

Rolling the Dice

For designer Juan Carretero, refreshing a historic house is all about taking chances. Whether it's incorporating modern furniture or injecting sly decorative touches, he's always game.



In the circa-1790 dining room of his Catskill, New York, weekend home, designer Juan Carretero painted the low ceiling a high-gloss blush. "It gives your complexion a candlelit glow," he says. Sconces, Visual Comfort. Portrait, Acroterion. Ceiling paint, Fine Paints of Europe's WC-19. **OPPOSITE:** The mudroom's floor, in tiles from Cement Tile Shop, reminds Carretero of his grandmother's home in Oaxaca, Mexico. Vintage iron dice stools can serve as seating at the secretary. Paint, Sherwin-Williams's Country Squire. Landscape drawing, Frank Faulkner.

Interior Design **JUAN CARRETERO** Interview **KATHLEEN RENDA**
Photography **STEPHEN KENT JOHNSON** Producer **DORETTA SPERDUTO**

Framed by curtains in a Kravet striped cotton, the living room's early Victorian windows "are perfectly proportioned and symmetrical," the designer says. Painting the ceiling in "a beige that reads like a whisper of pink"—Sherwin-Williams's Pediment—"brings out the crown moldings." Hicks globe light, Thomas O'Brien for Visual Comfort. Walls, Silverpointe by Sherwin-Williams.

WHAT FEELS FRESH

Having a House Mascot

This room's bust of George Washington, which Carretero sometimes dresses up in seasonal hats, gets a place of honor.

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There's an entire wall of framed insects in the living room. Was something bugging you?

JUAN CARRETERO: I love art that tricks you into taking a long second look. Study the images a little, and you'll notice those aren't actual bugs—they're recycled-metal sculptures by architect Thierry Despont. They're intriguing and witty, which is exactly the style I wanted in a weekend home: eclectic, slightly formal rooms with a sense of humor. Because I'm here to relax! That also explains why the room has a plaster bust of George Washington in it. I placed him on top of the high English Regency cabinet so he can surveil the entire space. He was purchased at an antiques shop in Quebec. I was driving past when I spotted him and hit the brakes. "George," I said, "you're going back home!" In winter, I dress him in a rabbit-fur hat.

KATHLEEN RENDA: What drew you to this property?

The insane views! The house is across the river from Olana, the eccentric 1870s Victorian–Middle Eastern castle built by landscape painter Frederic Church and set in the woods. I can see the grounds from here; it's like gazing out onto a fairy tale. Another plus was the river frontage. Direct water access is a rarity along the Hudson, because a road or train tracks usually blocks the way. But you can launch a kayak right from our backyard.

Was the house as picturesque as the setting?

To be honest, it was run-down and joyless—like Grey Gardens on the Hudson. While the original section dates to the 1790s, there were haphazard additions in the 1860s and 2000s. It had become a mazelike warren of dim rooms weighed down by a palpable shroud of unease. And the house ignored the stunning



ABOVE: The round iron coffee tables, custom made in Mexico, balance the living room's extra-long RH, Restoration Hardware sofa and are easier to maneuver around than one long table. Greek-key pillows in a Pierre Frey fabric. **FAR LEFT:** The living room's folding screen, with its Louise Nevelson-inspired collage of found wooden objects, was purchased online. **LEFT:** A portrait of a Dutch nobleman from the 1690s greets visitors in the foyer. Door in Sherwin-Williams's Quilt Gold. Lamp, Alexa Hampton for Visual Comfort.

views rather than embracing them. Luckily, I'm an architect and a renovation veteran. During the past decade, I've overhauled six local buildings with my life partner, David Osborne. We had dealt with worse, including a home without a roof. This place at least had some historical details—and a roof.

Still, that's some heavy lifting. Where did you start?

With serious structural changes. I reconfigured the layout to a free-flowing open plan with uninterrupted sight lines to the river. The decor reinforces that. For instance, in the living room, both the marble Saarinen table and Louis XVI-style cane chairs are in pale white. The effect is almost ghostly: The furniture seems to disappear, so as not to distract from the views. I chose an opposite strategy in the master bedroom, where I brought the outside in with an etching-inspired Anthropologie wallpaper of fleeting clouds and deciduous trees. It creates this amazing 360-degree panorama of nature.

Your rooms deftly team modern and antique pieces. Is that juxtaposition difficult to pull off?

Mostly it's intuitive. The 18th-century dining room, with its low ceiling and cooking fireplace, is the oldest room in the house. To make it feel alive, I brought in a mashup of furniture: Verner Panton S chairs, a streamlined oak table, a 1920s Chinese rug,

and a Louis XVI fauteuil. I always find that marrying past and present creates an opposites-attract tension. Also, I'm a nostalgic soul who appreciates the charm of things you can't find anymore. For me, uniqueness is the ultimate luxury.

The kitchen island goes on forever—I swear it's bigger than my apartment! Why so enormous?

It's 17 feet long, because I realized the need to surrender to the reality of life. I always preferred a sequestered kitchen, with cooking done in private. But it just doesn't make sense for our lifestyle. When we have people over, everyone always—*always!*—gathers in the kitchen. Knowing that, when I designed the addition on the back of the house where the kitchen is, I deliberately went colossal. A friend even calls it "the catwalk." Sure enough, everything—meal prep, informal dining, hanging out—happens at the island. I don't know if it's made us into great cooks, but our dinner guests always seem to come back.

Oversize dice stools, a circus-striped ceiling: These rooms clearly don't take themselves too seriously. Does that say something about your personality?

I do always try to have fun, and that's reflected in some of the objects that I choose for my surroundings, to be sure. Because if you're not having fun, what's the point?



WHAT FEELS FRESH

Going Big— Really Big

Just give in to size: The kitchen is where you spend all your time anyway, so why not make it ginormous? This island, which stretches 17 feet, is the hub of the home.



In the home's new kitchen addition, the island is topped with black soapstone, which contrasts with the white Carrara marble on the perimeter counters. Shaker-style MasterBrand cabinets in Ocean Floor by Martha Stewart Living for Home Depot. Pendant lights, Visual Comfort. Sink and fittings by Waterworks.





ABOVE: A ceiling painted in sunny yellow stripes by decorative artist Mark Chamberlain makes the tiny guest bedroom seem bigger and brighter than it is. "It's a dose of happy in a north-facing room that doesn't get much light," Carretero says. Rug, Madeline Weinrib. Sconces, West Elm. Roller shade with Lee Jofa trim. **LEFT:** Carretero in the media room. **RIGHT:** Carretero and his partner, journalist David Osborne, call their Victorian-style home Wildings, after the farm in Sussex, England, where Osborne was born. A flock of cast-concrete ewes playfully references the property's early days as a sheep farm.



RIGHT: In the master bedroom, a reed table purchased at auction is paired with vintage chrome-and-suede chairs to create a sitting area with a view of the river. After it was stripped of paint, the mantel was left as is to show off the raw wood's grain. Sculpture, Oly. Lamp, Aerin for Visual Comfort. **BELOW:** A Jonathan Adler oak bed is set against Anthropologie's woodsy wallpaper. Bedding, Boll & Branch. Lumbar pillows, Target. Curtains in a Kravet cotton. Valance trim, Scalamandré. Belgravia white lamp, J. Randall Powers. **FOR MORE DETAILS, SEE RESOURCES**

