

EAST COAST HOME+DESIGN





A SUBURBAN BUNGALOW WITH CITY SENSIBILITIES

Story by Maria Brown | Photography by Christopher Kiely





A red brick fireplace was modernized with 12x24 taupe marble in a subway brick pattern, while valuable floor space was reclaimed by removing the hearth.

When TJ Rutkowski and Lucas Zahas decided to move from New York City to Stamford, Connecticut, they hoped to find a home that felt spacious but wasn't too large for two people (and two cats). When they spotted this bungalow, they managed to see beyond its then-outdated interior and envision the contemporary suburban home pictured here.

"I walked in and said, 'What great bones,'" says Beth Krupa of Beth Krupa Interiors, the designer responsible for this amazing transformation. She knew she could provide the spacious feel her clients were looking for while maintaining a certain masculinity and city sensibil-

ity. She also planned to connect the spaces so the home would flow from room to room. Such a major overhaul involved exposing some of those "bones," however, so Krupa called upon Mallozzi Builders to get started.

The first step was dealing with the wood paneling in the dining and living areas. "It was that very 1970s paneling," says Krupa. "Now, it was painted white, so I'll give them [the previous owners] that, but paneling is paneling and it needed to go!" There was also a red brick fireplace and hearth that protruded into the living area. By removing the hearth, valuable floor space was reclaimed, and the fireplace itself received a facelift for a more modern look.



The next mission was the ceiling, which was quite low. Since outward expansion wasn't an option, Krupa and her team went up, taking the ceiling to a 14-foot cathedral height. "It makes the space feel so much more grand and open," she explains. The clients had the expertise to get involved in the project as well, and they installed their own sound system with speakers in the ceiling. "I love when a client wants to be involved and work together," says Krupa. "It makes it a lot more personable, and it's easier for me to get inspiration."

Krupa continued the concept of opening the space structurally by widening the staircases (both up and down to a lower level) and removing a heavy, flat carved baluster that appeared like a half wall behind the living room sofa. Since the columns are supportive and

couldn't be removed, they were simply spaced wider and updated to complement the newel posts that tie into the casing of the rest of the house. The resulting effect, with a modern cable system, is much more contemporary and less awkward. Here, a very narrow doorway was also widened, contributing to the open floor plan.

Pocket doors were added between the living area and den to provide an extra private area, if needed, for guests. But the spaces were formerly separated by floors not only of a different style and color, but also of different types, with engineered wood in the den and true hardwood in the rest of the space. On-site custom blending to match the stains erased this differentiation and maintains the flow from room to room, without the expense of new flooring in the den.



Narrow, awkward steps were widened to create a much more spacious feel. Here, artwork from the clients' collection and a blue glass wrap by SkLo offer a bold, but unobtrusive, splash of color.

While she has always had a creative eye, Krupa came to interior design in 2009, after a degree in sociology and 17 years in the fashion industry. She finds joy in developing close relationships with her clients and meeting their unique preferences and needs through her designs.

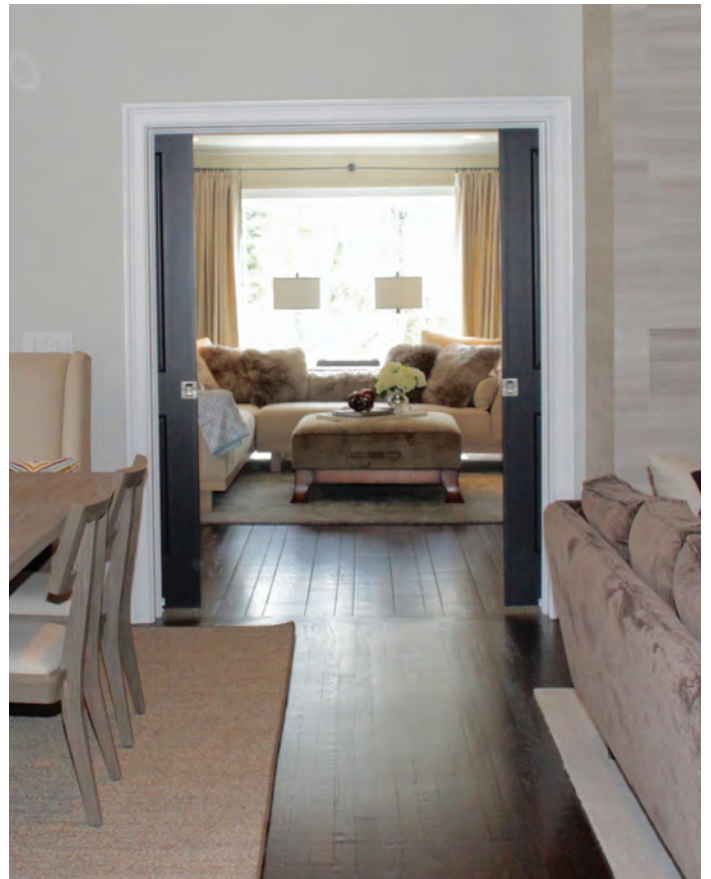
Structural changes continued in the master suite, where a little real estate was taken from the bedroom to accommodate the oversized shower in the bath. The clients also wanted a double vanity, and Krupa managed to incorporate a small window to allow for some natural light. In return, the bedroom was expanded upward by two feet in the form of a tray ceiling. Two small, outdated closets were demolished and replaced with an entire wall of closet space on a three-door-rails system, much more in keeping with the spacious closets found in modern master bedrooms.

With these improvements complete, Krupa was able to turn her attention to the finer details of the design. In terms of color, she sought to keep the tones similar but change them slightly from space to space. The living room features a taupe palette, with grey hues in the dining room and beige in the back den. This defines the spaces a bit and keeps the design from being completely monochromatic, yet maintains the sense of flow she and the clients were aiming for. Drapery and rugs tie it all together, and artwork the client already owned adds a splash of color.

Another unique feature in the public spaces is the color on the doors. "I took the darkest strain of color I could see in the floors and brought it up to the doors," Krupa explains. This provides a dramatic pop to accentuate the nickel hardware in this space. "These little details really matter, especially when working with a small space."

Krupa creatively introduces a bit more color in the master bedroom. Lush Bordeaux drapery in Kravet fabric adds an element of drama and is complemented by Italian bedding in a neutralized deep lavender. The soft colors add something special to the master bedroom but still tie in with the rest of the home's décor. Additionally, the wood furniture maintains the sense of masculinity but doesn't overwhelm the space by being too heavy, hard or cold.

The guest bedroom's décor is inspired by the green view from the windows, which also look out on the pool. Woven grass window shades and a variety of textures lend a back-to-nature feel to the space. While the dressers are similar to those found in the master bedroom, incorporating an upholstered headboard keeps the rooms from being





carbon copies but still provides the desired flow and connection.

Phase two of the project includes the kitchen and a lower level, which features an additional bedroom and entertaining space leading out to the freeform pool. Once phase two is complete, the couple is sure to have ample space to host their family, which is spread throughout the country. "It's a great entertaining house, and they spotted it well!" Krupa says of her clients' vision and insight in making the purchase. While she has always had a creative eye, Krupa came to interior design in 2009, after a degree in sociology and 17 years in the fashion industry. She finds joy in developing close relationships with her clients and meeting their unique preferences and needs through her designs.

"No two clients are ever the same," she says. "I really love what we do— transform people's everyday lives."

Resources

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