

This Old House

18
remodeling
secrets
only the pros
know
p. 78

Same house, more space

and lots less clutter!

- > store-it-all built-ins
- > family-friendly basement redo
- > tidy attic retreat

**32 fresh
wallpaper
ideas
p. 90**

more value inside!

Room-expanding
paint colors
Space-saving furniture
Budget kitchen
makeover

JANUARY | FEBRUARY 2012
THISOLDHOUSE.COM

\$4.99US \$5.99CAN

02>



0 70989 10160 9



specialized storage

LEFT: Cabinets bridged by a soffit and open shelves create an alcove for the kitchen loveseat, so traffic flows around it. The tall unit on the right stows board games. RIGHT: The island is capped by a cabinet with clear plastic fronts so that the kids can safely set their own places at the table.

BUILT-IN *charm*

*When space is short,
it pays to put every
NOOK, CRANNY, and CORNER
to work. For proof,
look inside this 1946 Cape*



by DEBORAH BALDWIN
photographs by TRIA GIOVAN
produced by COLETTE SCANLON
styling by INGRID LEES





anything

worth owning is worth a place of honor, be it a painting, novel, clutch of vases, or pair of shoes. Yet in most homes, possessions tend to gather on desks, counters, and closet floors, waiting forever for a spot of their own.

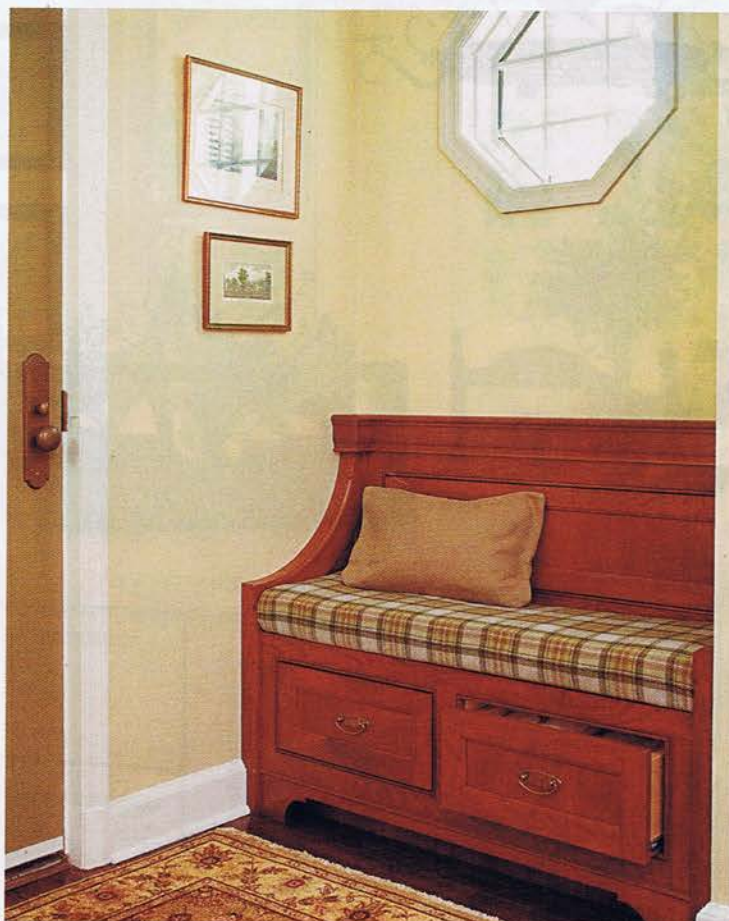
Which helps explain why the home of Ellis and Seth Lesser—shared with four school-age girls, one schnoodle, and all their stuff—seems like a series of mini miracles.

“Games go in one cabinet,” says Ellis, consulting a mental map of the built-ins framing a loveseat in her kitchen’s eating area. “Plastic cups and plates for the kids go in a cabinet at one end of the island, where they can reach them. Pots and pans are in cabinets with pull-outs.” Even the space over the loveseat has been colonized, with open shelves devoted to collectibles and the kids’ artwork. “It makes me crazy,” Ellis adds, “not to have places to put things.”

The kids can forget dumping their schoolwork on the kitchen table, where it can mingle with coffee cups and yesterday’s news. Assignments, permission slips, it all goes into shallow bins hung on the back of a cabinet door. As for the recycling bin for paper, it’s banished to a different room—and another cabinet. “When you have a lot of children, you can’t have clutter everywhere,” Ellis says, politely overlooking that where clutter and children are concerned, her rule may actually be an exception.

Or call it a model. Everywhere you look in the couple’s well-proportioned 1946 Cape Cod-style house are storage ideas worth stealing, from drawers tucked under a built-in entry bench to a home-office cabinet that hides a charging station. Even the desk’s customary nest of wires has its own place, no surprise, where nobody can see it.

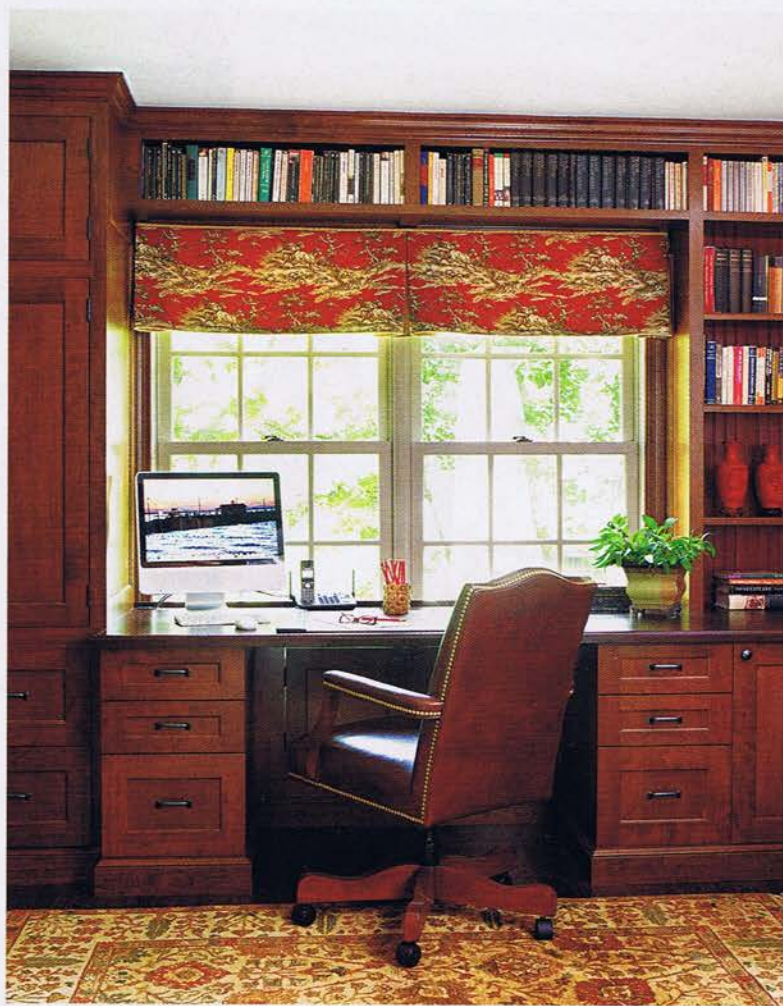
Situated on a tree-lined street in Chappaqua, New York, the modest two-bedroom house the Lessers bought in 1996 could have been a way station en route to ever-larger digs. But rather than decamp with the arrival of more kids, the couple decided to stay, adding here and there while maximizing what they had. “Each project was a function of having another child or a



a place to perch, a mantel with presence

TOP: The Cape’s classic facade was one reason the owners wanted to stay. **ABOVE:** The built-in bench in the foyer, just off the dining room, offers storage for holiday linens as well as a spot to remove boots. The cherry’s distressed finish withstands scuffs. **OPPOSITE:** Sconces with hidden wires flank the mantel’s display shelf; the overmantel’s elaborate crown gives it added prominence and a furniture-like look. The entire assembly was made from stock molding profiles and an MDF panel.





a desk that hides wires

ABOVE: Cherry built-ins line the home office, along with a shallow chase that keeps cords and outlets out of sight. RIGHT: Cabinet doors under the desk swing open to provide access to the chase as needed.



specific need,” says their architect and interior designer, Carol J.W. Kurth, who regards walls and niches the way developers look at vacant lots.

To unite old and new portions of the house, Kurth used the same trim colors and profiles throughout and added other traditional details. Striving for symmetry, she designed built-ins that rise to meet the crown molding, “which makes them look more integrated with the room. Moldings do not have to match exactly, but they need to be cohesive in style,” she says.

By spreading out improvements over 10 years and four children, the couple avoided the time-crunched

decision making that often comes with whole-house redos, while learning to tap existing space efficiently.

During the first phase, Kurth opened up the kitchen and added a seating alcove off to one side—away from foot traffic—by bridging two sets of cabinets with open shelves. She also added his-and-hers built-ins to the new master suite, framing the passageway from bed to bath.

More recently, Kurth ended relative chaos in the 130-square-foot home office with wall-to-wall storage solutions, including a cabinet that hides the printer and a charging station. “In this case,” Kurth says, “the door and window trim were switched to stained wood. We wanted the trim to be part of the built-ins, and sometimes a change from white to a darker color can have a dramatic effect.” Ellis, who likes to hunker down amid the warm furnishings, says, “Now it’s my favorite room in the house.”

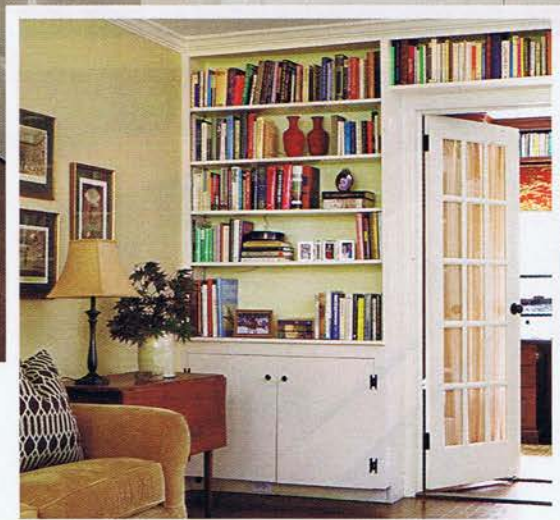
It is also a favorite project of the built-ins’ creator, woodworker Brian Clancy. Equipped with detailed drawings by Kurth and her codesigner Tina Schwab, and his collection of vintage and digital-age equipment, Clancy converted cherry planks into desktops, cabinets, drawers, and open shelves. He used contrasting stains to give the reddish beadboard-backed shelves a bit more depth, and chains, screws, chisels, and hand planes to distress the wood—a preemptive measure when kids and pets are involved, Schwab explains.

Openings in the desktop allow wires to be fed into a hidden chase behind the built-ins. “I’m not a wire person,” Ellis says—and, really, who is?

With projects like these, Clancy says, “I put all the pieces together to make sure it all lines up as it should. Then I break it all down and reassemble it on-site.” He continues, “The installation is the tricky part because you’re dealing with walls that aren’t square.” In addition to scribing the cabinetry to follow the walls’ inconsistencies, he uses leg levelers on all base units to compensate for uneven floors, then covers them with base and cap molding for a finished appearance.

Here, the designers “used every available inch,” Clancy says, right up to the ribbon of space between a set of French doors and the ceiling. “So much cabinetry and storage,” he recalls happily, “in such a small space.”

To capitalize on a nothing niche in the new foyer, Kurth asked Clancy to build in a bench made with the same easy-care distressed cherry. A recess along the bottom ensures the bench won’t store dust bunnies and lost marbles. Topped with a cushion and plush pillows, it



his-and-hers bookcases

TOP: Separate cabinets and shelves symmetrically frame the passageway to the bath in the master suite; they were modeled after the living room built-ins that came with the house (INSET).

may look like a place to sit down while removing your boots, but anyone who knows Ellis knows it's an excuse for two capacious drawers, one just for table linens.

After a partnership of 15 years, the house and its inhabitants continue to make adjustments. Kurth has been making sketches of the oldest daughter's bedroom, which is ripe for an upgrade; built-ins will no doubt play a part. "It's the kind of house that does not have clutter because it has a lot of places to put things," Kurth says. And yet, she points out, "it still feels like a Cape, with a scale that's very comfortable and inviting."


TURN THE
PAGE FOR
MORE SMART
BUILT-INS