

# DESIGNING DREAMS

A Southport home gets an unexpected second act.

BY JENNIFER CARMICHAEL

**Bountiful bunnies:** Notice the subtle rabbit theme here? Yes, there's a reason it's hopping around this luxe living room.



**M**eghan De Maria has been making the most of her living space from a young age. One of seven children, she would rearrange her bedroom for every season, while her sisters were content playing Barbies. Early on, she came to understand the beauty of a fine antique from attending auctions with her parents. And she looked on as they renovated their whole house in upstate New York, absorbing her mother's eye for fine fabrics and wallcoverings. So it's no surprise that, when Meghan, her husband Larry, and their then 3-year-old and 9-month-old moved from a pre-war apartment on Central Park West in New York to a house in Southport, she relished the opportunity to style her new home.



**Island dressing:** De Maria, who designed her kitchen as a class project, says, "I did a blue island before it was even in vogue to do one."

WILLIE COLE

“It had good bones, but there was so much that needed to be done,” Meghan recalls when first seeing the center-hall Colonial 12 years ago. “Nothing was on the market and everything was expensive. I was nursing at the time and couldn’t wrap my mind around it.”

Located just a block away from her sister and around the corner from her best friend, Courtney Yanni, whom she met at a Mommy and Me luncheon in the city with their first-borns, the house was ultimately one the De Marias couldn’t resist.

“We started with the safety stuff first,” Meghan says. “The yard was exposed to the side street and there was an enormous amount of ledge rock in the backyard which we had filled. We put up a fence, moved the driveway, and then did a lot of cosmetic stuff... woodwork, staining the floors, and painting the walls from coral to white.”

A third child arrived the same year Yanni added baby No. 3 to her family. They both enjoyed being stay-at-home moms, redoing their homes and constantly bouncing ideas off each other. Design, Meghan says, was always part of the conversation. It soon became clear to both women that the two made a formidable design duo. “We’d say, ‘We should do this,’” Meghan says of her and Yanni working together. “Then, we started helping a friend, who said, ‘You guys really need to do this.’”

So, when her youngest child started kindergarten about five years ago, Meghan went back to school too. “I was ready,” she says, and enrolled at Fairfield University, which offered a concentration in interior design. “It was about eight to 10 classes,” says Meghan, who previously majored in art history at Providence College, where she met Larry, who is now a financial analyst. After graduation, she fell into a career in fashion and later enjoyed a stint in finance before deciding to stay home with her kids for nine years.

“We were all very supportive of Meghan’s decision to go to school and pursue this career,” notes Larry, who grew up on Staten Island. “We recognized her passion for design and her talent for it. Learning the proper methods for design was going to be critical for her to accelerate her path and broaden the scope of what she could do.”

Before starting school, Meghan designed the screened-in porch and powder room. Bigger projects awaited her when she began her coursework. “I renovated our living room and kitchen as part of my class projects,” Meghan says. “Christopher Rosow, who was previously with a design/build firm out of Southport, helped me through the design process. He was an early mentor and we went on to do many more projects together.”

Meghan formed Moss Design in 2015, with Yanni joining a year later once the business

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**Living spaces:** An open living/dining area (with Lucy and Rosie the dog cuddling), game room and screened-in porch all have personal family touches.



### Sharing their story

Hanging in the De Marias’ entry is a photo with the message “Live a Great Story.” The phrase is an important one for the family. “I took the photograph in Austin several years ago as it stopped me in my tracks,” Meghan says. “Ever since, it became our family mantra. As my husband and I believe, life is a gift and truly a story, so make sure it’s a good one. Sometimes there are chapters that you are handed. For example, the work crisis [brought on by the coronavirus]. How are you going to write that chapter? How can you make the situation better? Your story should be kindhearted, loving, courageous, have growing pains, success and failure, lessons learned, but in the end, something that you are really proud to share.”

started to quickly expand. “Even today, after doing a lot of kitchens, I still love mine,” she says. “I did a blue island before it was even in vogue to do one. It’s a jewel-toned blue and the color just makes me happy. That’s why I wanted to do it. If green made me happy, I would have done green.”

The bunny wallcovering in the living room is another personal stamp, having called her children her “little bunnies” since they were born. Meghan strives to have at least one unexpected moment in every room, she says, and the bunny wallpaper is just that. But both Rosow and her professor, who’s also dean of the program, warned her that they didn’t think it would look right. “My professor said to me that everyone is always trying to do an unexpected look, yet there is always something wrong,” she says. “But he said that this was perfect. It was profound to hear.

“The living room, or bunny room, as we call it, is one of my favorite rooms,” she says. “It’s balanced, very cozy and brings a lot of joy. The sectional in the living room is my grandparents’, which we had reupholstered. The black lacquer bar is my husband’s grandfather’s. It’s a personal room, which I think design should be. It should evoke emotion and be reflective of you and your family.”

Another favorite is the screened-in porch, as they all enjoy being outside. They also love just hanging out and listening to music, so they turned the dining room into a pool room.

“The pool room transformation was important for me because it has some artwork I bought and my vinyl collection,” Larry says. “Meghan redid the table and picked out the record player console. We bought the custom rug together in Morocco a few years ago.

“I like to be involved in the design up to a point,” Larry says. “I have ideas, but generally I agree with Meghan. We have similar tastes. I am often a sounding board and sometimes a speed bump for home projects.”