



■ THIS PAGE: A pair of English club chairs, covered in a classic flamestitch pattern, can be pulled up to either of the living room's seating areas. ■ OPPOSITE: Matt and Fran Keenan with (from left) Ella, baby Wilkes, and Harper



# WARM ALL OVER

BIRMINGHAM DECORATOR FRAN KEENAN SHARES SEVEN WAYS TO CREATE A HOME THAT MAXIMIZES COMFORT WITHOUT COMPROMISING STYLE

“THE OLDER I GET, THE MORE RELAXED OUR HOME’S PALETTE BECOMES. MAYBE IT’S DUE TO ALL THE CHAOS.” —FRAN KEENAN



**F**ran Keenan—magazine editor turned interior decorator—has an eye for old homes begging for new life. When she and husband Matt were looking to trade their colorful Birmingham cottage for a larger, more family-friendly version, they set their sights on a quaint 1930s English Tudor that had never been renovated. Mesmerized by light streaming in through banks of windows and besotted with the home’s location on a sloping lot within walking distance of a local elementary school, the Keenans saw past plenty of imperfections (vinyl siding; lack of central heat and air; wall-to-wall carpet masking original wood floors; dreary, closed-off rooms; and a circa-1950 kitchen). Amazingly, the couple brought the clapboard exterior up to speed in just four months, but the cottage’s interior still called out loudly for a makeover. Remaining true to the home’s English Country ethos, Fran kept the interior neutral, livening the look with abundant pattern and texture. “In our last house, it was clear color,” she says with a laugh. “But the older I get, the more relaxed our home’s palette becomes.” Here, Fran opens up her decorating guidebook and shares ideas for creating warm, inviting interiors that aren’t short on style.

■ **ABOVE:** A cased opening joins the living room and study. First-floor doors and windows painted a dark shade, Grange Hall by Ralph Lauren Paint, contrast with creamy walls.

■ **LEFT:** The Keenans removed vinyl siding to reveal their 1930s English Tudor’s original pine exterior.

When the Keenans transformed a side porch into a cozy study, they left the original beaded-board ceiling because they loved its patina.



BEATRICE



## 1 PUT A TWIST ON TRADITION

"If I pulled out a swatch book, you might mistake this house for a home that's super traditional," says Fran. "But when you see the fabrics in context, the overall look is much younger." Fran and Matt wanted to pay homage to the home's Tudor roots with an English Country interior minus its characteristic elaborations: embellished fringes, skirted upholstery, formal valances, and fussy lampshades. Instead, strong silhouettes, modern art, and edgy patterns keep the home's look from becoming a pastiche. In the study, Fran rebuked tradition with a graphic color-coded book display.

## 2 COLOR IT CREAM

"Color has always been my vehicle," says Fran. "But the architecture of this house was strong; I felt color should take the backseat." In the main living spaces, she opted for a cream backdrop, painting walls, ceilings, and trim in Lime White by Farrow & Ball. Earth-toned gold, green, and brown fabrics and accessories lend depth to the otherwise blanched scheme. Moving parts of windows and doors outlined in a dark olive hue underscore the home's period architecture and frame views. "The painted trim is like an eyeliner," she says. "It gives extra definition."

## 3 ADD TEXTURE

"A well-decorated house should run the gamut of textiles from fine linen to worn leather," says Fran. "It makes for a more interesting and comfortable home." To hide spills and stains, she gravitates toward fabrics with heavy piles. Wool shag and Persian rugs add a layer of luxury underfoot. "There are few substitutes for antique rugs; they bring unmatched pattern and texture," she says.

## 4 PLAY UP PATTERN

"Pattern is the pulse of my work," says Fran, who uses it to create an evolved look. Throughout, she layered contrasting prints and alternated their scale for optimal visual interest. To prevent the look from being predictable, she combined traditional prints such as florals and stripes with tartans, geometrics, and a captivating ikat. "They help make the traditional patterns feel younger and more modern," she adds.

## 5 MAKE OLD NEW AGAIN

"Repurposing antiques is the ultimate form of recycling," says Fran. "It's a litmus test for individuality in a home." She looks for finds that aren't necessarily pedigree pieces. She scored the vintage foyer lamp at a thrift shop and gave it a

■ **ABOVE:** The dining room's inspired mix of seating includes slipcovered side chairs, a bench, and a pair of upholstered host chairs around an heirloom farm table.

■ **OPPOSITE, TOP LEFT:** Portiere curtains softly divide the study and adjacent playroom.

■ **OPPOSITE, TOP RIGHT:** The kitchen countertop stone is called "English walnut" travertine because it resembles that wood.

■ **OPPOSITE, BOTTOM LEFT:** Part of an antique wallpaper press was wired to become a distinctive table lamp.

■ **OPPOSITE, BOTTOM RIGHT:** A tight grouping of framed photos anchors the staircase.



Coat a hollow-core door with chalkboard paint to create a functional room divider.





style upgrade with a new burlap shade. Throughout, snappy prints outlined with nail heads loosen the formality of Victorian furniture. But it's Matt's grandfather's antique typewriter in the living room that rarely goes unnoticed. "Every child who enters has to touch it," Fran says.

**6 KEEP IT REAL** "It is possible to have both a beautiful house and one that functions with your daily lifestyle," says Fran. In a house where spills are unavoidable, heavy textiles and durable fabrics make cleaning up a mess a cinch. "Patterned rugs, slipcovered pieces, and indestructible fabrics are a mother's best friends." A sliding chalkboard door, a photo gallery stairway wall (snapshots can be changed out easily), an upholstered ottoman in lieu of a hard-edged coffee table, slipcovered chair backs, and a gallery wall of children's art keep the design approachable.

**7 CREATE INTERESTING NOOKS** "Our house is my laboratory. As I walk through our door every day, it's the vignettes I notice most," says Fran, who creates artful displays from ordinary and found objects. Unexpected paired items (such as a rock juxtaposed with vintage pottery, coffee-table books, and a treasured heirloom) adorn the tops of chests and consoles throughout the Keenans' home. "A mix of elements makes a display work—having something new with something old or an organic element placed against something elegant," she says. "I love to include items our children found or made. Then the display becomes a nod to our lives." 



### Take It from Fran

**Here are her secrets for creating cozy-chic rooms that make guests feel at home.**

**Q: What are your tips for selecting lighting?** Dimmers! When lights are dimmed, guests relax. Also, lamps are a great bet; their glow is softer than overhead lighting. If you read in bed, swing-arm lamps are a must.

**Q: What is the best option for new upholstered pieces?** If the budget allows, opt for down. Down is to upholstery what eggs are to cake batter—they give that extra lift that makes all the difference.

**Q: What are your absolute must-have accessories?** Throws and books. When a guest grabs a throw and snuggles up on the sofa,

it's evidence that they're comfortable here.

**Q: What about area rugs?** If guests end up sitting on the floor, I've done my job. Load up on antique rugs—the older the better. In terms of livability, a patterned rug is a lifesaver. Our dining table is on an old Heriz rug, and we eat there every night—there's no spill it hasn't endured.

**Q: What's the key to furniture placement?** I love seating you can rearrange in a pinch. Also, this is a great way to introduce a funky chair that you couldn't resist. I call it the "chip-and-dip chair" because it allows a hungry guest to be closer to the appetizers.

 LOVE IT? GET IT! PAGE 128



■ **THIS PAGE:** In the bedroom belonging to daughters Ella and Harper, wall paint in Heather Pink by Benjamin Moore creates a girlish backdrop for quilts used as casual draperies.

■ **OPPOSITE, TOP:** The master bedroom's green wall color (inspired by crewel-print bed pillows) allows the room to feel like a separate retreat.

■ **OPPOSITE, BOTTOM:** A Victorian rocker covered in a graphic houndstooth fabric livens up Wilkes' nursery.