



the house that jane built

An author brings to life a brand-new home that, like a cherished hardbound novel, somehow feels wonderfully familiar and old.

by RIANN SMITH photographs HÜLYA KOLABAS



It is famously said that there are only two real plots: a stranger comes to town or a hero goes on a journey. In the story of Jane Green's life, both plotlines serendipitously intersect on a private road in the Compo Beach area of Westport, Connecticut.

A British import, Jane arrived in Westport in 2001 with four bestselling books under her belt, most notably *Jemima J*, the compulsively readable tale of a twenty-something's struggle for self-discovery. Jane penned eight more bestsellers on this side of the Atlantic—in the Westport Library, to be exact—introducing us to women who tango through the nuances of marriage, motherhood, divorce, illness and reinvention with grace and the occasional glass of Sauvignon Blanc. Given the sorority of emotionally rich heroines she



opening spread: Minimal color and decoration in the foyer keep the focus on the linear view. **this page:** Jane was instantly captivated by the Old-World feel of floor-to-ceiling bookshelves in a friend's dining room and recreated them in her own. "They bring so much warmth to the space," says the author. High-gloss paint was applied to the ceiling the old-fashioned way, rather than by using a more efficient spray method. "I was after a natural, imperfect look," she says.



left: A mercury-glass bar proves a clever use of stairway space and showcases Ian's grandmother's antique shakers. Metallic grass cloth visually lowers the ceiling, creating intimacy. *right:* "I'm fascinated by people's bookshelves—it's the first thing I look at," says Jane.

has brought to contemporary women's fiction, it would have been easy for the author to lie back, self-satisfied, on a mountainous stack of her own novels in her perfectly comfortable rental property, and call it a day.

But Jane had a new story to tell, and it beckoned her from a few doors down the road. Its central character was an abandoned house on a one-acre lot, begging to be razed and rebuilt. "My husband Ian and I were married in 2009 and were searching for our first real home," Jane explains. Initially disinclined to take on the hair-pulling task of building from the ground up (with nightmarish visions of a charmless box dancing in her head), Jane reluctantly put on her hard hat. "We have six children from age eight to sixteen between us, so it was a challenge to find a house that could accommodate everyone," she says. Her stepdaughter fell in love with the lot and pointed out its beautiful light. Was there even a choice? As fast as you could hear the sound of ground breaking, Jane's new journey began.

In a passionate quest to steer clear of McMansion territory, Jane took to knocking on the doors of her Compo neighbors whose quaint homes she loved and inquiring after their architects. ("You can get away with a lot when you have a British accent," she says with a wry smile.) Enter Brooke Girty, whose firm specializes in historic restorations, including one of Katherine Hepburn's homes. "Because I am English I have a deep appreciation for the old," says Jane. "It was so important for me to capture the coziness and human-sized rooms of an old house, and once Brooke and I connected I knew it would be an extraordinary collaboration."

With the same energy that her fingers fire into her MacBook, Jane began scouting and sketching, sizing and selecting, alongside her contractor, Tiefertaler, and project manager, Marc Laibe of Soundview Construction Advisors. Was the nearly yearlong project, completed last spring, not unlike crafting a book, with cloud-gray walls and hidden doors her new metaphors? "Both processes require a great deal of

"I couldn't bear to get rid of my antique refectory table and had a wood top made to elongate it," Jane says. It now seats up to sixteen guests for casual Sunday suppers.



above: An unobtrusive lighting and sound system allows the natural ceiling to take center stage. The pantry beyond has a secret entrance by the bar. Jane's favorite house quirk. below: Glass orbs anchor the airy kitchen and add apothecary-shop charm.



Jane's inspiration for painting the window frames black, as seen in the family room, was her parents' country home in France. *opposite* "We throw open the doors in the spring and use the patio as an outdoor family room," says Jane. *below, left:* Buddha sits atop Jane's antique writer's box, a beloved piece from her childhood.

creativity," muses Jane, "but when I write, I draw largely on instinct, and when I designed this home I had to do an incredible amount of research." Jane lets out a little sigh, and you begin to wonder if she was guilty of pulling a few all-nighters in the D&D building.

It wouldn't have been surprising, given that the author-cum-designer chose every surface, fixture and finish herself, from the reclaimed beams in the kitchen to the metallic-flecked grass cloth on the entryway ceiling. The result is a gentle tension of masculine and feminine energies that is so wholly appealing, you yearn to be one of Jane's zen cats, curled up under a sun-drenched window. It suddenly seems quite sensible that design could be Jane's second calling, and sure enough, she reveals that she has a line of home accessories in the works. Still, Jane will admit to getting some guidance on the finishing touches. "I had absolutely no idea what to do with window treatments," she said. Luckily, her answer was on speed dial. "I rang my good friend Rob Rizzo of Cobble Court and that same afternoon I knew where to put a Roman shade, a sheer, a French pleat...it was a revelation."



The living room is the couple's grown-up salon, scuffed sofa notwithstanding. "Our house splits in two, with the kids' side on one end and the adults' area on the other," says Jane. "Ian and I actually use our 'quiet room' a lot."

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—JANE GREEN

Wander through Jane's home in search of showroom-glitz furniture, however, and you'll be more apt to find timeworn antiques and a cat-scratched sofa. Only after peeling back a few layers of Jane, and a few hundred pages of her latest novel, out this month, *Another Piece of My Heart*, can you fully appreciate why. Her heroine, Andy, is navigating through a new marriage and the complexities of a blended family, much like Jane is herself, but with an important distinction: Andy aims for perfection on every inch of the domestic front—and perpetually falls short. "A house should be a home," counters Jane. "I'm not interested in perfect...it's too stressful."

In fact, Jane purposely only bought one new chair and a set of end tables for the new house, preferring to commingle lived-in pieces from both families. It marks a true departure from her upbringing. "The houses I grew up in were like museums where everything was 'look but don't touch,' and my mother wasn't comfortable with people coming over," recalls Jane, now in the midst of making a warm chocolate banana cake for a friend's birthday. "I wanted this house to feel just the opposite, where everyone can relax as soon as they walk in the door."

right: "I like being surrounded by items that tell a story," Jane says of her choices in art and accessories. "What's lovely about this house is that it has room to evolve." below: Coral-tipped matches strike a chic note; a place for private thoughts; the well-appointed coffee table. opposite: A Chinese urn, Victorian candle sconce and Gustavian floor clock reflect Jane's global eye. The herringbone floor was sanded down between planks to achieve a lived-in effect.



AMY VISCHIO



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In Jane's office, a stuccoed gas fireplace with bricks painted black is based on a style she'd seen in London in her twenties. Her goal was to create a cozy space that wasn't too comfortable. "Much as I wanted my office to be my private sanctuary, the kids inevitably find a way in here," laughs Jane.

If there is one old-fashioned aesthetic Jane happily broke with, it is the Lilliputian English bathroom. "I wanted the master bath to feel like a proper room," says Jane, who adores a good soak. "Ian and I often catch up with one of us sitting on the edge of the bath... it is quite a luxury."



Jane's affinity for the color "greige" is painted on the bedroom's walls; the sitting area is an afternoon napper's haven; Carrara marble dresses up the master bath. **below:** "I fell in love with a picture of a bedroom that looked so serene and used that as my inspiration for this room," says Jane. "The funny thing is, I do think it needs a bit more variety now, like Indian hand-blocked pillows."



It sounds like her welcoming approach may be working too well: "We regularly have between twenty-five and thirty-five people in the kitchen, with a buffet along the counter," Jane says. "Kids crowd around the table and adults spill over into the dining room." Does she worry about the occasional mud print? "There may be dog hair all over my sofa and stains on the carpet but it's okay, really," says Jane. For a writer whose recurring theme is women in search of self-acceptance, her words take on new meaning. She pauses for a moment, then continues. "There is a famous saying at the beginning of my latest book that I love, which reads, 'Happiness is not getting what you want, but wanting what you've got.'"

Over three thousand miles, thirteen books, six children, two cats, one Doberman, one husband, one dream house and a few carpet stains later, Jane Green has engineered a plot twist even she might not have realized: She just borrowed a page from her own life. ■

RESOURCES

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