

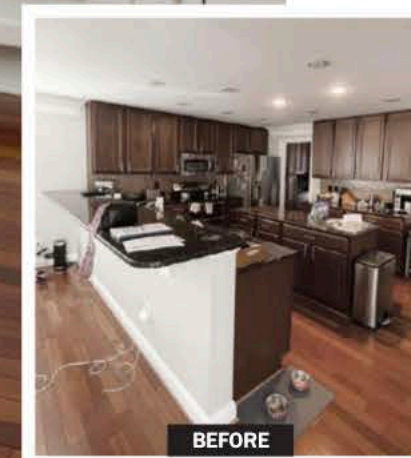


Lighten up

Once dated and dark, this renovated Arlington kitchen is fresh and functional.

BY NIGEL F. MAYNARD

PHOTOS BY CHRISTY KOSNIC



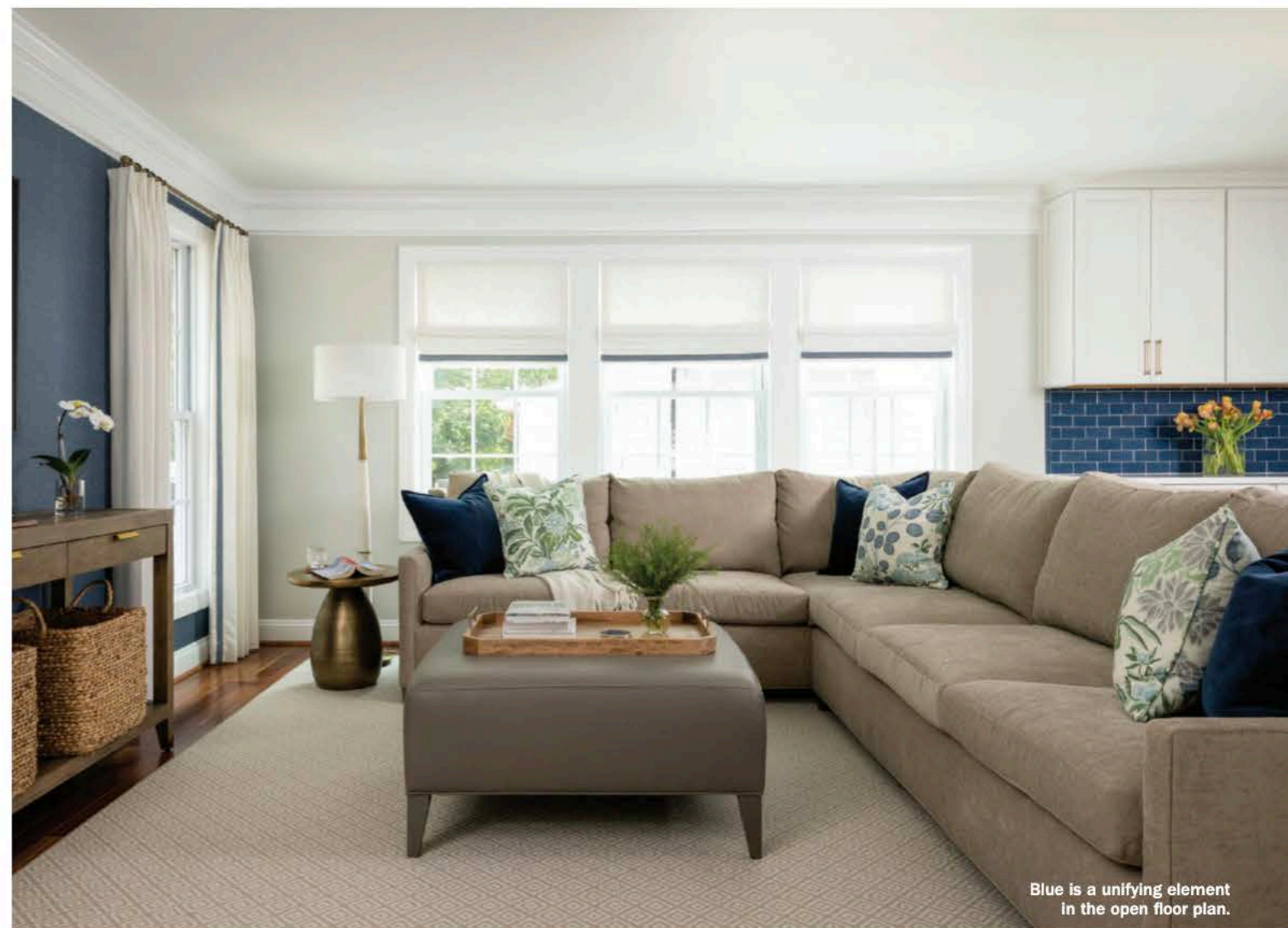
When Kate and Jon Merrill moved into their Waverly Hills Colonial in 2022, they weren't crazy about the interior design. Yes, the home had five bedrooms and four bathrooms, a spacious kitchen and hardwood floors, but its dark finishes felt passé. You'd never have guessed it was built as recently as 2010.

"The house had good bones because it's not that old," says Kate, who works in education. (Jon, a retired Air Force lieutenant colonel, is now a government contractor.) "There wasn't a lot that really needed to be fixed on it; it was just dated. Everything was peach and brown, like lots of peach walls, peach ceilings. The kitchen and all the bathrooms were this very, very dark brown with chrome fixtures."

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White cabinets with brass hardware are complemented by blue Roca ceramic tiles.



Blue is a unifying element in the open floor plan.

They bought the place knowing they would remodel at some point, but in the meantime made a few small upgrades for the sake of livability—painting the walls, repairing the trim, sprucing up the landscaping and replacing an aging HVAC system. “Not a lot of sexy stuff, but just things to polish it up a little bit,” Kate says.

A year later they were contemplating more cosmetic improvements. That’s when they took a step back and considered the bigger picture.

“[We realized] it wouldn’t make sense to paint the cabinets if I knew that eventually I wanted the whole kitchen layout to be different,” Kate explains. “Living in the house for a lit-

tle while, you start to notice things that just don’t work and don’t make sense. So we said, ‘You know what, we’ve been saving. This is our forever home. We should put the money in it now and actually enjoy it.’”

The Merrills wanted a kitchen that was bright, efficient and conducive to entertaining, with an updated pantry and a mudroom. They called Arlington designer Susan Sutter after seeing her work in this magazine. “I looked at a couple of other designers, but I kept going back to this beautiful green and white kitchen that she had done,” Kate says, “and I thought, that’s exactly what I want—only in blue.”

In Sutter’s estimation, the existing

kitchen and pantry were plenty large, but a peninsula impeded the flow between the kitchen and living room. Working in partnership with Design Pro Remodeling, she gutted the space and traded the peninsula for a large island with counter seating.

Out went the dark finishes, replaced with crisp white cabinets and white quartz countertops. “We were looking for something classic and timeless, and I think that’s what led me to the white,” Sutter says. Brass hardware and a brass strip on the range hood provide a touch of elegance.

Color also plays a huge role. In the kitchen, the bright whites are offset by a deep blue tile backsplash spanning



Fresh paint, glass cabinet doors and a beverage fridge turned the pantry from drab to fab.

two walls. In the adjoining pantry, Sutter painted the existing cabinets hunter green and introduced a complementary floral wallpaper to create a “dark moody” vibe.

Blue is a recurring motif throughout the home. Prior to the makeover, the Merrills had painted their dining room and Kate’s home office in shades of blue. “[Susan] pulled from that to make the rest of the house feel more like the only two rooms in my house that I liked,” Kate says. “The wallpaper in the living room, the color of the furniture, the curtains—everything kind of builds off that color palette.”

From a functional standpoint, the owners also wanted a mudroom where their 15-year-old son could store his baseball gear and muddy shoes. Eyeing the floor plan, Sutter noted an under-used space near an exterior side door that had originally been intended as a dining nook. She asked the contractor to build a wall to create an alcove and painted it a high-gloss blue. Measuring approximately 7 feet by 5 feet, it’s outfitted with custom-built lockers, a bench, coat hooks and a cement tile floor that can withstand abuse.

The wood flooring spanning the rest of the main level presented a slight challenge for the carpentry crew. Sutter’s design plan retained large expanses of the original Brazilian cherry, but there were holes after the demo. That



BEFORE



Botanical Thibault wallpaper raises the bar.

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Blues and greens are paired with classic neutrals in the living room.

made integrating sections of old and new flooring rather tricky.

Design Pro Remodeling devised a seamless solution with minimal waste. “We didn’t actually use very much new wood,” explains Cameron Brent, co-owner of the Fairfax-based contractor. “We ended up strategically harvesting existing wood from a few [hidden] areas—under the new perimeter cabi-

nets and kitchen island, and the flooring in the corner that became a tiled mudroom/storage locker area. This required us to carefully remove each piece, ensuring the existing boards we saved did not splinter during removal.” They then transplanted and reinstalled those planks in new spots.

Kate says the project, completed in the spring of 2025, hits all the right

notes. “It’s beautiful, but it’s also incredibly functional,” she says. “The kitchen is bright and pretty. Every time I sit in there, I can’t believe this is my house.” ■

Nigel F. Maynard is editor of the new magazine Design Vibes. Follow him on Instagram @products_hound and @designvibesmag.

The mudroom repurposes an underused space in the floor plan.

