



WHITE SPACE

athome's Creative/Editorial Director Amy Vischio takes on a very personal project—her own home in Fairfield.

by ANN KAISER photographs AMY VISCHIO

“Oh, say it was a piece of cake,” is how Amy suggested I begin the story about her renovation project. “I met with the crew and reviewed their plans by 7 a.m. every day, and still got to work on time.” This sarcasm occurred on a particularly stressful day of the process, and was perhaps also a reaction to my fortieth gentle suggestion that we begin thinking about how to approach this story. But now that it’s complete, the addition and renovation of her Fairfield home has given her the new office, studio, and storage she needed to get her most personal space back in balance.

In this magazine, we like to show you the finished project—with

linens pressed, kitchen scrubbed and fresh flowers on the bedside table. Nonetheless, even on the most seamless of projects, there’s always *something* that doesn’t go according to plan. On many—ultimately successful—projects, it’s several things. Creating a home that looks effortlessly elegant takes a whole lot of time and energy. Though Amy’s project was comparatively small in scale, there were a hundred decisions to be made and the possibility for all the same issues to arise.

I have never undertaken a renovation myself (and in fact, when I start to decorate my first apartment this month, it will be with a ton of notes from Amy, my creative director in work and often in life), but



opposite: Art with a backstory: Amy first spotted the sculpture by Kevin Kelly that now sits in her family room during our “Best Of Design” shoot at Amy Simon Fine Art. this page: Even the powder room has space for art. Amy’s neutral, spare aesthetic is carried over to the new mudroom entrance. A Janet Slom painting hangs above the B&B Italia sofa.



"I prefer **INTERIORS** executed over a long period of time, because what **I LOVE ONE MOMENT,** I might be over the next."

—AMY VISCHIO

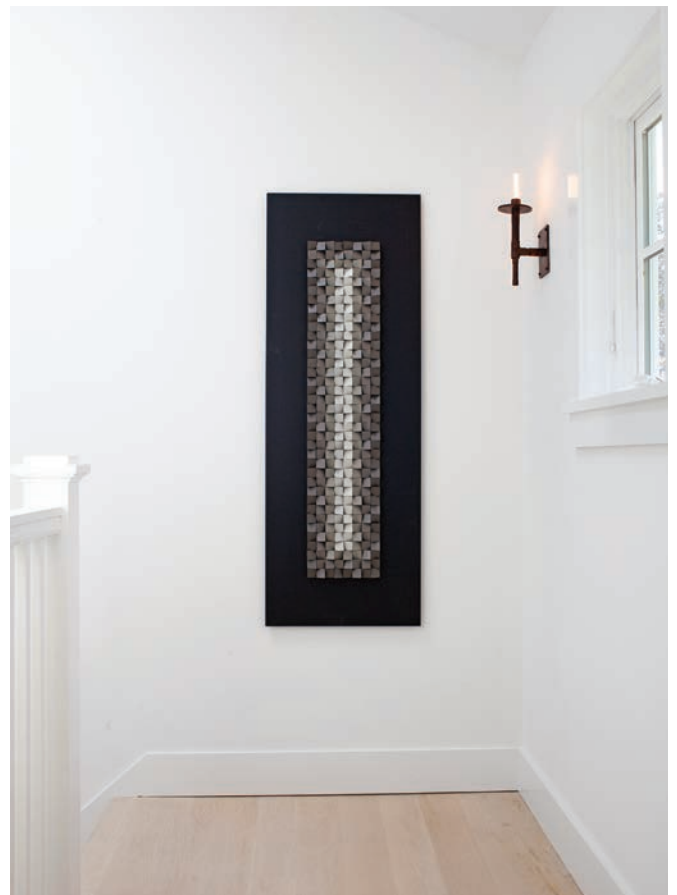


The office window took the place of the old mudroom door, and the existing narrow closet morphed into storage with deep file cabinets, a charging station, and a large cubby for plans and magazines. Hemingway Custom Cabinetry even created a drawer to hold Amy's printer and backup drive. Ceredus oak tops are a perfect solution that offer warmth and texture in a white space.



when Amy started this project, I was sure that with her design background and her definitive taste, the process would go pretty smoothly. She'd been thinking about this addition for years, and when I came to work for Moffly in 2011, she had already roughed out some plans for what the exterior should look like.

In my first months of working on *athome*, I quickly learned that although she fervently claims to "love" color and pattern, Amy's favorite type of house is all white with nothing in it. So I wasn't surprised when she told me that when she originally drew the plans for her (all-white) home in Fairfield, she purposefully didn't include much storage space, in order to "live minimally." Editorial work is madness, and



The new under-stair storage in the entryway holds quite a few pairs of colorful sneakers, Amy's beloved cowboy boots, and accessories for her spoiled pooch, Sadie. Amy liked the no-hardware look, so the Hemingway team installed touch latches to open the doors.



Sub-Zero refrigerator drawers from Aitoro Appliances hold water and snacks. Above, John Eigo from Hemingway designed doors on lift hinges for this tight space to conceal a microwave from Aitoro, plus plates and cups. Amy can wash her brushes at the sink, and not worry about destroying the durable solid stainless countertop by Surface Techniques.



tons of images and text cross her desk every day, so it's understandable that she'd want to come home to a clean, organized space.

It seems that the plan worked for a while. Then, slowly, her papers and iMac migrated to her kitchen counter, her painting studio ended up in the guest bedroom, and her photography equipment ended up everywhere else. So much for living minimally—she needed more space. Amy's thoughts turned to renovation, and when she got serious about it, she called Neil Hauck of Neil Hauck Architects. He could handle all the challenging details—getting the scale correct, connecting the old structure to the new one, dealing with zoning restrictions, and making sure it would actually be functional in the end.

When we started our athomefc.com web series, "Creative Thinking," in May, in which we chronicled the progress of the renovation, things seemed pretty buttoned up at Amy's house. Working with Neil was a joy; Amy was excited about the "Scandinavian" look the new, lighter stain on her floors would give the house; she even made time

An open studio space with high ceilings, lots of windows and white walls gives Amy a blank slate every time she conquers a new canvas. Sliding doors on stainless steel barn-style hardware are both design features and space-savers. A vintage modern pair of chairs were scores from Dovectote.



The editor/artist now has a space devoted solely to painting and photography. And as usual, Sadie is always close by. "She is my shadow," says Amy. opposite: The new bathroom off the studio has a floating vanity, sleek fixtures and a skylight.



"**ENVISIONING** the right piece and the **THRILL OF THE HUNT** can be as exciting as finding the thing I'm looking for. People ask me how I can live with sparse spaces, but I see **THE POSSIBILITIES.**"

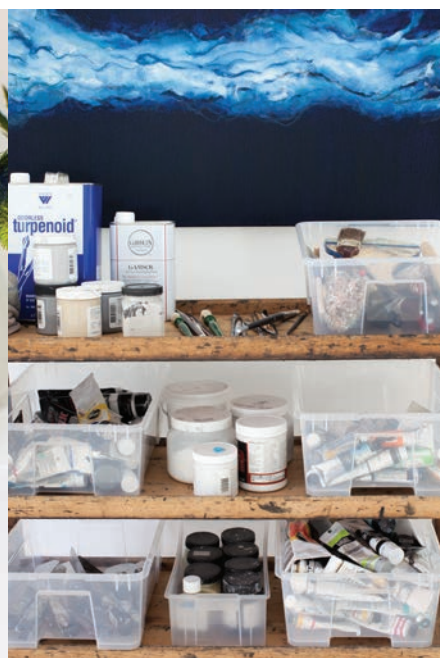
—AMY VISCHIO

to play Cupid and attempted to set me up with not one, but two guys involved with the project (maybe third time's the charm).

But the more components there are—wiring the place (low voltage or line voltage?), getting the stain for the floors just right, choosing the tile and hardware—the more chances for something to go wrong. Things moved along pretty quickly, which was great for staying on schedule with our web coverage, but not so great for making little changes along the way—something Amy is very fond of, both at work and at home. She loves to make tiny improvements to every issue of *athome* until the very end, and she can't be stopped until things are *just* right. But since all the work on her house was done while she was at the office, she didn't have the same ability to tweak her own project.

So there were some mishaps that kept her up at night. There were days when dust from the renovation covered everything in her house. There was the one week that turned into three weeks when she and her husband and their dog Sadie moved in with Amy's parents while the floors were being redone. There were days when she was just "over it", and even the Moffly editorial staff's favorite indulgence, dark chocolate peanut butter cups from Trader Joe's, couldn't stop the moments of second-guessing if this had been worth the time, stress, and hemorrhage of money required.

In the midst of all this—the realities of a renovation—there was the excitement of seeing it all coming together. Fortunately, Amy had assembled a great team that helped her reach the finish line and realize her vision. While many people complain that the builders are dragging their feet, Shawn Mauro and his crew worked so fast that Amy



Amy confessed to me that she has a hard time resisting the purchase of a good chair. "You're either a clothes person or a furniture person, and I'm a furniture person," she says. (She's accused me of being the former.) But her vintage Italian Arrben chairs do look lovely around a circular dining table from New Canaan Home and Antiques.



"I look at design like **CHEMISTRY**; too many antiques or too many modern pieces tip the **BALANCE** for me."

—AMY VISCHIO



More chairs. A pair of Milo Baughman chrome chairs she already owned joins another pair she spotted in Dovecote's window several years ago.



joked that one day she'd come home to a finished project. Shawn embraced the challenges of the space, and encouraged Amy to follow through with her plan for James Hardie board-and-batten siding, a product and style she felt was perfect for the house, even though it created more work for him. Architect Neil Hauck was the calm, informed partner Amy relied on to create a seamless, appropriate design for the addition.

Amy also enlisted the help of John Eigo of Hemingway Custom Cabinetry and Architectural Millwork for her wet bar, office and storage design, and the Hemingway team exceeded her expectations on all fronts. "Nothing was ever too much trouble, and John was the ultimate problem-solver," she says. Hemingway worked with Aitoro to find the one and only set of refrigerator drawers that would fit



The finished addition is seamlessly connected to the original structure. Architect Neil Hauck and builder Shawn Mauro made it look like it's always been there. A peek into the backyard shows Amy's outdoor fireplace and patio, which get used well into autumn.

into her small-scale wet bar from Sub-Zero. When Amy was losing sleep over the flooring transition from hardwood to limestone, John delivered three custom-made options for her to choose from—all of them so perfect, it was hard to pick one. It was clear that John's commitment to doing things right was especially appreciated by a woman of particular taste and near-obsessive attention to detail.

Matt Almy and Jim Gerrity of Oliver Nurseries tackled the .18 acres of outdoor space, and Amy was amazed at what they were able to do with her small lot. Building on a master plan that Jim created four years ago, the team took the original drawings to the next level. They created a courtyard in front of the garage with large stone steps and a boxwood hedge border and lined the driveway with a row of hornbeams. A stone path runs around the house and leads to a future outdoor shower. It was their idea to break up the expanse of the oil-and-stone driveway with a row of oversized rocks. Matt and Jim's work transformed Amy's space beyond what she thought was possible on her postage-stamp-sized lot; it should serve as a reminder not to underestimate the power of landscaping and a well-thought-out design plan.

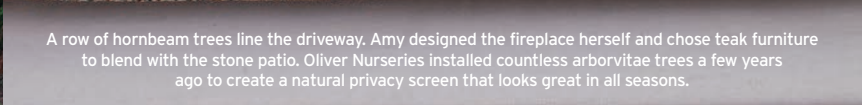
Though she's taking her time with the finishing touches—"I ordered swatches of avocado green velvet for pillows, but haven't been able to pull the trigger," she says—Amy now has a new office that lives larger than its 5x5 dimensions would suggest, under-stair storage that maximizes every square inch of available space, and a new studio where she can paint and conduct Moffly Media photo shoots. In other parts of the house, old is new again: the kitchen counter is clear for food prep and party spreads, and the guest bedroom is ready for visitors, who no longer have to go to sleep surrounded by easels, drop cloths and the fear of paint inhalation. Her home is back to the tranquil, clean, uncluttered space it once was. Now that the work is done, the team cleared out, and the dust is swept away, it seems that those few challenging times are starting to recede from Amy's mind. That prolonged stay with Mom and Dad has become "a blessing of quality time," she doesn't even look twice at those dreamy dark chocolate peanut butter cups anymore; it was "all worth it," she says—and just yesterday she announced she'd found the perfect bed for my apartment in New York. Here we go again. **ah**

continue for resources >>



Oliver Nurseries created a stone path across Amy's oil-and-stone driveway. In the side yard, a dining and seating area offer additional living space in good weather. Succulent planters are used throughout the property, as they require little maintenance and look great. Amy says, "Oliver's has a great selection of already planted pots, and carries tons of containers and plants to design your own."





A row of hornbeam trees line the driveway. Amy designed the fireplace herself and chose teak furniture to blend with the stone patio. Oliver Nurseries installed countless arborvitae trees a few years ago to create a natural privacy screen that looks great in all seasons.

RESOURCES

Architect: Neil Hauck, Neil Hauck Architects, Darien, 203-655-9340, neilhauckarchitects.com

Builder: Shawn Mauro, Mauro Builders, LLC, Easton, 203-373-7808, maurobuildersllc.com

Cabinetry, custom art pedestals: Hemingway Custom Cabinetry & Architectural Millwork, Black Rock, 203-382-0300, hemingwaycustom.com

Landscape design: Oliver Nurseries, Fairfield, 203-259-5609, olivenurseries.com

Garage doors: The Garage Door Center, Fairfield, 203-255-3033, thegaragedoorcenter.com

Sub-Zero refrigerator drawers, Frigidaire microwave: Aitoro, Norwalk, 203-847-2471, aitoro.com

Driveway: O'Hara's Paving & Excavating, LLC, Fairfield, 203-255-3414, ohara-paving-excavating.com

Stone flooring, shower floor tile: Greenwich Tile and

Marble, Greenwich, 203-220-6176

Stainless countertop: Surface Techniques, Milford, 203-874-7841

Bath faucet, shower tile, vanity, toilet: Porcelanosa, Greenwich, 203-698-7618, porcelanosa.com

Bath lights and accessories: Waterworks, Greenwich, 203-869-7766, waterworks.com

Staircase: Quality Stairs, Inc., Bridgeport, 800-852-6744, qualitystairsinc.com

Shower door: Fairfield Glass Service, Inc., Southport, 203-259-8183, fairfieldglassfairfieldct.com

Flooring: MBB Hardwood, 203-526-0996

Painting: Bruce Benway Quality Wallcoverings, Fairfield, 203-521-8882

Electric: Salvioli Electric, Fairfield, 203-259-0077

Spotlights in mudroom: Circa Antiques,

Westport, 203-222-8642, circaantiques.com

Family room sculpture by Kevin Kelly: Amy Simon Fine Art, Westport, 203-259-1500, amysimonfineart.com

Upholstery and pillows: Artistic Upholstery, Norwalk, 203-849-8907

Vintage furnishings, Lighting, Art: MIXIT, Inc., 203-610-3544, mixitdesign.com

Living room bookcase and chairs: Dovecote, Westport, 203-222-7500, dovecote-westport.com

Accessories: The Antique & Artisan Center, Stamford, 203-327-6022, stamfordantiques.com

Dining room table: New Canaan Home and Antiques, New Canaan, 203-594-9910

Irrigation: Greenwave Irrigation, Trumbull, 203-365-5000

Stone: Gault, Westport, 203-227-5181, gaultstone.com



Sometimes what you don't see is just as important as what you do see. Shawn Mauro strategically planned for a gasoline connection and underground power lines. Amy didn't want to look out of her living room window and see cars, so Oliver Nurseries carved out a small courtyard lined with boxwoods and flanked by two hornbeams, to push the parking area back to keep vehicles out of view.

"Never **UNDERESTIMATE** the power of good **ARCHITECTURE** and **LANDSCAPING**. Both work **MIRACLES** in even the smallest of spaces."

—AMY VISCHIO