





Formal but fun

Whimsical touches lighten
stately Shaker Heights home

By Nina Polien Light | Photos by Dan Morgan, Straight Shooter

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Joanne Dimeff's vestibule teases visitors.

Immediately, it establishes itself as a formal receiving area lined with rich red wallpaper. But a casual glance upward reveals unexpected fabric roping that frames a ceiling Joanne hand-painted with gold stars. ♦ From hand-painted nature motifs to clever accessories, whimsical touches abound throughout the 3,800-square-foot home interior designer Joanne shares with her physician-husband Bob, daughters Brittany and Alexandra, and Pickle, a Bichon Frise. ♦ The owner of Joanne Dimeff Interior Design sought a classical, formal style with unexpected touches when decorating her 1925 brick Shaker Heights Colonial.

European sophistication

Nowhere is that more evident than in the kitchen.

"Everybody was going for the Tuscan look when I remodeled it a few years ago," Joanne explains. "So, naturally, I took the opposite route and went with a light, 18th-Century France mix accessory-wise. I hand-painted sophisticated animals on the walls to give it my personal stamp."

Joanne's strategically placed hound, hare, garpike and birds in a tree aren't the only surprise elements in the soft beige kitchen. A neutral backsplash near the sink and main cabinetry is enlivened with 2x2-inch tile inserts of Greek gods Hercules, Medusa, Satyr and Dionysius. A large representation of Poseidon, originally designed for an outdoor fountain, commands attention on the backsplash behind the range.

"I always like a little whimsy," Joanne says, with a smile. "Using things in ways they weren't intended is a lot of fun."

Before the whimsy came renovation, much of which Joanne and Bob did themselves.

"We eliminated two stairways—one to the maid's quarters and an extra service stairway to the basement," Joanne explains. "By

doing this, we were able to widen the kitchen by three feet. We also removed the wall between the kitchen and breakfast nook—always a controversial move in these old houses. We removed it to make room for a peninsula and expansive desk for organizing household and family matters."

Original to the house, the butler's pantry in the breakfast nook serves as a contrast to the soft beige cabinetry in the main kitchen area. Bob built the countertop, and then the couple hired workers to install bead board and lights. Although the wood was meant to be painted, the couple chose a dark brown stain to hide deep grains in the wood.

Brass hardware with a King Louis XVI motif, raised panels on the cabinets, crystal chandeliers and an ornate wood-framed gild mirror over the desk establish the kitchen's formality. But granite countertops and stainless-steel appliances are a nod to the 21st century.

Joanne chose not to disguise the appliances with cabinets. "I believe you should have appliances do what they're supposed to be doing," she explains, admitting that she leaves most of the cooking to Bob.

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PREVIOUS PAGE: The homeowner brings whimsical elements into her traditional home with touches of life. Here, the living room coffee table rests on the ears of four cement statues of rabbits. The piece, from Arhaus, is stately and sweet.

THIS SPREAD: Along with the rabbits under the coffee tabletop, hints of life can be felt throughout the living room—from the honeydew walls to the antler candlestick holders on the mantle.



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ABOVE: The formal dining room is full of antique pieces, including two Asian-inspired lamps from June Greenwald Antiques.

OPPOSITE: The homeowners enjoy formal dinners in the dining room, including meals by candlelight.

Dinner is served

Although the Dimeffs generally grab breakfast or lunch at the peninsula, they enjoy family dinners in the formal dining room—often complete with an elegantly set table and candlelight. The gold-painted room is anchored by an antique Oriental rug in a floral motif.

The dining table and chairs—eclectic pieces with curved legs, carvings and angles—were an antique store find. Joanne believes the pieces are from the 1920s or 1930s. She asked the store owner to strip the furniture’s original shiny black paint, and then she applied tongue oil to highlight the interesting patina.

A wood buffet purchased in a Larchmere Road antique shop holds a painted Chinese picnic basket from the 1700s, which Joanne filled with dried hydrangea that she treated with floral spray paint. Flanking the basket are two lamps with an Asian motif from June Greenwald Antiques.

Perhaps most striking is the antique wood carving that hangs above the buffet. “I was going to make it into a headboard for my daughter’s twin bed, but my daughter thought the person in the carving looked spooky and she didn’t want it over head,” Joanne explains. “So it landed in the dining room.”

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Designer Tips

Joanne Dimeff says homeowners can freshen their homes without a major renovation by following these steps:

1. Edit ruthlessly. Start at the left side of the room and evaluate every accessory and piece of art. If it doesn't bring joy, chuck it.
2. Place everything that "made the cut" on a table.
3. Clean the room thoroughly.
4. Rearrange furniture. "For a living room or family room, center the furniture around the focal point, usually the fireplace," Joanne advises.
5. Return salvaged accessories to the space.
6. Fill in with seasonal color. "Use pillows, throws, candles, even books with gorgeous covers, and a nice healthy floor plant. Don't forget the scented room spray."

Whether homeowners are shaking things up a bit or overhauling their space, Joanne says they shouldn't get hung up on staying true to one design scheme.

"With clients, I always talk about a feel as opposed to a style," she says. "My goal is to have them walk in the room and feel an overpowering happiness visually."

"Ask yourself how you want your rooms to feel: Edgy? Formal? Comfortable and cozy? Light and airy? Zen-like? Once you know that, it will drive all your decisions."

RIGHT: The wall between the former kitchen and dinette was removed to create one, open space. The new space is a peninsula dining top and a desk area.





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The living is easy

Joanne's love of nature is evident in the living room. A glass-top coffee table from Arhaus Furniture takes center stage; four cement statues of rabbits form its base. One of the light-green-honeydew-painted walls is lined with framed and matted nature prints that Joanne found in a circa 1970s Audubon Society calendar. A large fiddle leaf fig plant stands in a corner near the fireplace. Expansive bay windows offer a view of mature trees.

But the room isn't all about nature. Antiques lend sophistication. Two recovered wingback chairs that Joanne inherited from family flank the fireplace. A 200-year-old dresser with homemade pegs stands in one corner, while an antique black-lacquered Asian desk with gold accents holds court at the other end of the room.

Artistic accents

Joanne's artistic talent shows up throughout the home, including in what she affectionately calls the "Bee Room"—a back hall that links the center hall to several rooms and leads to the back yard. Using gold paint and a stamp, she decorated the walls with a bee motif. She then dipped a pencil eraser in blue paint and pressed it against the wall to add small dots.



Hand-painted deer prance around a mirror in an upstairs bathroom. In the guest room, Joanne hung models of birds in a nest on a wire that stretches across the room.

"It's a surprise," she says. "The guest wakes up and sees birds in the air."

To extend the nature motif, she painted the ceiling sky blue and created a hand-painted tree on the chimney stack that extends into the guest room's loft.

Sweet dreams

When Joanne and Bob want quiet time, they retreat to the master suite. The elegant room features a small working fireplace, candle sconces, Thai silk curtains, wrought-iron bed and elegant turn-of-the-century French armoire with matching dresser. The armoire and dresser boast ornate carvings at the base, legs and top.

"We had to have the humidifier at a certain setting because you could actually hear a cracking noise from the [armoire's] wood drying out," Joanne says, adding that museums often use this technique to preserve delicate pieces. "It had to get acclimated to the humidity in our house."

Also of note is a relaxing first-floor sunroom.

ABOVE: A creative sculpture of birds in nests is suspended from the ceiling in the guest suite.

OPPOSITE: The sunroom is decorated with little color contrast. The space overlooks the perennial garden in the back yard.

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ABOVE: The master bedroom is a relaxing retreat with a wrought-iron bed and turn-of-the-century French armoire with matching dresser. The piece requires that the couple sleep with a humidifier to keep the antiques from drying out.

OPPOSITE: A relaxing fireplace completes the calmness of the master suite.

“The sunroom was my experiment in designing a space with very little contrast,” Joanne says of the comfortable light green area. “I wanted to try a floating, calm room with little visual clutter.”

A large mirror fills a space that Joanne believes was once a window because of the sill-like structure below it. Large skylights allow sunshine to spill over slipcovered chairs and a down sofa that’s flanked by octagonal glass-topped side tables holding artichoke lamps.

Adding Joanne’s trademark whimsy are antique angel candle sconces and a wood carving of a human figure that Bob purchased in Borneo.

The sunroom overlooks Joanne’s backyard perennial garden, which features Japanese anemone, asters, hosta, French lilac, black-eyed Susan, statice, hydrangea and other flora.

Home, sweet home

Joanne loves her formal, but fun, home. “I was not going for the lived-in look in my house, but it’s still practical.”

However, she admits that the design wheels are always turning.

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"I grew up loving the English Country House look, so that's the feel I wanted in my home," Joanne says. "It is also practical because it is timeless. My taste changes daily, however. I already have big plans for my next home—soft modern with a focus on large pieces of art." 🐦

ABOVE: The outdoors are brought in through bird napkin ring holders and stemware on the dining room table.

Designer: Joanne Dimeff Interior Design

Flooring:

Original hardwood, stained with Duraseal Golden Brown

Kitchen cabinetry: KraftMaid

Kitchen countertops:

Giallo Napoleon, Cleveland Granite & Marble

Kitchen tile:

Craftsman by Pratt & Larson field tile, Wiseman Spaulding, Poseidon fountain tile and 2x2-inch Greek gods accent tile all from The Thomas Brick Company

Kitchen sink/fixtures:

Elkay potfiller from Rohl, all plumbing from Edelman Plumbing Supply

Kitchen faucet: Grohe Lady Lux Plus

Dishwasher:

KitchenAid Superba, Interstate Kitchen Supply

Cooktop:

36-inch Viking Dual-Fuel, Interstate Kitchen Supply

Refrigerator:

48-inch Sub-Zero, Interstate Kitchen Supply

Oven:

Small second oven in island by Whirlpool, Interstate Kitchen Supply

Kitchen lighting:

Arhaus

Furniture fabric:

The Ohio Design Centre

Kitchen window treatments:

Designer Stitchery

Kitchen window treatment fabric:

Robert Allen

Living room paint color:

Honeydew by California Paints

Living room oriental rug:

Agra from India, Classic Oriental Rugs

Living room yellow chenille

pillow fabric:

Kravet through Cellura

Living room sofas: Bernhardt

Cupcakes:

Babycakes Cupcakery in Cleveland Heights

Sunroom ottoman: Ballard Designs

Upstairs bathroom countertop:

Caesarstone Champagne, Stone Solutions