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STORY TELLING

How to revive an 18th-century farmhouse without resorting to cliché? By imagining a made-up person lives there too.

By Alice Newell-Hanson Photographs by Blaine Davis



In the study of a house in Tivoli, New York, with interiors by Adam Charlap Hyman, Adelphi Paper Hangings wallpaper, a Strips sofa by Cini Boeri for Arflex, a 19th-century painting of the Hudson River, a 1960s space-age Bacco bar table by Sergio Mazza for Artemide and an area rug from Patterson Flynn.

NOT LONG AFTER buying their home in the early months of the pandemic, a young couple from New York City brought in a shaman. Lights were turning on and off without explanation, doors were spontaneously opening and closing. Like so many old buildings in upstate New York, this one — an 18th-century farmhouse with a white clapboard facade and gabled roof — was peaceful by day but creaky at night, when its oversize windows seemed suddenly too large, and its location, just outside the village of Tivoli, too remote. So when they asked the designer Adam Charlap Hyman to fill its interiors, they wanted not just furnishings but “to bring life and joy into the house”, he says, “with an edge of that Hudson Valley spookiness”.

Charlap Hyman, 35, has always enjoyed things that are both exquisite and slightly off. Through his New York-and-Los Angeles-based firm, Charlap Hyman & Herrero — which he co-founded in 2014 with his former Rhode Island School of Design classmate Andre Herrero — he has become known for creating eclectic, layered homes that draw on his deep knowledge of art and design, and for releasing idiosyncratic products like ear-shaped pillows sewn from pieces of vintage kimonos and a pigeon-motif wallpaper based on one that hung in the writer Gertrude Stein’s Paris apartment. The child of two artists, Charlap Hyman sometimes makes dollhouse-like maquettes of his projects and invents fictional backstories for the spaces he creates. When he designed the interiors of the same couple’s Manhattan apartment, he had



imagined his clients were not two young New York professionals but European émigré academics from another era, “communists who haven’t reconciled their family fortunes with their political beliefs”. The resulting space feels at once familiar — it’s a bohemian SoHo loft with Persian carpets and utilitarian metal fixtures — and beautifully unhinged: in the living area, a 17th-century Flemish painting showing the severed head of John the Baptist hangs on a wall covered entirely with cork tiles.

ON A WARM, windless August afternoon in Dutchess County, a bay horse from the neighbouring farm wanders slowly along the road that leads from town towards the house. Crickets chirp in the grass beside the driveway, which winds up a bluff, past two towering fir trees and a columned portico, to the side of the building. From the outside, nothing looks out of step. Inside, almost everything between the scrubbed pine floors and beamed ceilings is

purposefully not quite as it should be. “We all felt there was a way to do an upstate home that isn’t like anything we’d seen before,” says Charlap Hyman, seated on a black leather-and-chrome Jean Prouvé armchair in the living room. Behind him, the building’s original red brick fireplace has been wrapped partly in a sprawling asymmetrical textile work by the New York-based artist Sophie Stone, who makes shaggy patchworks by retooling materials like crochet and rag rugs “that are almost cliché in a country house”, Charlap Hyman explains. Two spindly 1980s floor lamps by the Italian designer Fabio Lombardo for Flos stand on either side of the work, their almond-shaped tops like unblinking iridescent eyes.

Charlap Hyman began the project by considering how other designers and artists have treated colonial-style houses in creative ways. He revisited the 1783 residence that the curator David Whitney had added to the Connecticut compound he shared with his partner, the architect Philip Johnson, in 1990, and used mainly as a sparsely furnished den. He thought of his own great-aunt and uncle, Modernist architects who lived in a saltbox house, also in Connecticut, with tubular steel chairs by the Hungarian-born architect Marcel Breuer. Breuer, who had been a teacher at the early 20th-century Bauhaus art and design school, made his way from Germany to Cambridge, Massachusetts, just before World War II and experimented with blending European Modernism and the vernacular of the American Northeast. The

From left: in the guest room, Laurel Trellis wallpaper by Adelphi, a WB Form Cloud Lamp, a vintage Ikea chrome bed, mismatched Adirondack twig side tables and a Chiarastella Cattana cashmere blanket; in the dining room, a mural by Lukas Geronimas, chairs from Shaker Workshops, a 19th-century Utagawa Kuniyoshi print, a schoolgirl needlework and watercolour on silk and a glass by Valentina Cameranesi Sgroi on a wall-mounted shelf by Jonathan Nesci.

previous owner of the house in Tivoli had been a professor, too, at nearby Bard College. Gradually, an imaginary narrative for the property took shape. “We thought it would be fun to think of it,” says Charlap Hyman, “as the country home of an architect-professor who comes here from the city and puts modern things in a really rough space.” Nothing was meant to look too polished.

Both he and the clients were interested in weaving elements of German Expressionism and other early 20th-century art movements into the space. Inspired by the work of the French Cubist painter Albert Gleizes, Charlap Hyman and the Massachusetts-based artist Lukas Geronimas collaborated on the design of a mural, painted by Geronimas, that covers the entire upper half of the home’s dining room with refracted emerald-and-cerulean shapes that suggest a canopy of trees. Its geometries echo and make strange the patterns in the room’s more traditional furnishings: Shaker dining chairs with woven tape backs and, lining a low window seat, cushions made from patchwork quilts. In each room, this mixing of eras and aesthetics speaks to the clients’ own interests, while also suggesting the evolution of the fictional inhabitant’s tastes. Upstairs, the main bedroom features a heavy pine bed made according to instructions written by



In the living room, a Kassl Editions Pillow sofa, a leather lounge chair by Jean Prouvé for Tecta and a pair of 1980s Aeto floor lamps by Fabio Lombardo flank a fireplace wrapped in textile work by Sophie Stone.

the Italian Modernist Enzo Mari in the 1970s (he encouraged others to make his designs themselves), and the windows are shaded with thick, dark grey felt blinds. “They’re a little military, a little Joseph Beuys,” says Charlap Hyman, referring to the German conceptual artist. “You can imagine the professor had a phase where everything was very rigorous.”

The adjoining study and the guest room across the landing might have been decorated later, after an attempt to ease into country life. Both rooms are covered in vibrant Adelphi wallpaper with petite botanical motifs that look traditional in isolation but psychedelic when repeated. In the latter room, a dark green carpet from Codimat Collection in a dense print of ivy leaves by the 20th-century French designer Madeleine Castaing is both bucolic and slightly uncanny. But the room, like the home in general, now feels, above all, joyful: a cloud-shaped plastic pendant lamp by Susi & Ueli Berger hangs over a chubby chrome Ikea bed from the 1980s. The couple recently got married — Charlap Hyman consulted on the design of their wedding — and are expecting a child. Luckily, for all their narrative function, the many curious layers of the house are extremely forgiving of real life: the base is so colourful, the designer says, that even a child’s toy “will look good in here”. ■