



When a House Becomes a Home

Years of living through house renovations taught me two important lessons. One, patience is key. A home's spirit tends to reveal itself over time, so becoming a house whisperer of sorts is critical in order to avoid rookie mistakes like buying sofas you'll never need (guilty) or building an extra room that really should have been a closet (guilty, too). Lesson two: Perfection is unattainable. Spare yourself the stress and learn how to accept reasonable flaws.

Certainly the homeowners featured in this issue have many more teachings to offer—like our cover stars David Burtka and Neil Patrick Harris, who are working

on their recently acquired 13.5-acre property in East Hampton, or Justin Portman, whose expansive Shangri-La in Montauk embraces his global footprint in a modern yet remarkably approachable home. Michael Giannelli, owner of East Hampton Gardens, is a wealth of design wisdom, no doubt thanks to his clients' horror stories. I bet he referenced those when renovating a charming cottage he shares with his partner, Gregory Shano. While each home is uniquely different, they all have one thing in common—the love and care put into them permeates every corner. I hope you will be inspired!



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Above: A garden vignette from the charming home of Michael Giannelli, featured in this issue

GIANNELLI HOME PHOTO BY COSTAS PICARDAS; ANETTA NOWOSIELSKA PHOTO BY MARK SAGLIOCCO/GETTY IMAGES



As a shop, East Hampton Gardens (easthamptongardens.com) is a physical manifestation

of all the things swirling and swimming around in owner Michael Giannelli's brain, including his impeccable taste. Much of that is due to his three decades as a fashion executive for companies such as Gap, Ann Taylor, The Children's Place and Victoria's Secret. His 1910 Cape Cod-style home, right down the road from the store, is a mirror reflection of his curated lifestyle shop, which is predominantly focused on his devotion to gardening and entertaining. "Those are two things I'm completely obsessed with: I love to entertain. I love to garden. I love to entertain in the garden!" quips Giannelli with his signature charm.

The Cedar Street house was originally a rental, but five years ago, when Giannelli and his partner, Gregory Shano of Gregory Shano Interiors (gregoryshano.com), decided to move in and stop renting it out, they remodeled and expanded the original cottage. With help

from architect Martin Sosa of Arcologica (arcologica.com) and builder Doug Cavallo (cavallobuilding.com), the couple added a sunroom, domed out the attic, constructed a staircase to a new master suite and created a dreamy back porch. "The relationship between Martin, Doug and us was unbelievable," says Giannelli. "Our builder was fast and detail-oriented, and they all got along great with each other." It's the kind of symbiotic relationship that makes most homeowners pea green with envy—and the whole project took only nine months and miraculously survived a huge storm. "They took the roof off the house, and then the forecast called for a hurricane," Giannelli says. "They tented the space with tarps and somehow it held!"

Adding to that good luck, the couple made it through the entire project without so much as a squabble. Given their respective design professions, the pair had made a pact: "He had final say inside the house, and I had final say on the outside," Giannelli says.

Shano also designed the interior of East

Hampton Gardens. "When I wanted the shop to be all navy and white, he said that was not going to happen," recalls Giannelli with a chuckle. "He decided it needed more of a personality and to speak more to a vision than simple nautical." Since Shano is obsessed with beach glass and has an affinity for ocean colors, he brought those anchoring shades and motifs into their home interiors. Hence the teal front door and the seagrass wallpaper and light-blue baseboards in the main rooms.

"The sunroom leading out to the porch is obviously our favorite space," says Giannelli. There Shano mixed custom pieces with chunky jute rugs and off-white shiplap walls. The chartreuse ottomans and Giannelli's large collection of vintage blue-and-white Chinese pottery from JED Design and Antiques help tie the bow on the sea glass feel.

And then there's the zebra: "We've had the zebra ottoman since our first house, and it's that one piece that comes with us wherever we go," Giannelli explains. "Greg worked with designer Stephen Gambrel for a while and



Items from the couple's collection of vintage books, pottery and seascapes, as well as some tortoise shells from Bali, find their places in a sunny living room with a rug from ABC Carpet & Home. Opposite page: Flowers and table accessories from East Hampton Gardens grace a custom dining set from Accents of France.



Custom herringbone marble flooring from Waterworks reflects sinks and mirrors from Restoration Hardware. Opposite page, clockwise from top left: A Ralph Lauren bed with English Country Home throw pillows; Michael Giannelli (right) and Greg Spano with their darling Harper; flowers from East Hampton Gardens; soften a vintage desk from JED.



loves layering and putting in twists."

Gambrel's influence can be seen in bookcases layered with garden and design books and off-white pottery, a collection of romantic seascapes on the wall, and the strong textures of rattan baskets in the sunroom. The living room has an eclectic mix of furnishings from different designers and eras, such as vintage *demilune* tables and French library chairs that Shano sourced from some of the couple's favorite local shops, including Red Horse Market (redhorsemarket.com), JED (jeddesign.com), Ruby Beets (rubybeets.com) and Laurin Copen Antiques (laurincopenantiques.com).

"I'll want to throw in an ornate Louis XIV mirror somewhere, and Greg will say no way," kids Giannelli. "I am a huge Francophile, and he's not. So I put a beautiful French fountain in the garden instead. That was our bargain." Giannelli has always been influenced by Versailles and its landscapes, and he knew he wanted a formal French garden once construction wrapped. To help realize his vision, he partnered with talented

landscape designer Hal Goldberg, who has since passed away; the couple's backyard is now a memorial garden to him.

Giannelli describes himself as a hobby gardener who grew up on Long Island and came to the beaches out East. "I fell in love with the farms and country life early on and moved out here to run the Gap in Bridgehampton Commons," he says. "I was recruited by an executive to work in the corporate offices in Manhattan, and that started my fashion career." That was 30 years ago.

A few years ago, someone sent him a quote that read, "Remember that thing you do when you have free time or you need the excuse... That's what you should be doing for a living." When Giannelli was procrastinating or stressed out, he always went into the garden. "That is what made me really happy. When I turned 50, I realized I could not sit in a Manhattan corporate office anymore." For years, he had been telling the owners of East Hampton Gardens that he was going to buy the shop from them someday. They made a deal to retire, and

almost two years ago, Giannelli moved to East Hampton full-time to take over the store. "Greg inspired me," he says. "He was a successful fashion executive at Gap for 17 years, and we met there. About eight years ago, he decided to parlay his knowledge of print, pattern and color from fashion into his passion: interior design."

Shano went back to school and got a degree in interior design, landed an internship with Gambrel and launched his own career. These days his clients so yearn for the Hamptons aesthetic he's created in the shop and at home that he has been busy with projects in Connecticut, New Jersey and Massachusetts. "His story was an inspiration for me to do my own thing. I saw how happy he was," says Giannelli, "and he's such a great life partner that he said, 'It's your turn.'"

Now that Giannelli lives in East Hampton, doing what he loves, life is much more relaxing. "When I walk into the house, its design gives me a calming feeling from the chaos of a retail store," he says. "That, and all my favorite things are here." ■