

Clarity and color are the watchwords in the living room, where a pair of turquoise sofas from Joybird, an amoeba-shaped coffee table from Article, and a coral-and-white arabesque rug from Global Views -- all budget-friendly sources -- take their color cues from the original stained glass windows. The porcelain vase in front of the chic black-painted fireplace is a family heirloom.

# BLITHE SPIRITS

An inviting, colorful Ditmas Park house is a pick-me-up.

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**T**o Keita Turner, interior design is about much more than merely boosting function or adding decorative pizzazz. In all her projects, including the fresh and lively Ditmas Park house she orchestrated for a couple just launching a family, she aims for nothing less than to “uplift the spirit.” “People don’t often realize what an important role their surroundings play in their emotional satisfaction, for better or worse,” says Turner, a refugee from the fashion industry who switched over to interior design in 2000 and has built an impressive roster of commercial and residential clients in the tri-state area and beyond. “Good interior design can enhance your life.”

When Turner, a longtime Harlem resident, first pulled up in front of the 3,200-square-foot, six-bedroom standalone, which historic maps and newspapers date to sometime between 1906 and 1913, she was stunned. “My mouth dropped. I had no idea homes like this existed in New York City.”

Turner had worked with the new homeowners, Brooke and Matthew Navarro, on their prior dwelling, a condo in Red Hook. It didn’t take long for the couple, former investment bankers turned entrepreneurs (they founded Without a Trace, a company making allergen-free snacks), to decide they needed Turner’s help once again in creating what the designer calls a “casual, approachable home in sync with their busy lives,” soon to include two young children. “They wanted a house that was nourishing, cozy and grounded -- not a showplace, but sophisticated -- all at the same time.”

“We had just closed on the house, and my husband and I were sitting on the living room floor going down a rabbit hole of lighting fixtures,” says Brooke of a late winter’s day in 2017. After “spending hours” fruitlessly scrolling, she called Turner to steer the entire process. “We have a sense of what we like – not cookie cutter, not off the wall – and Keita is really good at interpreting that and making it look beautiful.”

Turner was entirely simpatico with her clients’ stated goal of “keeping the house’s old charm.” “We wanted to honor and play up the original details – the stained glass windows, the original grand stair, the old tile in the vestibule,” Brooke says. “We even kept the old radiators.” But first came four months of mechanical upgrades by a general contractor, including the installation of central air, with Turner helping figure out where to place vents and hide ductwork. No walls were moved, and the house’s kitchen and four-and-a-half baths had been nicely renovated by a previous owner and required only hardware tweaks.



Ogden wallpaper from Thibaut’s Imperial Garden collection and bubble chandelier from Visual Comfort establish an upbeat mood in the stairwell. A black-and-white buffalo check bench from Max Studio Home adds unexpected punch.



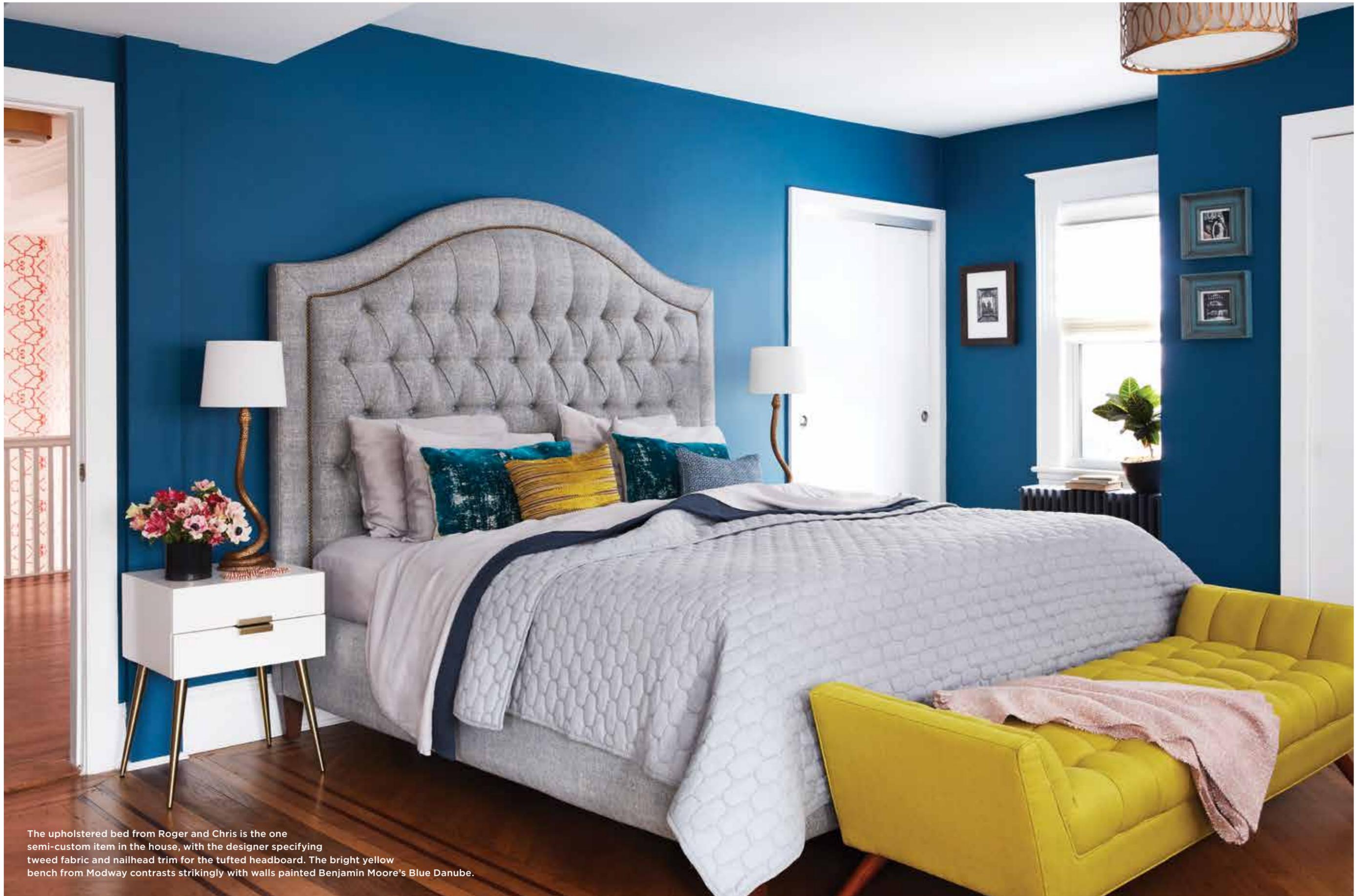
An apron-front stainless steel farm sink from Blanco, a new Moen faucet, and a striped rug with graphic impact were the only additions to a kitchen that had been renovated by previous owners.



The designer furnished a compact landing area near the front door with a stone-topped brass console table from West Elm and a quartet of framed New York City photographs.



A serene vibe permeates the dining room, kitted out with vintage rosewood dining set in Ming Dynasty style, a kaleidoscopic blue rug from Feizy, a gold-leafed chandelier from Arteriors, and an abstract oil painting by Etsy seller Koby Feldmos.



The upholstered bed from Roger and Chris is the one semi-custom item in the house, with the designer specifying tweed fabric and nailhead trim for the tufted headboard. The bright yellow bench from Modway contrasts strikingly with walls painted Benjamin Moore's Blue Danube.



A home office on the top floor was enveloped in Blue Snow, a speckled wallpaper from Hygge & West, to emphasize its dramatic angles.

The channeled green velvet armchair came along with the homeowners from their previous dwelling. The vivid artwork, multi-colored rug from Pottery Barn Kids, and squiggly patterned lampshade are suitably playful for a child's room.



After the existing hardwood floors were sanded and given a darker matte finish, the decorating fun began. For her part, says Turner, she appreciated the opportunity “to break out” creatively. “Some of my clients are a little more buttoned up. I’ve always used a lot of color, but in this project, they bravely embraced bold color and pushed me beyond.” Early on, designer and client walked together from room to room, paint deck in hand. “I already knew they loved color – navy blue, olive green, paprika red – as well as whimsical art,” Turner says. But rather than create a riot of different colors, she unified the scheme with a neutral backdrop of “cool taupe-ish gray” – Benjamin Moore’s Sleight Bells, to be exact. “That was the main wall color throughout, with other color laid in through furnishings, accessories, and art.” The homeowners prioritized “flashes of wallpaper,” which, for budgetary reasons, were deployed strategically, generally one wall per room.

Though the couple brought along a few pieces of furniture from their previous home and incorporated some items with an Asian bent inherited from Matthew’s family, a substantial number of the furnishings were purchased new. About three weeks after the Navarros bought the property, an ice storm brought a tree down on top of the detached garage, virtually demolishing it. The expense of rebuilding put a dent in the furniture budget. Turner rose to the occasion, bypassing the high-end vendors and custom workroom she frequently

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uses in favor of affordable, ready-made furnishings from such sources as West Elm and CB2.

Turner anchored the mid-century-inspired living room with a pair of chic turquoise sofas from Joybird and a modernist chandelier by lighting designer Rico Espinet, picking up the orange hue in the room’s stained glass windows as an accent color in the rug, pillows, and other accessories.

She did encourage her clients to splurge on the second floor stair landing, which is centered on an original stained glass window. “First I suggested wallpaper on the ceiling, but it was not enough of a statement,” Turner says. “Then I said, ‘Why don’t we just wallpaper the entire landing? It’s a hub of activity when you’re getting up and bathing the kids and rushing out to work. It will be a happy place on your way out the door.’” The cheer-

ful red and white wallpaper from Ogden and a bubble chandelier with a vintage 1970s vibe bring a lighthearted feel to the space.

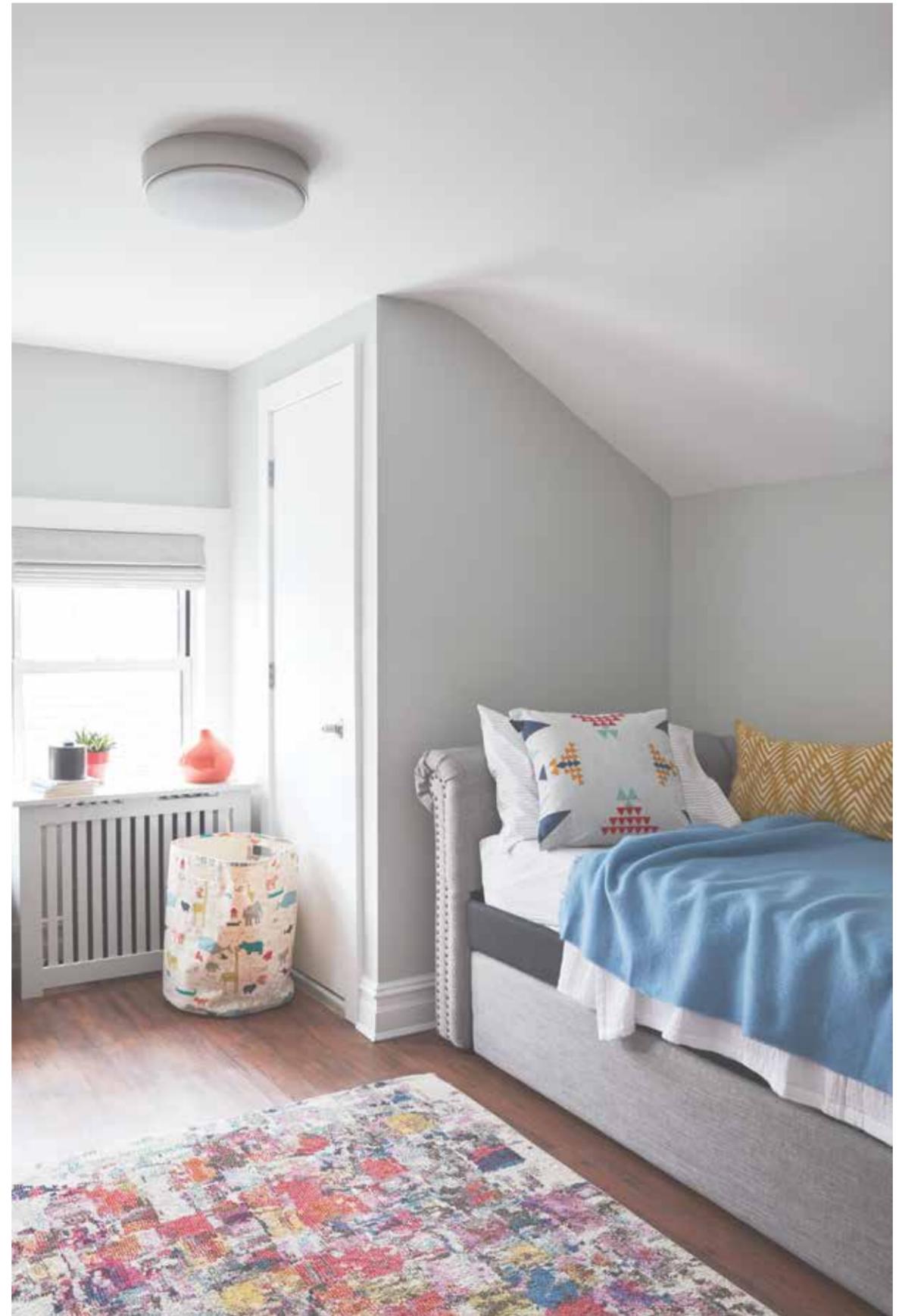
Another inspired stroke, in keeping with Turner’s philosophy of decorative uplift, is the tranquil dining room, where a vintage Chinese-style table and chairs from Matthew’s parents are set on a swirly rug that “makes the room feel like a koi pond,” Turner says. Brooke, who generally prefers new furniture to vintage, was initially uncertain about the dining set. “I thought it might look too stately, but Keita was like, ‘Oh no, this is amazing!’ The room wound up being really beautiful.”

In the primary bedroom, Brooke lobbied for a citron yellow bench at the foot of the bed, an offbeat exclamation point in a mainly blue room. Other standout moments occur in the nursery, where a seriously playful dark blue wallpaper from Hygge & West, illustrated with copper-colored jellyfish, establishes a marine-inspired theme, with a round ring-patterned rug from Ikea that suggests a pool of water. “All we need is the fishing pole,” Turner says.

It was during her early career as an overworked young fashion designer that Turner realized the subtler benefits interior design can confer. “I had a revelation in my twenties, when I first came to New York,” says Turner, who grew up in St. Louis and moved to the East Coast originally to attend Rhode Island School of Design. “My

job was fast paced and stressful, and I needed an oasis from that pressure cooker,” she recalls. So she threw herself into revamping her rental apartment. “I used some Danish modern pieces my parents had held onto, repurposed and reupholstered things, found stuff at flea markets and made it my own.” That’s when Turner realized what good interior design could do. “It pulled me out of a place of anxiety and relieved the stress of working for corporate America.”

Now, says Turner, she begins all her projects with a deep dive into what new clients are really looking for. “I ask, ‘Do you want to become more productive? The whole home can help with that, not just your office. Are you looking for serenity, a place of refuge?’” It’s all doable, Turner says. “Your home is one area of your life where you have control.”



An ‘overflow’ room under the eaves serves as guest room and play space, with a Chesterfield-style daybed and a multi-colored rug with an abstract pattern.