

ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

A SOPHISTICATED CONNECTICUT HOME

Architect Joel Barkley and decorator Alexa Hampton help a couple build a striking house that blends English-style architecture with Swedish charm

Text by Jesse Kornbluth | Photography by Durston Saylor

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Architects and designers may say they are fond of all their clients, but some inevitably stand out more than others. On their best-ever lists, [Joel Barkley](#) and [Alexa Hampton](#) would both start with Liz and Chris Pollack, who live, with three young daughters and an even younger son, in a house that gives fresh definition to the well-worn stereotype of the family home.

Considering who the Pollacks are, though, anything less than a stellar performance on their

part would be distressing. Chris spends his days as a high-end–building project manager; as the interface between architect, contractor, designer, and the people writing the checks, he’s expert at keeping crisis at bay, the project on schedule, and the budget firm. Liz, meanwhile, has substantial knowledge of architecture and makes aesthetic decisions without second-guessing herself. So the design, construction, and decoration of their Connecticut home took just over 12 months, produced no cost overruns, and engendered enduring friendships with their creative team.

“Building this house could have taken two years,” Chris says. “We saved about a year by avoiding the pitfalls. We walked through the plans, approved them, and didn’t make changes. Well, one—we changed the fireplace in the foyer from gas to wood-burning.”

The house is a rambling two-story structure that would fit comfortably in the English countryside; most of the façade is black-painted wood with white trim, while one side overlooking a driveway is stark white stucco. The first time Manhattan-based decorator Hampton saw the plan, she dubbed the color scheme “Oreo.” Barkley, principal architect at the New York City firm of Ike Kligerman Barkley, calls the unusual exterior treatment “Svenglish.” He first thought of it after seeing a black barn with white trim in a book on Swedish houses, then developed the idea while on an architectural tour of Sweden, where he was particularly impressed by the detailing of the 18th-century country home of botanist Carl Linnaeus. “The graphic quality was striking,” he says. “It made me want to experiment.”

How many of those 12-plus months were spent debating the palette? None. The Pollacks asked Barkley what he imagined for the exterior. “Black,” he said, deadpan. They were such instant converts that the only question was whether to trim the windows in black as well.

The interior is, in its own way, just as unconventional. There are no hallways on the ground floor; rooms flow directly into one another. The children do their homework at a long white counter in the second-floor corridor—which the Pollacks call the junior study. The dining room ceiling is silver-leafed Venetian plaster, and the chandelier and sconces are family heirlooms, but the tabletop is reclaimed elm. Instead of crown molding in the living room, there are planks of angled wood that suggest a cornice, a detail copied from a church in Sweden. And almost all of the antique furniture is in storage. “The kids can climb on these sofas,” Liz says. “It’s their house too.”

The Pollacks mean it. The mudroom has a cubby for each child, and the windows in the children’s rooms were installed at a low height so the youngsters wouldn’t feel dwarfed. In the kitchen, there’s a griddle on the stove dedicated strictly to pancakes. When Liz became pregnant during construction, the room that was to be Chris’s gym was cheerfully rethought

as a nursery. And the pair listened to their daughters when they insisted on just one requirement—a disco ball. It can be found in the basement, along with a small stage covered in beige shag carpeting.

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