





BY ERIKA ALEXIA TSOUKANELIS | PHOTOS BY CHRISTOPHER KOLK

Symmetrical Delight

*Robin McGarry brings balanced design
to a neoclassical Southport Home*

In 1768, a mountaintop was cleared and leveled in Charlottesville, Virginia, to make way for Monticello, Thomas Jefferson's historic home. Jefferson was an architectural enthusiast, with great reverence for classical building. His still-standing home reflects this respect; it is done in the Roman neoclassical style. It has served as an example for countless planners and builders over two centuries, including the team that in 1999 constructed the Southport, Connecticut, residence featured in these pages. The current owners bought the property six years ago, and though they were warned that it was not exactly a family home—it had no finished basement or entertainment room, the second floor was bare—they were captivated by the dwelling's balanced proportions, by the grace of its construction and by the promise of domestic tranquility they felt within its walls.

LEFT Completed in 1999, the neoclassical structure has perfectly symmetrical proportions.

A small, square antique table was duplicated so that the resultant pair now provide balance in the great room



ABOVE and RIGHT “There is definitely a central area that’s the axis of the house,” McGarrys says. “We really needed to keep that open.”

Before they had even closed on their purchase, they decided to consult an interior designer. Intrigued by a magazine photograph of an elegant, minimalistic room, they contacted the woman responsible for its design—Robin McGarry of Weston. The homeowners interviewed her, and they were impressed by her professionalism and flexibility. A former corporate designer, McGarry’s portfolio reflects her attention not only to beauty, but also to issues such as budget and scheduling.

While all of McGarry’s work can be characterized by appropriate and stylish tastefulness, no two of her projects are ever alike. This is because McGarry takes note of what aesthetics delight her clients, and blends those sources of delight with her own well-trained sense of design, cultivated over 25 years of experience. The owners of the Monticello-inspired home in Southport were sold on McGarry. They began work immediately, planning layouts and minor renovations that would transform their new place into a true family home. It was the beginning of what was to become a long, happy relationship. The homeowners continue to consult McGarry as they seek to make the interior design of their home all that it can be.

“There’s always something else to do,” says one of the owners. “Robin is extremely organized. She doesn’t impose her style. She listens to how I want my home to look, but doesn’t let me make mistakes. If I want something done and she doesn’t agree, she’ll let me know. And she’s always right.”

This seamless collaboration has resulted in a house where design elements echo the serene symmetry of its neoclassical architecture. Four large-scale antique prints of Roman arches hang in the great room directly across from a Jeffersonian fireplace and elaborate mirror, effecting a critical equilibrium. A small, square antique table that belonged to the client was duplicated in coordination with McGarry by Artifact Design Group of Wilton. The table now has a twin,





LEFT To ensure the great room be inviting, furnishings were scaled upward to accommodate a 22-ft. ceiling so that no objects seem dwarfed. Rug by Antique Looms of New York.

RIGHT Furniture arrangement in the great room mimics architectural symmetry. Loveseats by Classic Upholstery; mirror by L'Antiquaire of Westport; renovation by Ross Builders of Westport.

and the pair is featured in the balanced great room. Artifact Design went on to work with McGarry in the creation of other custom pieces such as tall bookshelves that help make the 22-foot-ceilinged great room cozy by shifting perceptions of scale, and a coffee table that anchors two matching slipper chairs and a couch in equalized arrangement. These pieces came from Classic Upholstery in Norwalk.

Walls, drapes and rugs throughout are done in warm, neutral tones such as cream, tan and gentle blue. As the client does not like dramatic shifts in color from room to room, variation may be found in texture. The great room walls and classical moldings are done in a flat paint. The dining room walls are hand-painted stria by Roland Interiors of Westport, and the central hall has Venetian plaster walls by Milé Djuric that continue up the staircase to the second-floor sitting area.

The central hall leads from the front door through to the great room, and French doors in the great room open onto a brick loggia and pool beyond. It is possible to stand at the front door and look through this channel out to the pool in back. McGarry felt that this space needed to be without obstruction, yet she did not want it to feel empty. Furniture was artfully set in symmetrical configuration about the open area, and the central axis of the house was maintained.



Around this axis, family life buzzes. Furniture in the great room is large and comfortable. Light-colored slipcovers in the warmer months are removed once the weather shifts, revealing deep reds and golds. Throw pillows are also changed out and sisal rugs swapped for darker-patterned floor coverings, inviting indoor warmth with rich hues. A breakfast nook provides dining intimacy for the family of four, with antique-white chairs around a small table near bay windows that open onto the loggia. In the basement, an entertainment room with a television and pool table provides an area where the clients' two daughters can entertain their friends. McGarry worked with the girls, helping them to choose fabrics and colors. The sisters created personalized sleeping quarters where they feel at peace.

The master bedroom, which is on the ground floor



Custom rugs and furniture are crafted with exacting precision

ABOVE Streamlined kitchen, left, is next to the breakfast room, right. Even the kitchen features elements of neoclassicism in its layout and polish. French neoclassical chairs are from Artistic Frame.

RIGHT Octagonal dining room features an 84-in. diameter table made of one piece of walnut and built by Artifact Design Group.

and has a door out to the loggia, exudes tremendous peace as well. It features a light-colored rug with subtle patterns by Antique Looms of New York. An old dresser that didn't work with the feel of the room was stripped and repainted at McGarry's urging; it is now one of the owners' favorite pieces. McGarry designed a cloth-covered headboard that was created by Classic Upholstery of Norwalk. The clients had barely any window treatments in their previous residence. McGarry encouraged them to try something new, and pleated-wool sheers from Zimmer & Rohde now provide a soft, romantic ambience. A flat-screen plasma television above the fireplace is a mark of McGarry's determination; other designers told the homeowners this addition was impossible.

"If something's really different, some people may not want to take it on, but Robin looks at it as a challenge," says one of the clients. "She is willing to do whatever needs to be done to execute what I want."

One of the ways that McGarry does this is by assuring all custom pieces are done precisely and perfectly. Thus the bordered wool rug in the dining room is formed in an octagon to match the near-perfect shape of that space. The round walnut table there—84 inches in diameter and crafted from one piece of wood—was designed in collaboration with Artifacts Design. The clients did not want the table's surface to have seams, so McGarry arranged for it to come with a larger piece of wood that







may be placed on top of the existing table to make room for extra guests. The family does entertain fairly often, so they also needed sixteen chairs for the loggia and poolside. Yet they did not have a great deal of storage area. McGarry located the perfect chairs from Brown Jordan and Kingsley-Bate. They are lightweight, stackable and elegant, recent additions to the Southport home, one of the tweaks the owners like to apply from time to time.

As one of the homeowners says, "I see imperfection, and I call Robin to figure out how we can fix it. And it always gets fixed."

There is a delight that this family takes in continuing to beautify their home, and a joy they take living within its walls. They use every room, every part of the house. Every night they are in the great room, which is neither too formal nor too elegant, appreciating the meticulous eye of Robin McGarry, a designer who gains pleasure and reward from her work. As Thomas Jefferson must have found delight in the creation of Monticello back in 1768, so does this Jeffersonian-inspired neoclassical home in Southport provoke delight in those who wish to perfect it and all who enter its doors. ■

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LEFT McGarry calls this master bedroom "my new favorite room." Rug by Antique Looms; headboard by Classic Upholstery; pleated-wool sheers by Zimmer & Rohde.

ABOVE The master bathroom features blue-toned granite and loads of natural light. Paint colors are sophisticated and neutral.





ABOVE Grass tennis court was put in three years ago by Stecks Nursery of Bethel. Boxwoods serve as natural barriers. Stecks continues to maintain the outdoor area.

LEFT Three-foot-square pieces of bluestone form a balanced pathway from loggia to the pool. Outdoor furniture is from Brown Jordan and Kingsley-Bate.

RESOURCES

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