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Friday, March 15, 2024

A WHOLE NEW LOOK

Century-old farmhouse gets a remake with a 'more is more' approach. 8H

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The benefits of sowing seeds directly into the ground. 4H

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Holland luxury condo sits on Lake Macatawa. 15H



Cover Story

SIGNATURE STYLE

Early 1900s farmhouse gets an update with a variety of influences

BY KHRISTI ZIMMETH
Special to The Detroit News

It's unlikely that anyone would ever call Jane Synnstedt a minimalist — and that's perfectly OK with her. While the Birmingham-based interior designer works in and appreciates a wide variety of styles, when it comes to her own residence, the Southern-born Synnstedt tends toward maximalism, opting to fill her carefully curated rooms with family heirlooms, souvenirs from her travels and other things that make her happy.

Her signature style is evident throughout the 3,000-square-foot, three-bedroom classic white farmhouse located within walking distance of Birmingham's downtown. "I gravitate to older homes," she says of her past preferences, which have also included an 1840 house in Metamora. She moved to the Detroit area with her ex-husband when he took a job in the auto industry and never left, although she has offices here and in Florida and works on design jobs around the country (janesynnstedt.com).

She purchased the early 1900s farmhouse about a dozen years ago and has been working on it ever since, she says. The history of the house is sketchy, although Synnstedt says locals think it may have been built for someone who worked on a larger nearby estate. "I am aware of renovations between 1904 when it was built and when the home was purchased in 2012," she explains.

"They involved the garage, primary bedroom and bathroom and den/family room." More recent owners had updated the historic house in a more contemporary style — including a relocated wood and Lucite stairway to the second floor, she points out — but her main goal included returning it to its original more classic style.

The house had been on the market for some time when she purchased it, she adds, an unusual occurrence in downtown Birmingham. "I don't think people knew what to do with it." Luckily, she did. "I worked hard to bring it back to what it should be," she explained during a recent tour. "The Lucite definitely had to go," she adds with a laugh. She replaced it with mismatched spindles that were salvaged from a house being torn down in Detroit.

It has been a labor of love. "I have always been passionate about old homes for myself," she explains. "I immediately noted the great bones of the house and decided it



Photos by James Haeffner

Located in the front of the house, the living room is one of the 1904 home's original rooms and features carefully chosen furniture and accessories.

would be a project to work on over time and that it would become a home I would love and enjoy for years."

She has renovated the entire home since buying it, starting with early changes to mechanicals through later design updates. Wall-to-wall carpet was removed, wood floors repaired and refinished, moldings added, doors widened where appropriate and historical custom paint colors added. "All rooms have been updated, including bathrooms and the addition of a gourmet kitchen," she says. While many of the home's original details had been removed during renovations, Synnstedt was thrilled to find the original white pine

floors in the upstairs two front bedrooms.

More recently, she and fellow designer Martin Bell, who works with her as creative director, tackled the kitchen. At one point, the room that now houses the kitchen had been a porch, and the pair replaced the porch and moved some walls to open up the limited space. While she had always planned to redo the kitchen, it was moved up on the to-do list after an upstairs washer overflowed. "I was getting ready to do it anyways," the designer explains. "It just expedited it."

Priorities included a kitchen that complemented the rest of the house and one with plenty of space to cook and to enter-

tain. To achieve that, she moved the refrigerator into a space that formerly held a dining area, adding floor-to-ceiling custom cabinetry from Perspectives, a German silver and oiled bronze range hood from Vogue Furniture and a second island that matched the rest of the kitchen.

No detail was too small. Distressed solid walnut cabinets have a low sheen, custom stain and glaze and unlacquered solid brass hardware that will develop a patina over time. Paneled appliances and antique panels on the island and pieces from the designer's antique lighting collection were carefully chosen to fit the traditional aesthetic.



The primary suite is part of an addition to the home. The antique desk once belonged to the designer's grandfather.



The designer moved the dining area to the front of the house opposite the living room and near to the newly renovated kitchen. She enjoys cooking and entertains regularly.



Once a small galley, the renovated kitchen now opens to the dining area and adjacent family room.



A vignette in the living room shows the Southern-born designer's preferences for lush textiles and beautiful, traditional antiques.

dn More online: See a photo gallery at detroitnews.com/homestyle.

she says, a fact that other homeowners, no matter the age of the house, can relate to.

One thing that won't change is her decorating style. "I like busy, I like eclectic, and I like collections," she says. Many of the blue-and-white porcelains in her family room were her mother's. She loves the desk in her bedroom that once belonged to her grandfather. Her family had a place in the Bahamas, so shells and fish plates remind her of those good times.

She also likes to add some unexpected touches, such as the life-size mermaid hung at the top of the stairs to the second floor. "My things make me smile, and some make me laugh," she says of her home's inherited furnishings and acquired accessories. "It's nice to keep things around you that make you feel good."

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The spacious primary bath has a peaked ceiling, walk-in shower and more.



A small table in the entry hall signals the design style to come and adds a warm welcome.

The redesigned space makes the most of every inch. Even the window seat has pull-out storage underneath. The layout was tweaked several times to accommodate the desired appliances and to open up the existing galley kitchen to the adjacent family room. Structural laminated beams were added to open up two walls in the kitchen and family room. "It is important to me that the kitchen felt as if it could have always been here," she says. Since completing it, the renovated kitchen has become her favorite room in the house, she says. "I spend a lot of time here."

She's looking forward to getting outside soon. Warmer weather plans include replacing the deck of the back of the house and redoing the front porch. "There's always something that needs to be done,"