

LIGHT BRIGHT
Exposed beams give the illusion of more space in the peaceful sitting area just off the kitchen. The homeowner wanted her entire house to be a personal sanctuary. A painting by Donna Von Holdt, from Olley Court completes the design.

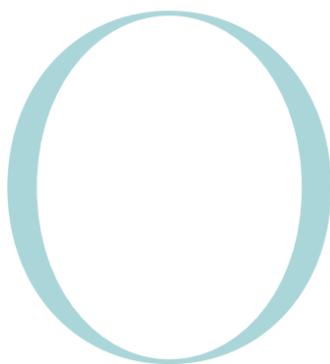


By GERRI LEWIS // PHOTOGRAPHS BY JANE BEILES // STYLING & ACCESSORIES BY SUSAN BUZUID, OLLEY COURT

Her Own Way

ELLIE KIRK'S PERSONAL SANCTUARY





OUTSIDE OF ELLIE KIRK'S HOME, there's a glimpse of her vision for the future—a woodland refuge with a meadow of wildflowers designed to attract butterflies, fireflies, and other soaring creatures. Already a vegetable and cutting garden reaps a bountiful harvest of seasonal vegetables and flowers. Everything, including the surrounding natural landscape with its indigenous plantings is cultivated organically.

On this thoughtfully nurtured property sits a 1940s cottage style house that took plenty of vision and a year of construction before it too became part of the peaceful refuge. "I wanted to have a sanctuary and the house was crafted with that in mind," says Ellie, a reiki master and certified energy medicine practitioner. "I wanted to live as close to nature as I could without becoming 'the farm' girl."

When Ellie first found the house, the property was overgrown, the house in disrepair and dated. The floor plan wasn't exactly suitable for her needs. The screen porch was so dilapidated that light seeped in through the cracks. But the location offered plenty of privacy without isolating her from the friends and neighbors she enjoys. Ellie's profession as a coach and teacher has led her to change the way she lives by appreciating the influences nature and energy have on well being. What she saw in this house and property was the potential to create a haven that would reflect her personal evolution. So she purchased the property and went to work.

Ever conscious of her environment, she wanted to use as many green materials as

EMBRACE THE FUTURE
Going green is more than using environmentally correct products. For Kirk, it's a lifestyle. A painting by Martha Robinson and an Alison Evans oyster bowl add a focal point between the elegant lamps.





ALL IN STYLE Simplicity is the name of this game with just enough space for the no-nonsense cook. The living room takes its energy from the careful color selection, the abundant light from the oversized windows that she chose for tranquility and for a nod to nature.

possible. She wanted to repurpose what did not get used. She liked the manageable size of the home and didn't want to increase the footprint and yet she wanted certain conveniences like a first floor bedroom and an updated bath.

High on the list was an energy-efficient home remodeled with as little change to the existing footprint as possible. She wanted to enjoy the outdoors even while she remained inside. For Ellie, this was an opportunity to leave behind a conventional home on a busy road with formal manicured gardens and a lifestyle that she no longer embraced.

She credits Jay Condon of Condon Brown Builders in Norwalk for many of the creative solutions that went into the renovation. To get her first floor bedroom and bath, they bumped out a study, raised the roof to show off more of the existing natural stone fireplace and added radiant heat beneath the floor. An adjacent bathroom was added with all the contemporary amenities Ellie wanted.

New windows were added throughout the house, but are particularly highlighted in the living room where they were enlarged to take in the outdoors. Dark panels were painted light calming colors that complement those of the outdoor landscape. Old siding was replaced and the house was reinsulated with Roxul Comfo batt, a stone wool product that is made from natural and recycled materials.

Solar panels were installed on the roof to support the electrical systems and heat the hot



water. Originally an upstairs laundry was planned, and it was her builder that convinced Ellie to locate it in the master suite, something she is very glad about.

Because Ellie does not love to cook, she didn't want to waste space on an oversized kitchen. Instead, under counter refrigerator drawers, a wine cooler and appliances cleared the space above for ample counter space. There is just enough workspace for her to cook. There is a cozy eating area with built in glass front cabinetry that is ideal for displaying finery. When the old ceiling was removed, she liked the look of the exposed studs so they were painted to create interesting detail. Along with her builder, she went in search of antique beams to add to the kitchen as well as to the living room.

A small powder room was created from a cramped full bath, and some leftover flooring from the bedroom was repurposed. The final part of the renovation was the conversion of the dilapidated porch, and at first Ellie was uncertain how the space should be used. After some consideration, the space was rebuilt as a year-round room. Now windows line three sides, more radiant heat was added, and a white washed-wood ceiling tops it off. It became the perfect spot for her dinner parties.

ALL THE RIGHT STUFF
 Ellie Kirk didn't have to sacrifice her dream of a first-floor master. She could incorporate her wish list with very little change to the footprint of the original house and efficient upgrades such as radiant heat.





LEARNING CURVE Kirk will have to rethink how those marigolds take over the garden when she plants next year. Still, they kept the critters out and Kirk loves the seasonal vegetables.

The décor is simplistic and she used a calming color scheme throughout. Dark living room panels were lightened with Benjamin Moore lichen green. The goal was to not compete with the colors she viewed from the windows. Furnishings are a mixture of antique and contemporary. There are few curtains to spoil the view to the outdoors and you won't find a television anywhere in the house.

"I wanted to sit anywhere in the house and feel two steps away from nature," she says. "This is a sanctuary for me."

With the help of David Miles of Gardens of Spirit and Paul Fujitani and Brid Craddock of Growing Solutions, the outdoor space continues to evolve. Growing her own vegetables, enjoying plantings that will survive the climate and the creatures sharing the space are all part of the plan that continues to be a work in progress.

With the home remodel under her belt, Ellie says that the house reflects her personal energy and gives her comfort and support. She finds the clutter free environment soothing and stresses that anyone can create a small haven, full of peace, wherever they live. Ellie's recommendation: surround yourself with colors, sights, smells and sounds that you love. "Add in some quiet and you have a sanctuary." ■

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