

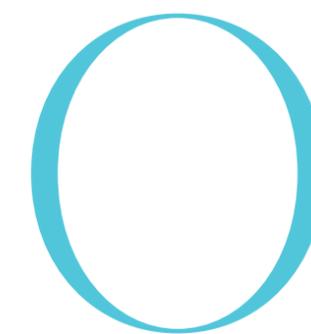


RUSTIC CHIC A mid-century modern dolphin-gray velvet chair contrasts with the original black-painted Douglas-fir hardwood floors. Owner Susan Vanech in front of the reclaimed-wood accent wall conceptualized with Ian McCann, GC.



A Forever Home

"HOUSE HUNTERS" STARS HONOR OLD WITH NEW



THE ISAAC JENNINGS HOUSE, which stands on a prominent corner adjacent to the Fairfield University campus, is said to be the first home rebuilt in Fairfield after the Revolutionary War. The current structure dates back to 1780, however an addition was built in the 1930s, and yet another renovation occurred in the 1950s. Amazingly, much of the original home was left intact, including two fireplaces, original Douglas-fir flooring, and the original front door with hand-hammered

hardware. After many years of neglect, the historic property had fallen into disrepair, and in 2014 was put on the market.

To say this home was a fixer-upper is something of an understatement. Enter Fairfielders Susan Vanech and Matt Brodman, and sons, Samson and Jonah. After flipping nine houses over the course of five years, they were finally ready to find their family's forever home. "We wanted a yard," says Vanech, a realtor, "and my husband wanted a pool," she explains. "Plus, sharing a bathroom with three boys was painful!"

When they first saw the Isaac Jennings House, and its one-and-a-quarter-acre

BY TRACY HOLLERAN // PHOTOGRAPHS BY EMILY SIDOTI



lot near the center of town, Vanech knew it was home. "As soon as I walked in the house, I had a vision, and it checked all our boxes," she says. "I knew which walls were coming down, but I wanted to retain as much as possible while also getting my dream home." Must-haves included creating an open kitchen, a master bath, and designated space for the boys, plus room for a pool. However, before they could start picking out kitchen cabinets, the first order of business was shoring up the existing structure, which was badly deteriorated. "I could stick my finger through the dining room wall right to the outside," she recalls. While removing these walls and the ceiling in that room, they discovered the original, hand-cut posts and beams, which they decided to keep exposed to add visual interest. "I made them save everything during the demolition," she says, including the sheathing from the roof, which Vanech later turned into a reclaimed-wooden accent wall in the family room. "We wanted to honor as much of the integrity of the original home as possible."

While Vanech loves the original front door, which opens into a small vestibule featuring a 1950s mural depicting the Revolutionary War, she made an 11th hour design decision to shift the primary entrance to the east side of the house. There, a new foyer was created and opens out into the center of the home, where the kitchen, dining area, and family room are located. The kitchen is bright and airy, and boasts white cabinetry and marble counters, a marble subway tile backsplash, and a center island large enough to accommodate the entire family. The cabinets and most appliances are from Green

RECLAIMED BEAUTY

A huge, custom-made marble table serves as the figurative and literal center of the home, with greenery styled by Ginny Kelly. The teal-accented family room looks out to the backyard through French casement windows. Vanech reclaimed the 1780s roof sheathing to surround the entryway into the formal living room.





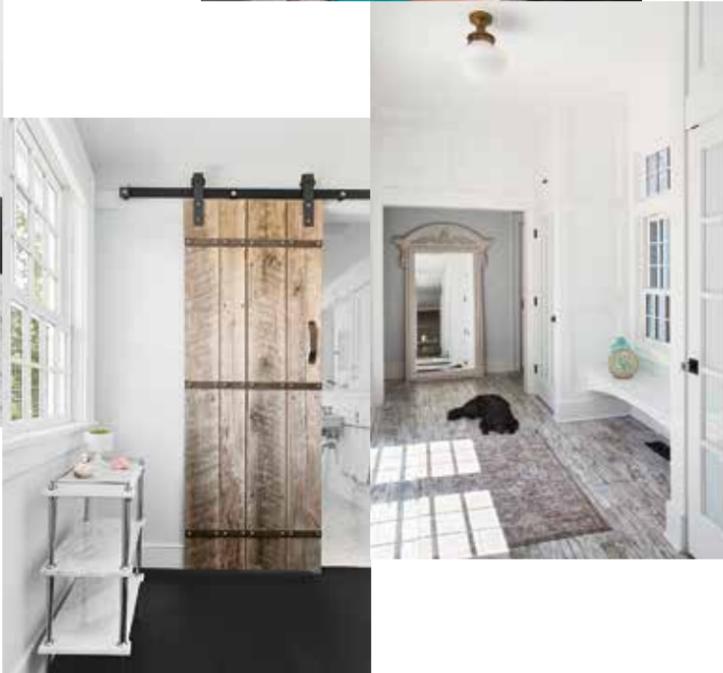
COOL COMFORT Open shelving lines the tiled walls of the butler's pantry, which also features a copper sink from Green Demolition. A polished-nickel Watermark faucet is the showpiece of the kitchen. The all-white open kitchen features artwork commissioned and custom created by Ben Roland of Westport.



Demolition, which sells repurposed, high-end kitchen and bath materials at discounted prices. "I like the idea of reclaim and recycle," Vanech says. "But I did splurge on the kitchen faucet, which was an 'out-of-budget' item," she admits of the Watermark polished-nickel fixture. "I love the mechanism. It's like a piece of art."

The kitchen opens into the spacious dining area and family room, which was enlarged by enclosing what was once a screened porch. "We wanted to take advantage of the views with lots of windows and glass," Vanech explains. At the center of the home, both figuratively and literally, is a huge, 70-inch round, custom-made marble table, which seats ten. "I always wanted a big table at the heart of my home," she says, and at around 500 pounds, "it's never moving!" Through a wide opening in the reclaimed wood accent wall is the formal living room. Because of the large, original hearth fireplace that sits on the interior wall, Vanech believes this room was originally the kitchen. They even found two cooking cauldrons and an antique well wheel during the renovation. "There was a little half-door on the exterior wall with this pump. It was 'indoor plumbing' in the 1780s."

Up a steep set of stairs are the family bedrooms—one for each of the boys, a master suite, and a "reptile room" for their pet bearded dragon and Russian tortoise. Original wide-plank flooring runs throughout the second floor, past the 1930s-era hall cabinetry, which now serves as linen closets. The boys share the hall bath, featuring the home's original porcelain-enameled



WARM WELCOME The entry foyer, styled by Ginny Kelly, leads into the center of the home. Vanech and Bella, the family's mini Australian shepherd. Exposed beams in the dining room show off the home's original architecture. Pooch Jack relaxes by the door. A custom Vermont barn-wood door by Ian Mccan, GC, leads to the long-coveted master bathroom.

cast-iron tub, which was reglazed and is set upon classic penny tile. When it came to the master suite, Vanech went all out. There is a private deck off the bedroom, which is painted in calming blue hues. A custom-made barn-style door gives way to Vanech's long-coveted master bath, which includes a massive marble-tiled shower and claw-foot tub. Small, teardrop-shaped tiles line the floor, and are mirrored by a marble accent wall featuring the same pattern. "I really wanted a giant chandelier right over the tub, but my electrician felt it would be a safety issue," she laments. "He was just looking out for me."

If all of this sounds vaguely familiar to you, it may be because you caught the episode of HGTV's "House Hunters" that starred Vanech and her family. Five days of filming captured both their house search and parts of the renovation project. "People who didn't know we'd bought this house couldn't believe it when they saw the show," said Vanech. "It was more work than we anticipated, without a doubt."

"I don't ever see us leaving this house," Vanech says. "I don't feel like I compromised on anything. Budget is always an issue, but there were splurges and savings," she continues. "The fact that it was a historical home made it meaningful. We fell in love with the historical integrity and character." ■