breakfast room that was added onto the original 1840s home (above).

story of this house is that it really is an early 19th-century Hudson Valley home. I definitely refreshed it and updated it, but my feeling was that I needed to be sensitive to the bones, the architecture. I did not go ripping things out."

Thus, she refused to touch the handcrafted mantel in the living room (formerly the parish hall, which, Marina says, "was used for everything, including funerals"), or the antique French wallpaper, or the original wood-paneled fireplace and hearth on the ground floor (right next to the door to the "kind of creepy" root cellar below). Nor would she even consider replacing the 30-year-old living room curtains made of silk brought back from Thailand by the home's previous owner, himself an expert designer and antiquarian—and Marina's mentor in the decorating business—who spent 27 years restoring The Manse to its proper period style before selling it to Marina five years ago. Equally untouchable were the faux-painted "mahogany" doors and "marble tile" floors he had an artist friend create in the main hallway, which replicated what Marina says was a popular decorating technique in the 1800s.

Marina, however, is no slave to tradition, and that's where the story of her life comes in. Although the home's decor is definitely "leaning toward the period," she says, it also incorporates a plethora of elements that are purely Marina. As a child of Greek and German immigrants, she spent many summers visiting Europe, and traveling with her journalist father on

"low-budget" junkets to places like Israel, Egypt and Turkey. "I got to see a lot of the world," she says. "I was also a religion and philosophy minor in college and was fascinated by all the perspectives around the world. So I think I have created a very international mix here in this house."

Certainly, the Dutch parishioners would have been surprised to encounter, on a wall of their parsonage's narrow, curving staircase, a towering pair of ancient Oriental parchments bearing proud ancestral portraits. ("Not my ancestors," Marina jokes, "but I love them.") They might have been curious about the Byzantine artifacts that Marina describes as "all over the house," thanks in part to the influence of her stepmother, a professor of Byzantine iconography at the University of Athens. And the animal print pillows and tribal-patterned wall hangings probably would have had the congregation wondering if Geronimo had left some personal effects behind.

"I l-u-u-u-v animal prints," Marina says, "and tribal, which is a work of the people—I'm big into that, too. I love Asian things. And I'm crazy for tortoise—I have a tortoise mirror, and tortoise tables, and I try to collect it all the time."

Exotic and modernistic as some of it may be, it all fits in seamlessly with the home's period-leaning decor. Perhaps that's because it represents the true spirit of the period itself—a time when transatlantic

*continued*



Marina's trained eye for color keeps the old house lively. Above: Red accent curtains in an otherwise traditional stairway. Opposite, top: bright apple green and Delft blue in the master bedroom. Opposite, below: Coral and yellow accents on a creamy beadboard wall in the master bath.

travel, global trade and the conspicuous consumption of the Gilded Age were rapidly expanding American sensibilities. "In America in the 1800s, they were craving things from the Orient; they were craving things from England," Marina says. As the nation's prosperity grew, Americans began to emulate the worldly sophistication of European aristocrats, who would go on a 'grand tour' and return with exotic collectibles to display in their homes. "I sort of take that 'grand tour' decorating approach," Marina says.

The home's master suite is a prime example. Traditional blue-and-white British toile draperies and Willow Ware china pieces—a vintage British style that sought to imitate blue-and-white Chinese pottery—share space with chests of drawers covering three centuries (one filled with Marina's tribal jewelry collection) and a pair of damask-covered Centennial wing chairs from one of the numerous Colonial revivals that started popping up in American design almost as soon as we stopped being colonies. But the most striking aspect of the suite is the paint color: a bright apple green. One might be tempted to call it a "fun" color, but for Marina, color is a serious matter. In fact, she had the bedroom's green paint custom-mixed five times before she felt it was just right.

"Everybody thinks, Oooh, color! Fun! But to get it to work in the room, in the light, with all the variables that surround it—it's a science," she says, "and it requires serious training." Her studies have paid off with a color confidence that would be the envy of anyone who's ever made

a half-hearted commitment to a paint chip; from the rich golden vista of the living room, to the creamy colored master bath with its splashes of coral and yellow, to the home office accented with a color she describes matter-of-factly as "dead salmon," Marina has boldly conquered color frontiers where the chromatically timid would fear to tread.

And if the bold use of color includes the courage to use no color at all, Marina has covered that territory as well—in the kitchen. Painted floor-to-ceiling white cabinets, white Corian countertops, white walls, mostly white appliances. Only a butcher-block island, a stainless-steel stove, and a collection of hand-wrought copper pans strung above the windows keep the kitchen from being nearly invisible. And that's just the way Marina wanted it. "Especially in a home that's a bit fussy-traditional like this, I find it's a nice relief to have a simpler, modern kitchen," she says. "And I'm definitely in favor of white kitchens. In a kitchen, you want to highlight your food, your cooking—you don't need to highlight anything else."

Into the pale kitchen saunters a still-groggy Andrew, wrapped cozily in a blanket like a tall, teenage papoose. He and 17-year-old brother Alexander share the top floor of the four-story house ("It's like a townhouse in the country," Marina says), which may explain the attraction of the earthbound family room as a napping spot. Or maybe it's the ghost of a long-ago guest, beckoning him to keep one more tradition of The Manse alive. ■

