



**ENTRY** reflects Mathieson's decorative predilection for early Americana styles, earth tones and natural materials.



## A World of Charm

A simple Cape restored with distinction gives it cultivated comfort and visual appeal

**H**idden among the restored historical homes and Colonials lining West Lane in Ridgefield was a small cape, clean and updated but obscured by overgrown landscaping and the grander homes that made up its neighbors. "It was a haunted horrible cape," says style consultant Sherrie Mathieson, but its level property, tony surroundings and proximity to the village gave it potential for rejuvenating transformation. "There was a coziness there I wanted to preserve. We spent a lot of time looking, and not a lot was available, but the property and road spoke to me. I just knew I could make it a lovely home."

That was three years ago and it was enough for Mathieson and her husband, John, a financial consultant, to purchase the property and begin what would become a two-year restoration, using designs by architect Peter Coffin that preserved the home's traditional style and scale, particularly on the exterior, while opening up its interiors to enhance the integrity of the structure and its surroundings. "When you drive down West Lane, you see a number of old estates on smaller one-acre properties that you can see from the street," says Coffin, whose Ridgefield firm is known for appropriate integration to surrounding environments and careful

BY CAMILLA A. HERRERA | PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHRISTOPHER KOLK



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attention to the aesthetic affinities of the client. “It was important to try and keep the scale and proportion to the rest of the street, but also not overwhelm the property. It is easy to expand but a challenge to keep it restrained.”

Based on Mathieson’s account, Coffin also considered her predilection for structural allure and graceful appointments that would enhance her collection of artifacts and custom furnishings when drafting his designs. “Everything is new, but it was important for us to preserve charm and coziness,” says Mathieson. “Everything in it was considered in terms of lifestyle, ease and practicality. I wanted a house that said, ‘Ah! I’m home.’”

The end result can be described as elegance and distinction balanced with comfort and appeal, a visual tribute to residential styles and palettes particular to a hard-to-define, but easy-to-recognize understatement often associated to New England sensibilities. It was Mathieson’s intention to pay such tribute, in part because of its contrast to the colors, materials

and styles that surrounded her in Arizona and brought with her about 18 months ago into the three-bedroom, three-bath home after 16 years in the Southwest. “I want people to visit my home and sit in my living room and see there’s a world beyond New England and still feel they are in New England,” she says. “The architecture should belong. It’s the same for décor. They have to give a sense of where you are.”

Consider the first impression, a conservatively framed home with natural cedar shingles and a fieldstone walkway and portico that open into 4,000 square feet of warm space in warm colors that encases a mix of early Americana anchored by Stickley sofas, Arroyo and Mica lamps and Old Hickory chairs. Mathieson loves wood, particularly when complemented by her collections of pottery, Navajo-styled hand-woven rugs, wrought iron embellishments, basketry and caned seating that help frame original art, Native American photography and antiques, each with distinguishing details that reflect culture, history, craftsmanship and artistic integrity. “If you have an educated eye, you’ll see it’s not a Western home,” says Mathieson. “For me, it’s art of the mix.

**ABOVE** Stickley furniture and Mica lamps are a Mathieson favorite and can be found throughout the house.



The gazelle skulls, Pueblo pot and reclaimed wood mantel beam are among numerous antiques that reflect culture, history and craftsmanship.

An educated eye will discern that this is not a Western home. It's the art of the mix that invites self-expression.



It invites self-expression. The more personal, the better.”

Part of what makes it personal for Mathieson is an impression of someone's hands shaping, weaving or carving any given piece, invariably with natural materials, whether they be wood, fibers, clay or leather. That a person made it—and not a machine—gives it authenticity, especially when imperfections are detectable, as they are (when pointed out) in barely irregular bowls and pitchers from France and Spain, a slightly discolored Two Grey Hills rug or a hardly misshapen Shaw basket. Each piece has a story to tell about technique, intention or context. “These give relief to the eye but the natural clay and natural fibers also bring you back to the earth,” she says.

Native American imagery plays a unifying theme throughout Mathieson's home, seen in turn-of-the-century photography, Pueblo pottery, throw pillows hand-woven with Native American fabrics, wooden antique figurines, tools and original moccasins and a cornhusk bag in separate shadowbox frames. These contrast with the wood and leather pieces, Mexican ceramics, a French antique wooden horse, Shaker boxes, Tramp Art mirrors, Adirondack side tables, antelope skulls, an antique French easel, and numerous other singular pieces Mathieson and her husband “picked up at auction or in our travels.” Worth noting is a dining room chandelier Mathieson designed with stag horns reaching up, around and through the fixtures. “It is visually arresting,” she says. “It fits with the rest of the home. This is a home that says peacefulness.”

All these, along with the furnishings and architectural elements found around the home, showcase neutral hues Mathieson favors. But little punches of color can be found in each room landscape, providing a pleasant surprise that injects a decorative sense of mischief to its surroundings. These can be a couple of bowls of marble peaches in the middle of a honed granite counter, a Zuni bowl in the middle of an an-

**TOP** Native American art and photography, Pueblo bowls, a Zuni pot, hand-woven pillows and a collection of fabric dolls give a Southwest feel to the sitting rooms.

**RIGHT** Stag horn chandelier designed by Mathieson, a burnished red antique hutch and Old Hickory chairs add pastoral interest.





**LEFT** A collection of colorful pottery exhibited on a concrete fireplace gives a punch of color to a fully stocked cook's kitchen.

**THIS PAGE** A Stickley bookcase, Shaker boxes and an antique French easel.



tique hutch, stacks of Hermes signature boxes stacked on a master bedroom dresser, red stitching on a tonal rug, a reflection through a lamp's colored glass shade or Native American dolls in colorful dress. "It's all the same general palette of stone, putty, beige and sand with woods and fabrics," she says. "Each room, however, is subtly different. It creates a subconscious effect. The eye flows from one room to the other with these spots of color that stand out and are pleasing."

Essential to the exhibition Mathieson required for her possessions are the myriad details Coffin and project architect Michelle Myers suggested through their floor plans and architectural designs and builder Joe Fossi of Ridgefield's Pelham Country Homes implemented. "The interior architecture was designed to showcase her stuff," says Coffin. Among these are three stone fireplaces and a fourth in concrete with reclaimed pine beams as mantels. Wide-plank pine floor boards found throughout the



house mimic the lines in bead board and plank on cabinetry, straight-edged base molding, chair rails and paneled wainscoting in the dining room, where exposed planks and trusses in its cathedral ceiling give the space a hand-crafted look, as in similar high ceilings in the master bedroom. “There is a pickling hand on the cathedral ceilings so textured effects of wood knots come through the white-washing effect,” says Mathieson. “Our sensibility was not cushy curves. It’s about straight lines.”

According to Coffin, the idea for the cathedral ceilings—to incorporate scissor trusses and exposed planks—was borne out of an effort to give the impression of exposed rafters. “It creates a juxtaposition of modern with fun, like an old bungalow without being too rustic,” he says, referencing how the hand-forged iron hinges and hardware on cabinetry, identical to those in exterior shutters, complete the look he aimed to achieve.

But for all of the home’s old-world, pastoral feel, plenty of luxury abounds in the West Lane home, including a chef’s kitchen with designer stainless steel appliances and marble countertops,

cherry custom cabinets, an integrated sound system, Waterworks fixtures in all bathrooms and a temperature-controlled, fully stocked wine cellar in the basement. For Mathieson, the amenities complement a comfort that is essential to any home. “I wasn’t going to do anything that didn’t prolong the feeling of sanctuary,” she says. ■

**LEFT** Ralph Lauren four poster bed, bedding and side tables display the comfort and charm Mathieson wanted

**Top** A small portrait over a distressed antique mantelpiece and a handwoven, Navajo style rug add a handmade touch to the master bedroom.

#### RESOURCES

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