

Connecticut COTTAGES & GARDENS

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WATCHES FOR HIM AND HER



ON THE COUCH

On The Couch *by Susan Bednar Long & Dr. Venus Nicolino, Ph.D.*

DECORATOR VERSUS SHRINK! (WHAT DO YOU THINK?)

Do you think the furnishings and objects in a room reveal much about the homeowner(s)? Interior designers and psychologists have demonstrated in past *On The Couch* columns that they can identify characteristics of an unidentified home with amazing accuracy. This issue, we've invited Susan Bednar Long, president of Tocar Design, a firm with offices in Washington and NYC, to face off against Dr. Venus Nicolino, Ph.D., who has regularly contributed to this *CT&G* favorite. Whose assumptions come closer? Turn to page 93 to find out.

THE DESIGNER SAYS

SUSAN BEDNAR LONG

Definitely a Southern belle! The house seems like a new Shingle-style family home in Fairfield Country—Greenwich or New Canaan. The wife, let's call her "Mrs. Belle," is either from the South or has an old-school decorator mother who lives in the South. The double-skirted round table in the living room seems distinctly southern to me, as are the numerous floral arrangements. I'm intrigued by the flowers everywhere, especially on the floor between the dining room and center hall. Maybe Mrs. Belle is a stylist herself or has a good friend in the floral business.

The rooms have been carefully appointed by a professional with an interest in organic floral motifs. The use of yellow is intense, though safe. Mrs. Belle hosts local events frequently at her residence. She likes to entertain a lot and keeps her home tidy and visually beautiful. So she took pains to fashion a friendly, yet proper, home. She has inherited the stemware and Oriental rugs from her husband's relatives. Most everything else was purchased new when they moved into this house.

Although these are the most formal of the rooms in the house, they still have an alluring informality to them. For example, the walls are a rich yellow, mixed with crisp white trim. The drapery is not overly fussy; although the fabric on classic fluted brass rods is brocade and expensive, the design is simple and overlays a soft Roman shade. Similarly, the table setting is formal, yet fresh, with crisp white linen table runners. A relative newcomer to the neighborhood herself, Mrs. Belle appreciates traditional furnishings and likes the conformity that they convey in her new town, but she and her family are fairly young so she uses restraint and keeps it fresh. She would never want to be pegged as stuffy.

THE SHRINK SAYS

DR. VENUS NICOLINO, PH.D.

It is clear to me that the owner of this home is longing for a space deeply rooted in tradition. Or, at very least, the idea of tradition. Is this room similar to her grandmother's dining room? Is someone recreating such a familiar backdrop in order to evoke the feelings of stability and comfort?

The warm, golden hues and polished-to-perfection rich woods conjure



images worthy of a Norman Rockwell Thanksgiving scene—true Americana at its best. There seem to be touches of a contemporary setting—elements such as the beaded fringe on the drapery and the cobalt stemware. Overall, however, this appears to be a classic home that has been carefully decorated with taste, precision and class.

I believe the residents of this welcoming home are a married couple in their mid-50s. The occupants could very well be empty-nesters who have used their wisely invested savings to hire a professional decorator, whose wherewithal and know-how have turned the home once ravaged by children into a work of art. The space can best be described as formal, safe and timeless. This 1950s fantasy-turned-reality décor immediately informs guests that this house is a "perfect" stage for a "perfect" family. These rooms were decorated with intention. That being said—and all precision and detail aside—I also get the impression that this space welcomes the potential scratches, smudges and footprints of much-anticipated grandchildren.

PHOTOGRAPH BY NANCY HILL



On The Couch

I grew up near the Great Lakes where many turn-of-the-century summer homes were built in the Shingle style. I would beg my parents to drive by them so I could fantasize what wonderful spaces were behind their fascinating facades. The last 10 years have kept architects busy in Fairfield county with Shingle-style homes like the one featured here, proving my theory that home fashion repeats every hundred years. The charming exterior doesn't disappoint. The interior is about places to do things, destinations within the home and discoveries around the corner. That reflects perfectly how my clients like to live.

She grew up in California and spent summers in the mountains on horseback. He had a privileged upbringing in Caracas. They were graduate students together at Stanford and spent the first half of their marriage raising their family in Venezuela, Argentina and Italy. Once they arrived in Connecticut they were ready to settle in and create a home that didn't feel nomadic. She loves rich, sumptuous fabrics, intense color (think the walls of Pompeii) and upholstery that begs to be used. He veers away from Rococo details. The Venetian plaster on the living room walls, vintage chandelier and Italian-made dining furniture are reminiscent of their years in Milan. Other case pieces feature lots of inlaid design reflecting their love of the Old-World style. The table setting is relatively new but was carefully chosen to reflect Old-World tradition. The salad plates feature Faberge eggs; the white wine glasses are by St. Louis. The other glasses, with a playful use of color, keep the scene from becoming overly serious.

— **Julianne Stirling, Stirling Design Associates**