

KING OF MAIN

BY MIMI SHANLEY TAFT
PHOTOGRAPHS BY PETER LOPPACHER



OWNERS OF THIS 1890S MANSION ENSURE
A SOLID FUTURE BY REVISITING ITS PAST

“We moved to Ridgefield in 1994,” explains Annette O’Brien, a petite woman with an easy smile and welcoming manner. “And we always wanted to own a house on Main Street.” In 2002 Annette and husband Daniel got their wish—purchasing not just any Main Street house, but the grand 1890s structure that commands the corner of Main Street and King Lane. The stone wall edging the property cannot begin to shield the large gray clapboard façade from passing pedestrians. An architectural cousin of the Lounsbury House just a few doors up the street, the King Lane Mansion was built by Joshua Ingersoll King to replace his father’s house, which a fire destroyed in 1888. >>

house tour



LIKE IT USED TO BE
The owners strived to capture the house's early splendor, from its grand staircase to the railings on either side of the front entrance and atop the porches.

“THE DESIGN OF THE
HARDWOOD FLOOR AT
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VISUAL FEAST

A palate of golden ocher, ginger, and creamy beiges on walls and furniture creates a sophisticated but relaxed atmosphere.

O'Brien, a nursery-school teacher in South Salem, has become well-acquainted with the home's former owners by reading her collection of books on Ridgefield's history. The story begins with Gen. Joshua King, who arrived in Ridgefield in 1783. Among his duties was marching British Maj. John Andre to the gallows. King married Anne Ingersoll, the youngest daughter of the Reverend Jonathan Ingersoll, pastor of the Congregational Church.

According to *A View From the Inn*, the recently published journal of Anne Marie Resseguie, the original King home, built in 1800, was a "rather large, two-story edifice always neatly kept and glowing in fresh white paint."

King was a leading member of Ridgefield's commercial and political community. He co-founded the King & Dole store directly across the street from his home, in the Old Hundred building now a part of the Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum. Resseguie's journal describes King as "a high-minded, intelligent man." After King's death in 1840, members of his family owned the house—rebuilt in 1888 after a fire—until the 1920s. They then sold it to the Jackson family, who resided there for several decades. "The Jacksons gave a lot of parties," says O'Brien, "so many people in town still associate the house with the Jacksons and remember having good times here."





WARM AND RICH
An ornate mantel of inlaid chestnut and ebony wood looks over a tobacco-colored leather sofa and wide-screen TV.

OLD AND NEW
The mosaic tile design in the oak-heavy butler's pantry mimics details of the dining-room fireplace.



“A SWINGING DARK-WOOD DOOR IN THE REAR OF THE DINING ROOM LEADS TO A BUTLER’S PANTRY STILL ADORNED WITH THE ORIGINAL OAK COUNTERTOPS.”

By the time the O’Briens bought the house, much of the exterior detailing had disappeared and the site, once totaling nine acres, had been whittled down to two and a half. Shortly after moving in, the O’Briens hired building contractor Neal Hicks, with whom they had worked in the past. Hicks, with the assistance of Peter Coffin of DCA Architects, had recently restored the Lounsbury House. Struck by the similarities between the two buildings, Hicks introduced the O’Briens to Coffin, who signed on to the project.

Because of the home’s location, the Historic District Commission had to approve all exterior work. In preparing for a presentation to the HDC, Coffin showed O’Brien a 1924 photograph that captured the house in its former splendor, complete



with railings on either side of the front entrance and along the tops of the porches. Charmed by the image, O’Brien seized upon the idea of returning the façade of the house to its original condition. “She was really interested in bringing the house back to what it was,” explains Coffin.

These restored railings, banisters, and columns are prominent features to a visitor arriving at the O’Brien home. The same attention to detail has been taken on the restoration of the interior as well. A high, wide, dark-green door opens into a broad hallway flanked by generously proportioned rooms. Richly patterned oriental carpets lead toward a grand sweeping staircase and highlight the hall’s golden wood floor. The hall, furnished sparsely, is lit by delicate sconces, original fixtures in the house.



“THE NEWLY PLACED KITCHEN SPORTS A 10-FOOT-LONG GRANITE ISLAND AND FLAT-FRONT CABINETS WITH INSET MOLDING.”

CHEF'S DELIGHT
The magnificently renovated kitchen features a stripped fireplace back that now houses the Viking stove.

On the left is a library with a refinished working fireplace surrounded by an ornate mantel of inlaid chestnut and ebony wood. The rich tones of the mantel inform the décor of this masculine room, which features a comfortable tobacco-colored leather sofa, large armchairs, and wide-screen TV.

Across the hall is a more feminine parlor with niches and curio cabinets filled with pill boxes, dishes, china figurines, and other collectibles. Family photos sit atop a piano, and other heirloom photographs dec-

orate the walls. The furnishings here and throughout the house are well-suited to the home's original period and to the proportion of the rooms. "Most of the furniture I already had," says O'Brien.

Tall French doors lead from this room into the larger living room, with a baby grand piano set near a full wall of west-facing windows. The design of the hardwood floor at this windowed end of the room follows the pattern of a stage, where

in years gone by live chamber music may have provided post-prandial respite. As in all of these rooms, Hicks' workmen spent months repairing the plaster and meticulously restoring the detail before a single coat of paint was applied. Here a palate of golden ocher, ginger, and creamy beiges has been chosen for the walls and furniture, creating a sophisticated but relaxed atmosphere. On either side of the



OUTSIDE WORLD

Behind the kitchen are a mudroom, laundry area, and a porte-cochere that connects to a two-car garage with a studio above.

SUNNY DAY

The light-drenched window seat provides a comfortable vantage point for those sunny spring mornings.



marble fireplace are glass doorways topped by soaring arched fanlight windows. These doors lead to an adjacent high-ceilinged glassed-in porch that runs the depth of the house.

Across the hall from the living room is a spacious, well-appointed dining room. Above the 14-seat English mahogany table hangs an ornate brass-and-crystal chandelier, also original to the house. As in the living room, a pair of tall doorways capped by arched fanlight windows dominates one



ROOM WITH A VIEW
A bright and spacious glassed-in porch, with expansive ceiling heights, runs the depth of the giant house.

“THE OLD-FASHIONED SOUND OF A DEEP TICKTOCK RESONATES FROM AN EARLY 1800S GRANDFATHER CLOCK—A TIMELESS REMINDER OF THE HOUSE’S PAST.”

wall. Coffin created a narrow porch to protect the exterior dining-room doors and to shelter a shallow patio, employing the same column and railing forms as were used in the front of the house.

In the rear corner of the dining room a smaller swinging dark-wood door leads to an enchanting butler’s pantry still adorned with the original oak countertops and shelving. Their rich, warm feel is complemented by a mosaic tile pattern that mimics the details of the dining-room fireplace.

A small breakfast room sits just beyond the butler’s pantry.

The breakfast room leads into the magnificently renovated kitchen, featuring a stripped fireplace back that now houses the Viking stove, a 10-foot-long granite island, and flat-front cabinets with inset molding created by Northeast Cabinet Design. Behind the kitchen are a mudroom, laundry area, and a porte-cochere that connects to a two-car garage with a studio above.

All in all, the O’Briens tacked 2,500

square feet onto the 11,000 they purchased. The three-story house has 12 bathrooms and nine bedrooms, which also retain their original look and offer sweeping views of Main Street. Down the stairs and back in the main hallway, the old-fashioned sound of a deep ticktock resonates from a signed early 1800s Patterson grandfather clock—a timeless reminder of the house’s past. ■

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