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JOHN + KIM CONTE
FAIRFIELD HOUSE & GARDEN
"WORKING FOR YOURSELF"

Photography by Neil Landino





During the 80-plus years that the Conte family has been running Fairfield House & Garden, the firm has become known as a leader in interior and exterior construction in Fairfield, CT, and Westchester, NY. John and Kim Conte, part of the Fairfield team, had a house they no longer loved and were contemplating moving. But it was hard to leave this home: a 1976 mid-century modern classic with a lot of original detailing, especially the cedar tongue-and-groove ceiling. So instead the couple decided to hire their own firm and remodel their dated kitchen and back garden. “The wonderful thing about this project is that we were our own client,” recalls Kim. “Every now and then, we get to do a project for ourselves, where we sit on both sides of the table. As designers, contractors and client, we experience the process in a way that is enlightening and informative. We always learn from these experiences in ways that directly benefit our clients on the next project.”

When she wears her interior designer hat, Kim gets a sense of her client’s style from conversations and nonverbal cues provided by the homeowner. For their own project, however, Kim let the house dictate the style. Having lived there for 10 years, she and John appreciated the mid-century modern aesthetic and didn’t want to lose it. “We realized



how beautiful the original materials of the house were—everything is natural and top quality—and we wanted to stay true to that,” she explains. “We matched existing mahogany throughout, the Douglas fir beams, and the knotty cedar tongue-and-groove decking on the ceilings. The flooring throughout the house is eight-inch-wide plank character white oak. Entryway flooring is natural large-cleft irregular bluestone flagging to match the screened porch floor.”

Kim gave herself an extensive list of “must-haves.” Just because the couple loved the pureness of their mid-century modern home didn’t mean they didn’t want modern updates. These included relocation of the stove to an island, the addition of a coffee bar, a large pantry for food and kitchen accessories. The renovations presented a number of challenges, however: Lighting in the ceiling was a big concern because of the cedar planks; the only way to rewire the kitchen without destroying the ceiling was to temporarily remove part of the roof. Relocating the range to an island, moreover, would require special venting. These challenges, however, were no match for the experts at Fairfield

House & Gardens.

Kim created several sketch-up renderings, which were constantly tweaked until the design was just right. Favorite features of the house include a hidden pop-out buffet counter to keep the counter/bar clean for seating, and the stunning navy blue and copper La Cornue stove. Kim also used copper in the cabinet hardware, faucet and trim on the mahogany vent over the stove.

Resource:

Fairfield House + Garden
John and Kim Conte
28 Langborne Road
Greenwich, CT 06831
203.661.8900
fairfieldhouseandgarden.com

