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Greenwich Time

Designer Mark Cunningham tailors an idyllic Connecticut estate for model Hana Soukupová, entrepreneur Drew Aaron, and their young family



Model Hana Soukupová and entrepreneur Drew Aaron with their three-year-old son, Finn, at their home in Greenwich, Connecticut.

Left: Built in the early 1900s, the house, dubbed North Court, was renovated with the help of designer Mark Cunningham. For details see Sources.

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When it comes to crafting a home, few relationships can be more critical than the one forged between designer and client. Such was certainly the case for paper magnate Drew Aaron and his wife, model Hana Soukupová. Nearly a decade ago the two set out to find someone to help them overhaul a recently purchased apartment in one of Manhattan's shimmering glass towers. A single name rose to the top of their list: Mark Cunningham, a designer who'd honed his eye at Ralph Lauren. "Mark took us to see some homes he'd done, and they weren't just beautiful, but each was completely different from the other," Aaron recalls. Adds Soukupová, "Right away he got us—what we wanted, who we are, and how we live."

Years later, as the couple began planning a family, their needs naturally had evolved, prompting the decision to move out of the city. And knowing that Cunningham was going to be a part of the design process, "we took him to see every house we thought had potential," Aaron says. *Potential* in this case meant not just a great place for children but also a fitting showcase for the duo's extensive collection of contemporary art, which includes works by Andy Warhol, Damien Hirst, and Jean-Michel Basquiat, not to mention an array of extraordinary midcentury furnishings by such masters as Jean Royère and Charlotte Perriand.

Cunningham's opinion—as well as the homeowners', of course—ultimately led them to a 100-year-old brick-and-limestone residence in Greenwich, Connecticut, called North Court, reputed to be a replica of the north court of a grand English country home where the wife of the original owner had lived. "The exterior had to have presence for Drew, whereas the interiors had to be comfortable and intimate for Hana," Cunningham says of the house, which, while expansive, still has an inviting, human feel. The old property needed work, but, the designer notes, "it gave each of them what they were looking for." Or it would, once

a thorough renovation had been completed. "It was a diamond in the rough," Aaron says.

To make sure the home got the attention it required, the couple entrusted Cunningham and his team with all decisions, both aesthetic and architectural (an engineer was brought on to oversee structural repairs). "It made sense, given that what we were doing was taking things back to the way they'd been originally," Aaron says. Throughout the two-and-a-half-year process, care was taken to salvage moldings and plasterwork. And while the crew opted to occasionally alter things like the location of hallways or the size of doorframes, it was all done with an eye toward how it might have been when the house was built.

Perhaps the biggest change to the residence occurred on its lowest level, previously a warren of tiny rooms notable for their three-foot-thick brick walls and massive metal doors. "They say the house was used for something illicit during Prohibition," explains Aaron. Today the revamped space comprises a screening room, a gym, and, fittingly, a wine cellar featuring century-old lighting from the New York City subway and limestone floor tile laid out in a spiffy herringbone pattern. "The room looks like it was

built 100 years ago," Aaron observes. "We love hosting dinner parties there because you're so removed from the rest of the world."

The upper floors, meanwhile, were kept largely light and airy. "For this project I focused on making things feel more relaxed than the apartment had been," Cunningham says. But it's still a glamorous home. The living room, for instance, is furnished with a pair of Jacques Quinet armchairs and custom-made sofas upholstered in shades of cream and oatmeal, while the master

Above: An RH sectional sofa anchors the media room, whose walls are coated in Fine Paints of Europe's WC-86 blue. Among the room's red accent pieces are a 1950s Pierre Guariche armchair, a '30s André Sornay stool, and a vintage leather floor lamp by Jacques Adnet.

Opposite: The entrance hall boasts two Andy Warhol portraits and one of the artist's Brillo box sculptures, as well as artworks by Jean-Michel Basquiat (left) and John Baldessari. The '50s chandelier is by Jean Royère, and the bronze apple sculpture is by Claude Lalanne. The '70s gilded-iron sofa is cushioned in an Hermès abaca-cotton blend.



Left: A Warhol flower painting overlooks the dining room's vintage table, which is joined by wood chairs designed by Mark Cunningham. The chandelier is by Achille Salvagni, and the sconce near the fireplace is by Jean Royère. The custom-made carpet is by the Mitchell Denburg Collection.

Below: In the master bedroom, a Cunningham-designed four-poster is hung with Rogers & Goffigon sheers. Roberto Giulio Rida lamps top 1970s Karl Springer nightstands, the Lucite benches are vintage, and an Aurélien Gallet bronze side table sits next to an early-20th-century club chair by Jules Leleu. The photograph is by Elmgreen & Dragset.

bedroom is a cloudlike confection of pale fabrics punctuated by nougat-color Karl Springer nightstands. "Some of the rooms might not look kid-friendly, but we actually used fabrics designed to survive spills," Soukupová says.

Elsewhere, the decorator took a darker, more romantic tack. "It was important to us that this house feel cozy and warm," Aaron says. In the adjoining dining and media rooms, the walls are painted a satiny blue, offset, respectively, by an Achille Salvagni bronze spider chandelier and a 1950s Pierre Guariche armchair cushioned in red pony skin, while the family room has custom-made chaise longues clad in a tweedy gray alpaca-linen. "It's kind of my home office, so they made it really comfortable for me," Aaron says.

For the grounds, which have a tennis court and swimming pool, the pair turned to landscape designer Robin Kramer. Her task was to bring harmony to the existing hodgepodge and create a buffer from the street. It was a challenge she met by fashioning a series of outdoor rooms delineated by English boxwood. "The spaces are made for a great party," Soukupová notes.

Although the couple also owns a finca in Majorca, Spain, it's a testament to how they feel about their Greenwich residence that they're reluctant to leave, especially in summer. The dynamic is one they attribute to Cunningham's design approach. "When we met him, instead of telling us about all the big names he'd worked for, he asked us how we lived, what we thought about space, where we eat breakfast," Aaron remembers. "It was refreshing"—and, it turns out, the key to creating their ideal family home. □



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Another Warhol portrait keeps watch in Finn's playroom, which is furnished with a wraparound banquette cushioned in a Link Outdoor fabric, a low table by Hive, a Vitra cork stool from Design Within Reach, a teak play table from the Land of Nod, and Verner Panton chairs from Vitra. The walls are painted in Farrow & Ball's Lulworth Blue, and the custom-made carpet is by Merida.

