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A CHANDELIER (left) shimmers above the carved mahogany dining table. At the base of the family room staircase (below), a landscape of a French countryside captures the colors of the home's interior as part of a charming vignette. Artist Richard Davis of Forked River painted the scene in the style of Cézanne. Patterns and textures (right) mix it up in the cozy-but-sophisticated living room. The gas fireplace and a scrolled-iron mirror anchor the sweeping, white-spindled staircase. Sources: cabinetry, Britton Cabinets in Long Branch; window treatments, Peary Upholstery in Atlantic Highlands; mirror, Creative Space in Middletown; living and dining room floral arrangements, Fine Flowers in Middletown.




A MATTER OF DETAIL

Colts Neck home blends French country style with touches of Tuscany

IN PURSUIT OF MORE LAND FOR REARING THEIR TWO YOUNG children, a couple set their sights on Colts Neck Township, a community of sprawling horse farms. The husband, vice president of sales for a financial printing company, and the wife, a *New York Times* advertising executive, favored a custom-built home that they could tailor to suit the demands of

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“When we visualized the house, we knew we wanted to pay attention to the details,” the wife says.

NATURAL STONE surrounds the 1,200-square-foot pool with a waterfall and spa. The landscape plantings change with the seasons. Source: Pool Concepts in Manalapan.



everyday living. "We came from a center-hall colonial [in Shrewsbury] with lots of little rooms, most of which were never used. This time around, we wanted to make sure we lived in every room," the wife said.

A two-year search yielded just the right site on a quiet cul-de-sac: 1.5 acres with a private, wooded back yard. "There was one problem," the wife explained. "The property was pitched very low from the street." Some family members even referred to the prized lot as "the ditch." The couple initially planned to haul in fill dirt to bring the property up to street level, a costly solution. But the lot challenge ultimately fell to Neptune architect James Monteforte, who turned the problem into an opportunity. "Fortunately, our ditch became a valley when Jim convinced us to leave the property alone and nestle our home right into its natural setting," the wife said.

With that issue resolved, the couple could outline design criteria for the architect. "We wanted lots of windows to showcase the woods in the back yard," the homeowners recalled, "and an open design feeling." From the beginning, the priority was to make

LACE CURTAINS (above) filter the light through the double French doors in the entryway. Above the doors, an original leaded-glass floral design imparts a sense of genteel elegance. The street façade (below) has provincial influences with its multi-tiered roofline, dormers, and columned porch. The semicircular driveway adds convenience, and a curved cobblestone path provides a welcoming entry. Source: leaded glass, Coastal Glass Carving in Keansburg.





CUSTOM WINDOW treatments in playful patterns and trims enliven the breakfast nook without obstructing outdoor views. Source: light fixture, Hardy Steiner in Shrewsbury.

every inch of living space count. And because the focus was on quality of space, not quantity, the couple budgeted for custom accents and architectural detailing.

To everyone's delight, the challenge that the property initially imposed turned out to be one of its greatest assets. Monteforte took advantage of the steeply graded lot to create 4,716 square feet of functional living space. The slope allowed for a lower level with a three-car garage, full walk-out basement, spacious mud room, fifth bed-

room, and full bath.

Along the back of the home, an expanse of windows and an open balcony span the length of the central living area. The balcony adds drama while the windows flood the home with natural light and spectacular views of the landscape.

A combination living/dining room occupies the main-floor living area. Furnishings define each room's function rather than the walls that chopped up the spaces in the family's former home. The owners, who frequently entertain,



AMPLE WORK surfaces and separate sinks allow the couple to cook simultaneously. Custom maple cabinetry with crown molding makes a seamless transition to the adjacent family room; draperies frame the archway that leads into the formal dining room. Source: floral arrangement, Fine Flowers in Middletown.



COUNTRY FRENCH furnishings (above) mixed with custom bedding and window treatments provide a cozy retreat for a pre-teen girl. The window seat serves as a place for quiet reading. Artist Richard Davis of Forked River used the younger daughter's room (far right) as a canvas, with a nature-inspired theme gracing his ceiling cameo. The two girls share a feminine bathroom (right) that's outfitted with traditional wallpaper, deep-stained wood cabinets, and a white marble counter. Source: bedding and drapes, Peary Upholstery in Atlantic Highlands.





agree that the open layout lends itself to formal entertaining or casual family gatherings. "We use the main room all the time, especially during the holidays," the wife said. The dining room table seats 12, and after dinner, guests can mingle comfortably a few feet away in the inviting formal living room, where a gas fireplace, wet bar, and ample seating await.

Other rooms flow naturally into the central living area. To the left is what the owners term the "working" side of the house, the site of an office and a fully equipped gym. The center of family activity takes place

to the right of the main area where a roomy kitchen opens to a sunny breakfast nook and comfortable family room. A laundry and powder room are conveniently located down the hall. Two stairways, one in the formal living room and one in the family room, lead to four bedrooms, including the master suite and two full baths.

Nearly two years after the home was built, the couple hired Bacarella Martin Interiors in Shrewsbury to design the rooms. "When we visualized the house, we knew we wanted to pay attention to the details: lots of molding, the right door-

knobs, and even the right drawer pulls," the wife said. Before working with the firm, the wife had lamented the length of time she spent making decisions about each element of the house. "I literally spent hours and hours at Creative Space in Middletown simply picking out six handles for my bathroom vanity," she said. The wife formed a great partnership with Sally Bacarella and Liza Martin, whom she praises for their mastery of detail and for a firm understanding of the couple's design goals.

The designers introduced architectural accents such as bead-board ceil-







