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the Grells' update

RICHARD AND GAY GRELL'S HOME IN THE WESTERN RESERVE AREA OF OHIO WAS NEWLY COMPLETED WHEN IT APPEARED IN THE PAGES OF OUR SEPTEMBER 1984 ISSUE. HERE, A LOOK AT HOW THE COUPLE HAS EASED THE 18TH-CENTURY-STYLE STRUCTURE INTO THE 21ST CENTURY.

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2003



The Keeping Room

"I was drawn to its 18th-century colors, its reds," Gay Grell says of her keeping room's original paint, which she selected for its supposed period authenticity. "But it just wasn't me." Gay now always remembers three tips that her mother, an interior designer, taught her at an early age: (1) a room should look beautiful even when it's unfurnished; (2) forget labels; and (3) be true to yourself. "I decided to listen to my mother," Gay says, noting that the current, lighter wall color is an easier backdrop to live with. REPRODUCTION WINDSOR CHAIRS AND SETTEES THROUGHOUT; RICHARD GRELL WINDSOR CHAIRS.



revisiting the 18th century

In September 1984, we featured the home of self-taught Windsor chair maker Richard Grell and his wife, Gay. Because of Richard's profession (see "Made by Hand" in our April 2003 issue), and because the surrounding area, Ohio's Western Reserve, was settled by people from Connecticut shortly after the American Revolution, the Grells chose to build an authentic Connecticut Colonial. "Back then, we just wanted to be as true to the period as we could," says Gay. "I have to say, I was a beginner! I was only 25 when I designed the house." Two decades later, *Country Living* has returned to the Grell home to find warmer colors, brighter rooms, and pared-down collections. But the couple's love of 18th-century America is still strong, and Richard's Windsor chairs are still the focus of every room. "One of the things that surprises us most is that so little has changed," says Gay.



The Living Room

The basic layout of the living room remains the same. Common elements include the camelback sofa (now on its third fabric), the Queen Anne-style tea table that Richard built (now black instead of straw-colored), and the portrait of Gay's great-great-great-grandmother, Mary Maxima (in white), and her sister, Sally. A warm, deep-gold wall color won out over the old Colonial blue and white. And the Bokara carpet was replaced with a sisal rug and a 100-year-old Aubusson. "I love it," Gay says of the French textile. "I wish it were room-sized."

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The Dining Room looks as though it has evolved as a real 18th-century house's would have, beginning with simple trim, wall colors, and lighting fixtures and becoming more elegant over time. Richard's craftsmanship—like his ambitious 10-legged Windsor settee (left)—is still key. The portraits of Gay's great-great-great-grandparents, previously on separate walls, were finally placed side by side (left). "Now they're together, as they should be," Gay says. **HANGING CORNER CUPBOARD:** DELAGRANGE ANTIQUES. **REPRODUCTION CHANDELIER:** THE SALT BOX. **WALL SCONCE:** OLD DOMINION TIN SHOP.

what was done

■ **MOLDING** For a more finished look, Gay and Richard added crown molding to the perimeter of the dining room and widened the window trim.

■ **TABLE** Desiring something smaller than the curly-maple drop-leaf dining table that Richard made (top right), Gay substituted a more compact antique hutch table (right) for it.

■ **CHANDELIER** The folksy eight-arm tin chandelier from 1984 was later replaced with another reproduction—this time, a statelier brass model.

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“Collecting is one of my passions,” says homeowner Gay Grell. “But it’s hard to know when to stop.”

The Kitchen

“I remember 20 years ago when we laid wood floors in the kitchen,” Gay says. “People told us, ‘You can’t do that!’ But the floor has stood the test of time, along with the oiled poplar countertops, classic furniture (although some pieces have moved, like the step-back cupboard, opposite page, which is now in the atrium), and kitchenware collections. “We love utilitarian artifacts,” says Gay. “There’s a sense about what they represent, where they’ve been.” With a laugh, she adds, “In 100 years, my cooking utensils would not have as much to say.”

OPPOSITE PAGE: TABLE AND CUPBOARD: DELAGRANGE ANTIQUES.



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what was done

■ **PARE DOWN** “We tried to simplify,” Gay says of her leaner kitchen. She thinned out her collection of kitchenware, replaced one set of shelves with a closed hanging cupboard, and removed another shelf altogether. “It was just too much to dust,” she says.

■ **COLOR** The cabinets and trim were lightened, using the identical paint color that appears on the keeping room’s fireplace wall: Maya, by Pratt & Lambert.

■ **REFRIGERATOR** One bold modern indulgence that Gay allowed in the otherwise totally 18th century themed kitchen: a stainless-steel refrigerator.



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Guest Bedroom

The Grells built timeless, practical details into their guest room. For example, the handy wall-mounted peg rails to the left of the window and the high shelf that spans its length will always be useful for hanging clothes (or handmade candles and antique lanterns) and displaying favorite collectibles. Toy farm equipment from Richard's boyhood lines the shelf. The antique rope bed was in pieces, nearly unrecognizable, when they found it at a flea market late one afternoon in 1976. "That's why nobody had picked it up before we got there," says Gay. The couple passed the bed's red Jacob's Ladder quilt—an heirloom handed down from Richard's great-grandmother—to his niece. In its place, Gay dressed the bed with a new blue quilt and bed skirt and an antique yellow crib quilt. The new wall color complements the richness of the wood floor and antique bed. "It's a very soothing, comfortable room," says Gay, "restful, as it should be."

what was done

■ **COLORS** The coir sisal rug was the inspiration for the wall paint. "I saw that rich color and said, 'That's what I want to do,'" says Gay. The white trim and ceiling help reflect more light into the room. Plus, Gay says, "We love the contrast of white trim and deep colors."

■ **SHUTTERS** The window originally just had a simple set of curtains. "We owned ordinary louvered shutters, but never hung them," says Gay. "We wanted to be more creative than that." When they redid the room, the Grells decided to update the window treatment, too, by inserting custom beaded panels to add privacy and tame the morning sunlight.



1984



■ **FURNISHINGS** In the atrium, Richard's eight-legged sack-back Windsor settee pairs up with a Chippendale-style mirror that has a frame composed of oxidized metal.

■ **FAUX FLOORS** A wood floor faux-painted to resemble marble tile eases the transition from the main house into the more modern addition.

An Addition

The Grells love sitting outside, gazing at the garden, but in Ohio, that's not practical year-round. So in 1992, Gay designed a conservatory (left). Its clerestory and many other windows gave it a distinctly different look—both inside and out—from the 18th-century-style core of the home. "It was a challenge to work out the transition between the conservatory and the house," says Gay. "That's why I created the atrium." The atrium hallway, with glass doors and skylights but a painted wood floor (above), helps to connect the old and new spaces.

the Grells' notebook

Small Changes

Minor changes make big differences. The keeping-room sofa is the same one that the Grells had in 1984, but Gay later hid the original upholstery, a Cranston plaid from Waverly, with a slipcover of saddle-colored denim. When that wore out, she had the sofa reupholstered in the same fabric. The dining room still has sconces, but the simple tin ones from 1984 were replaced with more elaborate reproductions made of tin and gilded tin. Some pieces from Gay's collections, like the salt-glazed crocks and jugs, were moved to other rooms. Others, like the 1830 Ohio corner cupboard, she sold. But, she points out, that's all part of living with a house and redecorating it. "Some things you let go of."

■ **WINDSOR CHAIRS** Richard Grell Windsor Chairs, Hudson, Ohio • richardgrell.com, (330) 650-0586

■ **ANTIQUES** Delagrangre Antiques, Jeromesville, Ohio • ohioantiques.com, (419) 368-8371

■ **CHANDELIER** The Salt Box,

Greensboro, N.C. • thesaltboxonline.com, (336) 273-8758

■ **WALL SCONCES** Old Dominion Tin Shop, Atkins, Va. • (276) 781-0084

■ **PAINTS** Benjaminmoore.com, (800) 826-2623 • prattandlambert.com, (800) 289-7728



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