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Country Properties: Barn
Homes, Weekend Retreats





Country Weekends

*Roxbury, Conn., Author Makes Splash
With Her Own Lake House Project*

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RETREAT MENTALITY

It only took a few clicks of the mouse to decorate the new Lake Waramaug retreat in Connecticut. Susanna Salk bought the orange leather dining chairs on eBay, which add a punch of color and whimsy to the room. Photo by John Gruen. Left, Ms. Salk at home in Roxbury, Conn., in a photo by Laurie Gaboardi, and top, a family room in New Preston, Conn., that will appear in "Weekend Retreats," published by Rizzoli. Photo by John Gruen.

After it had spent two decades confined to a box frame hanging on the wall, Susanna Salk recently decided that her grandmother's antique silver spoon needed a breath of fresh air. On a whim, the writer and design expert liberated the family heirloom and moved it to a mantel covered with an eclectic array of vases and knick-knacks.

"Now I can finally touch and appreciate it so much more than when it was a 'trophy piece,'" Mrs. Salk said. "Sometimes you have to look at a thing a long time to finally arrive at how it should be displayed and loved."

The moment was quintessential Susanna Salk—inspired, energetic and a bit unexpected. A tall, slim blonde not adverse to sitting Indian-style on the floor, Mrs. Salk allows the natural flow of creativity and a growing understanding of herself to guide her design philosophy and life.

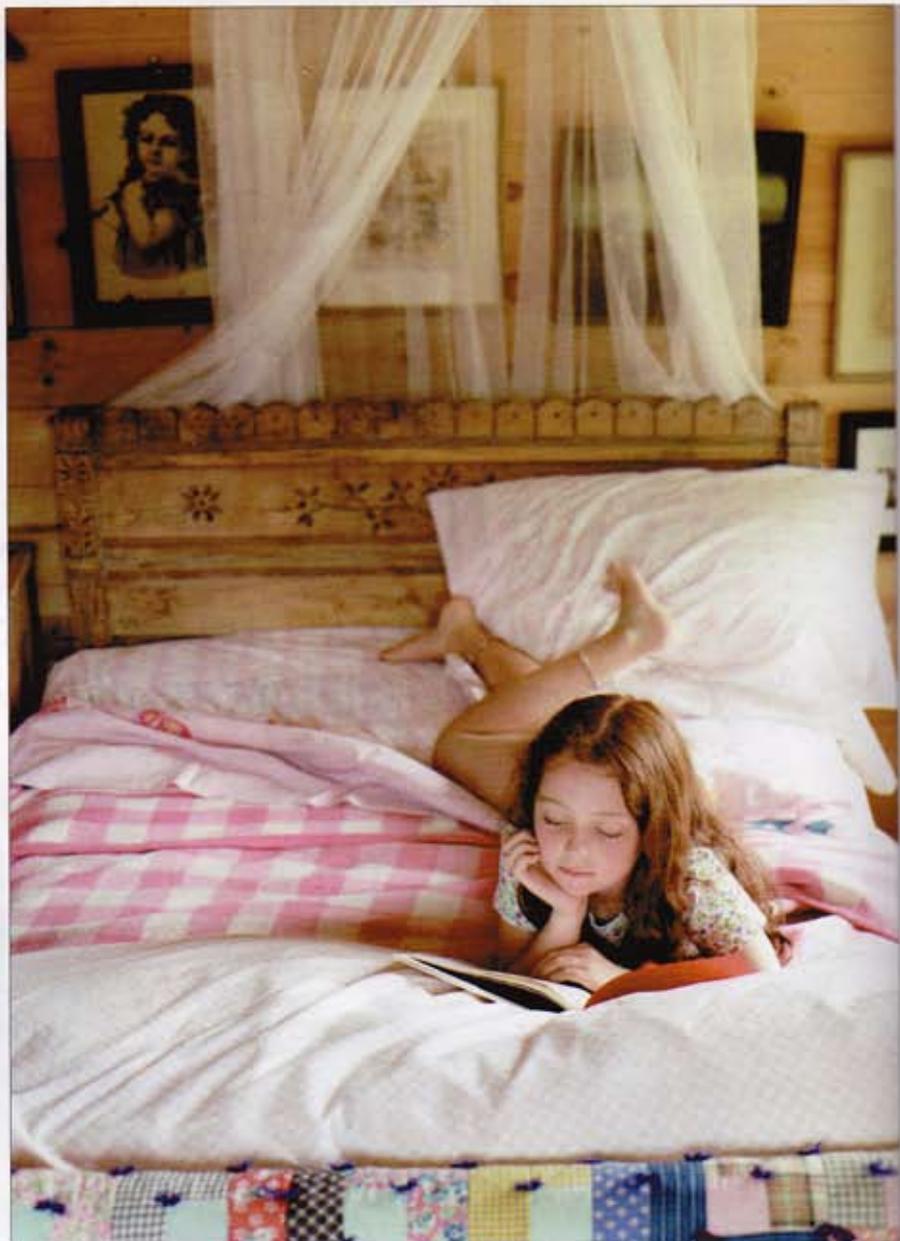
"Change it up. If you've lived with the same pillows on your sofa for 10 years or a set arrangement on your mantle, dare to start moving pieces around and exciting things will happen. It's just like life," she said.

Two of Mrs. Salk's latest projects perfectly reflect that ethos. A new family retreat on Lake Waramaug in Connecticut is only 20 miles from her Roxbury, Conn., residence—a redefining statement on what it means to have a getaway—and in the upcoming months Rizzoli will publish her latest book, "Weekend Retreats," which explores the new, bold style emerging in some of the best country homes in the region.

As a national voice translating high-style interior design for the masses in the pages of magazines like *Elle Decor* and the former *House & Garden*, and through regular appearances on NBC's "Today" and CBS' "The Early Show," Mrs. Salk is an expert on all things of beauty for the home. And there is one thing of which she is certain: "The velvet rope on design has come down. There are elements of the interior designs that you wouldn't have seen 70 years ago."

In "Weekend Retreats," 25 homes primarily from Litchfield County, five of which have never been published before, showcase the individual personalities of their stylish owners. Details that make a home appealing are revealed, like set designers Bob Topol and Tony Tratta incorporating pieces from movies they worked on into their décor, including a small side table from "Unfaithful."

Together, they reflect a new energy in country home decor, one where ▶



SOMETHING OLD, SOMETHING NEW

Above, a vintage camp blanket covers a wooden bed Maura McEvoy purchased at a local antiques store. Mosquito netting from Ikea lends a breezy air to the room. The previous owners left the quilt and pink and white sheets behind, which are put to use in the rustic bedroom. Photo by Maura McEvoy, featured in "Weekend Retreats." Right, a kitchen in Millbrook, N.Y., that is also featured in "Weekend Retreats." Photo by John Gruen.





CODE RED

"It's the perfect cheerful surprise" and one of her favorite colors, Susanna Salk said of the Ballard Designs Chinese-red colored bench she showcases in her formal entrance.

adhering to traditional standards—sea grass chairs around a country French dining table at high price tags—is pushed aside in favor of bold statements that mix luxury with flea market finds.

"One of the requirements was that the house had to have a special spirit," said Mrs. Salk. "It had to feel like a retreat and make people really look forward to coming to it. A lot of the people featured in 'Weekend Retreats' talk about their homes like a love affair."

The new Salk home, which will serve as a respite for her husband, Dr. Eric Salk and two sons, is no different. The couple was "smitten" with the house when they found it even though it required renovation. (Mr. Salk guided that process, as he always does, with Mrs. Salk admitting she doesn't have the patience for it.)

When it was time to decorate, Mrs. Salk turned to the Internet, sourcing most of the furniture, including the couch and area rug, from West Elm, Pier 1 Imports and Pottery Barn. Orange leather chairs that anchor a



HAD TO HAVE

Mrs. Salk had to convince her husband that this yellow and pink wool Aubusson rug from ABC Carpet & Home was right for their living room. Picking up the golden hue on the walls, Mrs. Salk created permanent sunshine in the space. Cleverly chosen red toile curtains speak to the style expert's daring with pattern.

neutrally-colored dining area—an open space with a simple round, white table that flows into the living room—were bought on eBay and reflect her natural penchant for orange and red, as well as a growing confidence in her own style.

“It’s not like we achieved the interiors through billions and billions of dollars,” she said.

It might seem an unusually mainstream strategy coming from the woman who last year drew attention for her intimate glimpse into an iconic and upper-crust American style with her book, “Celebrating WASP Style: A Privileged Life” (Assouline, 2007). C.Z. Guest graces the cover in pink and “sums up WASP style like no other,” while Mrs. Salk employs humor, an insider’s perspective and a writer’s curiosity to exploring the centuries-long influence of the WASP lifestyle on hip-hop culture, suburban mall rats and everything in between.

Raised in Essex, Mass., a graduate of Milton Academy and a Vassar College alumna who also writes plays, Mrs. Salk has all of the résumé requirements needed to signal that she is of “the tribe,” as she puts it, but at the core she is an individualist who at times has challenged her pastel and chintz upbringing with hippie blouses and high heels at the Thanksgiving table. By seeking out that which was different, Mrs. Salk broadened her understanding of her own cultural and stylistic upbringing and learned to appreciate the eclecticism of beauty without sacrificing the tenets of a superior design aesthetic.

“We have to keep looking at our beloved stuff and not be afraid to update it without changing its original spirit,” she said. “And don’t be afraid to mix high with low, in fact that’s where the most interesting design lies.”

While her message is becoming better understood by consumers and interior designers today, it wasn’t always the case. The fact that once cutting-edge designers like Victoria Hagan and Todd Oldham have created affordable home furnishings and accessories lines for national retailers like Target (Mrs. Salk bought two of Ms. Hagan’s mirrors for her sunroom at the retail chain), is still a relatively new development, and one in which Mrs. Salk played a significant role.

In 1990, she was a member of the Elle Decor magazine launch in the United States, which followed the brand’s successful run in Europe. As design and decoration manager for the publication, Mrs. Salk was among the first proponents of “aspiration” ▶



LONG-TERM RELATIONSHIP

Traveling two coasts, three homes and 15 years with the Salks, their antique dining room table and chairs prove classics endure with just the littlest of tweaking. “I often recover the chairs with fresh fabric to suit the new mood of the rooms,” Mrs. Salk said.



QUINTESSENTIAL SUSANNA

There are no boundaries when it comes to interior design—including reimagining outdoor furniture for your interior. An antique white wicker sofa with traditional ticking fabric gets new life with embellished gold pillows from Anthropologie and fabric Mrs. Salk found online.

attainment” for the interior design market. “Back then, we had to explain what it was,” she said of the magazine’s early days. “Products were shot like jewelry. We wanted to rattle the cages of *Architectural Digest*.”

So they did. Today, home decor magazines are among the best-selling of all categories, including fashion, with readers devouring tips by famous designers and the naturally stylish. Retailers like Pottery Barn, Pier 1 Imports and West Elm, which bring high design to consumers at affordable prices and easily through the Internet and chain stores, have since transformed the furniture market. The end result is a world of interior design where the word “budget” doesn’t mean “cookie-cutter” and high-style isn’t limited to 19th-century antiques. Homes have never better reflected the characters of those who live inside their walls.

While Mrs. Salk’s grandmother’s

spoon settles into its new, more democratic role among her Roxbury home’s decor, an antique white wicker sofa once relegated to outdoor use that she re-imagined for her sunroom is undergoing its second metamorphosis—this time, the blue-and-white ticking seat cushion is being covered with yellow, brown and green fabric to reflect the natural design progression of the room. It’s another quintessentially, irrepressibly Susanna Salk move.

If change is a good thing in Ms. Salk’s world, then the new vitality and freedom infused into design will be hard to repress. “I think we will just continue to see more and more celebration of personal style,” she said. With new projects always on the horizon, Ms. Salk is in negotiations to write “Mastering Old Line Decorating” for Artisan Books this coming year and is now a contributor to ivillage.com. 



LOCAL TOUCH

It was love at first site when Mrs. Salk encountered Roxbury, Conn., artist Laura Evans’ “Contemplation.” Adding local touches to a home ensures that the design speaks to its surroundings and reminds you of why you initially fell in love with the house and town.