



A homeowner describes her vision for an extensive renovation and expansion in Hopewell Township

# Comfortable Yet Classic

**WRITER** MARY VINNEDGE  
**PHOTOGRAPHER** PETER RYMWID  
**ARCHITECT** CATHERINE KNIGHT, AIA  
**CONTRACTOR** SEBASTIANO NINI INC.



**Left:** A new porch with a dormer above it was part of the renovation designed by architect Catherine Knight. On the left side of the house, Knight gave the family a much-needed mudroom, laundry and back stairs leading to the expanded second floor, which has three en-suite bedrooms.

**Above:** Vertical gray siding and cream-colored stucco fit the pastoral setting of the property. The addition's covered back entry goes to the mudroom-laundry area and back stairs. (The large multitrunk tree is original to the property.)

## ONCE UPON A TIME (ABOUT FIVE YEARS AGO), A COUPLE WITH TWO YOUNG CHILDREN DECIDED TO LEAVE NEW YORK CITY

for the wide-open spaces. They looked at houses in Connecticut; Westchester, New York; and North Jersey, but those environs “still felt too confined”—not enough of a change from the city, the wife says.

So she asked her husband whether he would consider a longer commute from the Princeton area where she had grown up. Turns out he would, and as they traveled up the long driveway of a nearly 11-acre property

in Hopewell Township, he told her “This is it. This is the one.” To which she responded, “But we haven’t even been inside yet.” His assessment turned out to be prophetic, and the family purchased the property with plans to renovate the kitchen.

They lived in the home about a year, assessing their needs as they drew up plans with architect Catherine

Knight, a member of the American Institute of Architects and principal of Knight Architects LLC in Princeton. They determined which views to emphasize while planning the renovation and expansion in minute detail before moving out so the work could begin, the wife says. “We were only going to do a kitchen renovation, but it grew,” she adds. Ultimately



the square footage more than doubled, from 3,080 to 6,505 including a finished basement.

#### THINKING AHEAD

In working with Knight, the wife says, “I appreciated a woman’s point of view about how we would be using the house in years to come... The kitchen was the catalyst. It really is the heart of the home, and when you plan for that, you plan how it flows to everything else.

“We also wanted each bedroom to have its own

**Top:** French doors in the kitchen open onto a bluestone terrace.

**Bottom:** Basement amenities range from a media room with a fireplace to a large children’s play area; there’s also a walkout to a bluestone terrace. Views from the windows across the back of the house look onto woods.

bathroom and walk-in closets. And we wanted a playroom and casual entertainment space for family” in the basement. That playroom can be closed off from the adults’ entertainment area, Knight says. The basement also has a full kitchen to ease entertaining, especially when the husband’s large family visits.

“The home was built in 1983 and had never been remodeled,” Knight says. “We removed the original kitchen and built a new one. We also added two full bathrooms, a study, back entry and mudroom.” With the addition, the L-shaped house morphed into a U for a balanced look, Knight says. “This addition links nicely to the upstairs bedrooms and the downstairs entertaining areas,” she says.

The three upstairs bedrooms were reconfigured and expanded, and the basement now has two levels for walking out. Throughout the home, larger windows were installed to let light flood the interior, including banks of windows along all three floors at the back that offer views of the woods.

#### GLAMOUR + COUNTRY

Every change was made with the goal of maintaining the original structure’s charm.

“The home already had iron light fixtures and board-and-batten doors. The homeowners loved that charm but wanted a new kitchen and modern conveniences,” Knight says. Contractor Enzo Nini of



The two-story entryway, which features whitewashed paneling and wide-plank floors of white oak, reveals the second-floor hallway for a trio of bedrooms.



**Left:** The hands-on homeowner block printed the silk drapery panels in the great room. The new railing visible from the great room matches the stair railing and newel posts of the front and back stairs. Family and guests reach the terrace through sliding doors.

**Above:** The dining room is bold yet welcoming, with floor-to-ceiling windows, a long farm table and an iron chandelier.

Sebastiano Nini Inc. in Trenton used his company’s own craftsmen for most of the work and oversaw every detail. For instance, “the wife had the idea for the vent hood in the kitchen, and he [Nini] made it happen,” Knight says.

The architect gives credit to the wife for steering a cohesive course for the home’s interior design. “She had this overall style idea for the house: glamour and country charm. That image, that vision,

drove her decisions. She did the decorating herself.”

The wife has no design training, but says she grew up reading her mother’s *Architectural Digest* and *Metropolitan Home* magazines. “I just love decorating, and I wanted the home to be comfortable yet classic,” she says. “People say, ‘Wow, I feel so comfortable here,’ and that’s what I was going for.”

Asked about her husband’s input on the massive project, he had one mandate: “Keep the price down,”

she says with a big, rippling laugh. “He had certain things he liked and didn’t like. But we had done a gut renovation in Manhattan, and we were pretty much on the same page. He wanted a home office, and that was his reward for making that trek to Manhattan.”

#### THE FUTURE

Eventually the couple will build a master suite addition, and the current master bedroom — which

didn’t move during the initial renovation — will become a cabana for a future pool. Those plans are on hold, however. “My dad renovated our house when I was growing up,” the wife says, “so I’m used to living with sawdust. But my husband isn’t. He needed a break.”

She pushed on with final touches, tweaking the furnishings for several months. She admits to buying three sets of window treatments for the great



**Above:** The husband and wife enjoy cooking so they wanted a lot of firepower. Fabricated by Sebastiano Nini Inc. artisans, the custom hood enclosure crowns a 60-inch-range with 4.5-cubic-foot dual convection ovens. The oversize island, topped with soapstone, offers plentiful prep space and casual dining.

**Right:** The family of four can dine with great views through the French doors. Custom cabinetry displays china and glassware, and built-in shelves store cookbooks. The wife chose Simply White (OC-117), Benjamin Moore's 2016 Color of the Year, for the kitchen, breakfast area, girl's bedroom and guest room.



room but still wasn't 100 percent happy. "My husband said, 'Enough.' So I said, 'All right, but I'm going to paint them.'" She then block-printed the panels to achieve the graphic punch that had been missing. She also changed the great room's paint color three times because she was determined to get it just so, her approach to decorating every room.

"It's a place we feel like we will always live in. It's our home forever," a happily-ever-after ending. ■

*Mary Vinnedge confesses to being a serial remodeler herself; she's currently planning changes to a shore home. She would love to hear from you through her websites [EditorForRent.com](http://EditorForRent.com) and [WritingGenie.com](http://WritingGenie.com).*

**SOURCES Overall:** architecture, Knight Architects LLC in Princeton; contractor, Sebastiano Nini Inc. in Trenton; sliding barn doors and other interior doors, Tiny Timbers in Deputy, Indiana; barn door tracks, Better Barn Hardware & Plans in Collinsville, Connecticut. **Exterior:** shutters, hardware and louvers, Timbe-

lane Inc. in Montgomeryville, Pennsylvania; planters, Restoration Hardware; door hardware, Emtek Products Inc. in City of Industry, California; paint, Hale Navy on shutters and Cabots Shale on clapboard, both by Benjamin Moore. **Foyer:** console, Bernhardt in Lenoir, North Carolina; trunks, Restoration Hardware; chandelier, Fourteenth Colony Lighting in Memphis, Tennessee; rug, Kalaty in Hicksville, New York; wallpaper, Phillip Jeffries Ltd. in Fairfield; paneling, glazed in Grizzly Bear Brown by Benjamin Moore. **Great room:** chairs and bombé chest, Crate & Barrel in Northbrook, Illinois; small lamps, Thomas O'Brien for William-Sonoma Home in San Francisco; coffee table, Baker sofas and wing chairs, and Thomas O'Brien large lamp, all through Safavieh in New York City; drapery panels (hand-stamped by homeowner), Restoration Hardware on Kirsch drapery rods; rug, Pottery Barn; paint, Adagio from Benjamin Moore. **Dining room:** table, Drexel Heritage in Thomasville, North Carolina; chairs, Michael Weiss for Vanguard Furniture in Conover, North Carolina. **Kitchen and breakfast room:** bar benches, Raymond Waites for Lane Furniture in High Point, North Carolina; table and chairs, Ethan Allen in Danbury, Connecticut; chandelier over table, Crate & Barrel; pendant lighting, Regina Andrew Design in Riverview, Michigan; faucets, Hansgrohe in Alpharetta, Georgia; sinks, Franke

From his first-floor office, the husband can view the woods on the 10.76-acre property.



**Left:** The new covered back entry leads into this two-story mudroom with custom cabinets and a cherry desk with matching window seat. Beyond the sliding barn door is a laundry room. **Right:** The back stairs go up to the expanded second floor and down to the finished basement. The wife chose the floors of white oak and brick in a herringbone pattern.



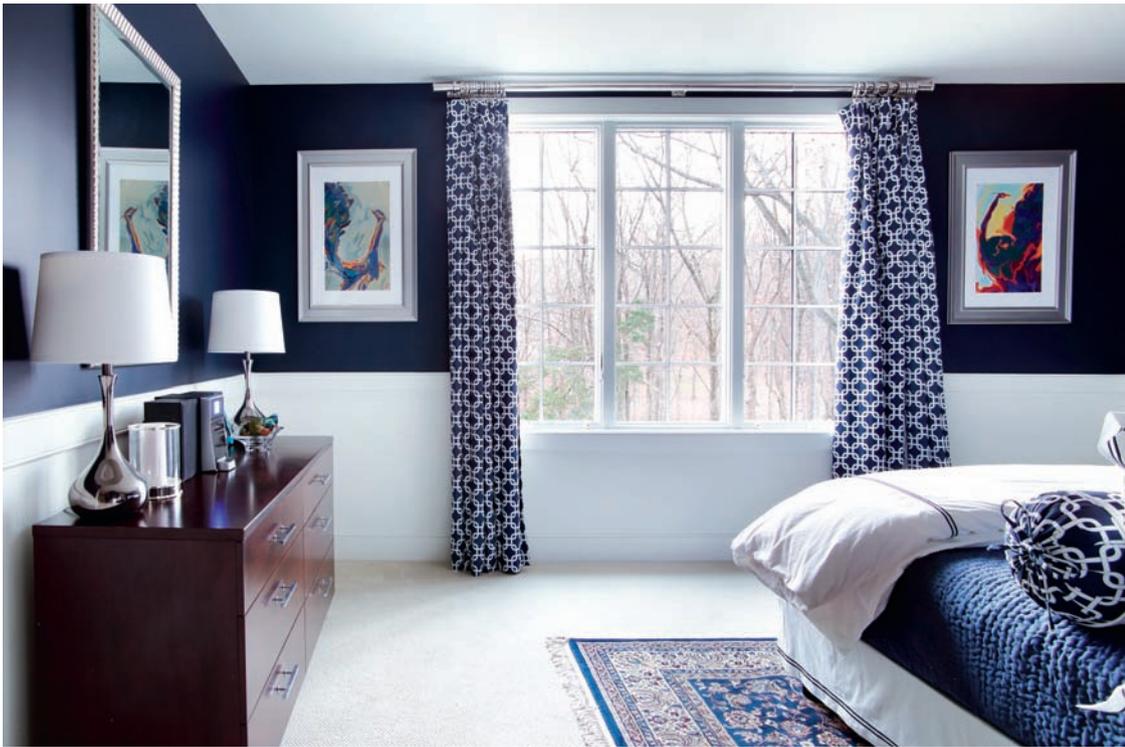
in Smyrna, Tennessee; range, Wolf in Madison, Wisconsin; paint, Simply White by Benjamin Moore. **Mudroom:** bench and chair, Pottery Barn; pillows, Elaine Smith in Lake Park, Florida, and Thos. Baker in Bainbridge Island, Washington; brick floor, Marion Ceramics in Marion, South Carolina; paint, Gentle Cream by Benjamin Moore. **Office:** sofa, Pottery Barn; desk, Restoration Hardware; rug, Crate & Barrel; paint, Pale Oak by Benjamin Moore. **Media room:** coffee table, Restoration Hard-

ware; paint, Sail Cloth by Benjamin Moore. **Basement bathroom:** wallpaper, Cole & Son in London. **Girl's bedroom:** bed, bedding and rug, Pottery Barn Kids; paint, Simply White and 50's Pink by Benjamin Moore. **Guest room:** drapery fabric, Gotcha by Premier Prints with fabrication through Etsy; mirror and lamps, Crate & Barrel; paint, Simply White and Old Navy by Benjamin Moore.



**Above:** The expanded basement includes a media room plus a new full bathroom and exercise room. During the renovation, architect Catherine Knight and contractor Enzo Nini added a genuine stacked-stone surround for a new gas fireplace with a large television screen above. French doors lead to a terrace. The basement has a second kitchen (off to the right in the photo).

**Left:** One of the barn doors in the finished basement provides access to the hallway and exercise room (left) and the other to the children's play room (right).



**Left:** The upstairs bedrooms were reconfigured. Guests can luxuriate in their own suite with a walk-in closet and private bathroom. Large windows look onto the wooded backyard.



**Above:** The frankly feminine daughter's bedroom has views of the woods from the canopy bed.

**Right:** Wallpaper in a birch tree pattern sets a serene tone in this basement bathroom. The oversized shower features a pebble floor and walls of subway tile; the bathroom itself has black slate tiles in a herringbone pattern. For convenience when entertaining outdoors, architect Catherine Knight placed this bathroom off the bluestone terrace at the back of the house.



As Featured in February/March 2016 of

NEW JERSEY'S HOME & DESIGN MAGAZINE  
**design** **NJ**