

House&Home



Treading the clapboards

Renovation | Moving from Brooklyn to Bedford, NY, called for a full-gut project inspired by nature, reclaimed finds – and Narnia. By *Keith Flanagan*.
Photography by *Matthew Williams*



Clockwise from far left: the 1920s house, with clapboard exterior and wooden shutters; the Karol family outside; Lyndsay landscaped the grounds with native plants; the rear staircase; the raised ceiling in the main living room allows space for Fitzhugh's wooden sculptures



Lyndsay Calco Karol almost didn't want to see the 1920s farmhouse she'd purchased sight unseen with her husband, the sculptor Fitzhugh Karol. At least, not at first: "I'm not ready yet," she told him as they first approached the house in late 2022, asking him to keep driving past it. The interior designer has built a career renovating a small property she had bought. Once they had graduated, Lyndsay's brother Bill floated an idea to put those skills to use: he had purchased a building in Brooklyn and wanted her help redeveloping it.

One townhouse led to another, and in 2007 The Brooklyn Home Company was born. Bill handled the business side while Lyndsay and Fitzhugh were the engine room for the design. As creative director, Lyndsay shaped an aesthetic that prioritises craft; modern apartments and period townhouses from Park Slope to Clinton Hill – and even one 1985 tugboat – are filled with custom joinery and bespoke furniture. The studio's aim is to create an antidote to the stripped-back, sanitised interiors that often rattle Brooklyn's historic buildings of character.

But during the pandemic, Brooklyn life began to chafe. The couple decided to move full-time to their weekend home in East Hampton. The Bridgehampton "invisible learning" preschool, where their children were enrolled, changed the way the family viewed life outside the city: "It's like Narnia – everything's living together and flowing," says Lyndsay of the school's farm animals, vegetable plots and wheelbarrows that had been adapted into calculators.

Inspired to create a similar, unbound environment for their children at home, they started to look further afield for a new place to live. Lyndsay was also keen

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to branch off with her own creative practice. It was her mother who sent the Bedford listing, a 4-acre plot flanked by farmland. Another buyer quickly made an offer – but they countered and bought it sight unseen.

When they finally did pluck up the courage to cross the threshold and move in, it quickly became a test bed for transferring Lyndsay's aesthetic to a rural setting. Today, the American Colonial-style house has undergone a full gut renovation – including replacing a sagging roof and removing a forest of bamboo to reveal views of the hills – yet retains a rural charm with its clapboard exterior and traditional wooden shutters.

It sits on the corner of the farm estate – the owner originally built it for her best friend to live nearby – in the shadows of a towering red oak nearly 300 years old. It still has an original root cellar, used for storing vegetables in winter; nearby, troops once sat catching their breath during the war of independence.

Inside, white walls and contemporary furnishings are tempered by the textures



is fixed. "I don't want anyone to feel overwhelmed," she says.

Evidence of a love of the outdoors is clear throughout the five-bedroom home. One windy night, a 50-metre-tall pine tree on their land cracked and fell, so Fitzhugh, whose studio is on the property, turned the wreckage into hulking side tables for the wood-paneled sitting room. "Stuff from the land comes right into the house," he says.

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Lyndsay used low-VOC paints and reused materials whenever possible. Sinks, cabinets and even the oak floors are reclamations, sawn from the timber of an old barn.

The philosophy is one Lyndsay has long practised in prior renovations, but employed with renewed vigour here. It's now one of the main focuses in commissions for her new eponymous studio, she uses repurposed materials right down to the plumbing.

The house, no longer barricaded by bamboo, is now filled with light. Clever storage, both hidden and visible, is everywhere. "It's an emotional thing, it's self-care," says Lyndsay of her commitment to tidiness. In the breakfast room, she even devised a "shipping and receiving" cabinet for packages.

That clean aesthetic is reflected in the soft-white, shiplap walls and millwork with crisp lines that look fresh from the dry cleaner's. But it isn't sparse: decorative objects and ceramics from fellow artist friends, alongside pieces from American artisans including Toshiko Takaezu and Ruth Duckworth, add visual texture and intrigue.

Adjustments to the main living room have paid significant dividends; raising the ceiling has created an airy, modern space that can accommodate Fitzhugh's soaring wooden sculptures. Another room, with a view of the landscape, is entirely free of technology. It's where the family draws, reads and plays chess.

During the renovation, Lyndsay took daily strolls through the woods to decompress, gathering wild plants; she became obsessed with gardening books and Edwina von Gal's Perfect Earth Project, which advocates for chemical-free landscapes. Using her pocketed specimens, Lyndsay planted the grounds of the property with the ingredients for a garden of native plants – from cottonweed to yarrow – all anchored by multiflora rose.

They lightly deer-proofed the property so goats could roam freely and planted only what these new pets could safely eat (they're now so spoiled for choice that they don't even bother a grove of apple trees) and species that would thrive unimpeded. "We spent no money on irrigation," adds Lyndsay. "Zero."

Lyndsay is adamant that their home is not a static, finished entity: it's a framework for their changing lives that can adapt to new furniture or art, or a new daily ritual. "It's a nest, a laboratory. It's a space to just be away from the world and enjoy it," she says. "I think the house will never be done."

The family leans into the wholesome: tending vegetable gardens, keeping bees and even tapping sugar maple trees. Every morning, the children open the pens to an "explosion" of chickens and ducks. "If I could freeze this part of my life..." says Lyndsay. "This is by far my favourite, favourite chapter."

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Clockwise from far left: the 'tech-free' family games room; the bathroom; Lyndsay used low-VOC paints and reused materials; Fitzhugh sculpted the side tables in the sitting room from a 50-metre pine tree that came down during a storm



of wonky handmade finishes, unlacquered brass, natural fabrics and warm timbers. The decor is cosy and in keeping with the period of the property, but its minimal palette keeps it from veering into pastiche.

A renovated second rear staircase aids the house's circular flow. Much was designed, says Lyndsay, with the display of Fitzhugh's columnar abstract wood carvings in mind. But she did not want to create a museum – nothing