

Home Improvement

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Bringing Foxchase back

Material salvation

Interior refinement

**10 ways to make
your house a home**

Off the grid

Bringing Foxchase back

BY *Laura Jean Whitcomb*

PHOTOGRAPHY BY *Andrew Wellman*

When you're working on a project to modernize more than a dozen rooms in a 10,000-square-foot house, it's not surprising to hear the question: "How are you guys getting along?" But Annie Ballin's answer — "Great!" — may be unusual. After all, it's not often that a homeowner, a design firm and a team of local contractors become friends during a renovation project.

Ballin, an accomplished watercolorist and art educator, recently launched a new Wilmot-based design business called At Home New Hampshire (www.athomenh.com). She offers color consultations, room design, furniture placement, staging services for home sale and complete interior makeovers. She transformed the headmaster's house at Proctor Academy in Andover and recently completed a design project at Foxchase in South Sutton.

What to do with 11 bedrooms

Mark Loehr bought Foxchase in October 2005. From a big family (one of eight siblings) and with a big family of his own (four children), Loehr thought Foxchase would be the perfect spot for family reunions and a home for his kids on break from Proctor Academy. "When we thought about updating it, we didn't want to modernize it. We wanted to bring it back to what it was in the 1930s — the same feeling of peacefulness and understated grandeur," he says. "It's a place to enjoy the people you are with." He hired Ballin to provide artistic design services in March 2006.

Ballin looked at each room with a careful eye, retaining fixtures and bathroom tile in good condition and refinishing wood floors in the bedrooms. Eight bedrooms, six baths, the hallways and a few basement rooms required a coat of paint, and several bathrooms needed new lighting, fixtures and sinks. Local contractors — Millstone Woodworking, Millers Plumbing and Heating, A.S. Bartlett and Sons, Floorcraft & Creative Kitchens, Newbury Plastering, to name a few — were hired for the major construction, flooring, electrical and plumbing work. Two on-site

handymen — John Blake and Horace Witcher — refinished floors, built new furniture and fine tuned the details, such as adding trim to a bathroom cupboard to give it a 1930s look.

With the renovations completed, Ballin needed to furnish Foxchase in time for a family reunion in August. "With the exception of some wonderful pieces Mark

owned, the house — 11 bedrooms, two living areas and media room, a library, a morning room, a dining room and a bunk room — had to be completely furnished," says Ballin. She purchased custom cherry beds, mattresses, pillows, 650 thread count sheets, Matalesse



Laura Jean Whitcomb

Foxchase is well known to Sutton residents. Benjamin Philbrick Sr. (sometimes written in the history books as Philbrook) moved to Sutton in 1773 and built a homestead where Foxchase now stands.

coverlets and matching shams as well as custom framed artwork, lamps and rugs for each bedroom. Eleven full bathrooms and two half baths received plush white towels, monogrammed robes and bath mats.

Heart of the home

The kitchen renovation turned five rooms (a kitchen, office, pantry, medicine room and resident room) into a large, open space for family and friends to gather. Four walls came down, and Blake found 17-inch laminated beams at Vermont Salvage in White River Junction, Vt. The 690-square-foot area provides three seating options: An island table in

► FOXCHASE continued on page 40

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P.O. Box 1482, Grantham, NH 03753
Phone/fax: (603) 863-7048
E-mail: info@kearsargemagazine.com
Web: www.kearsargemagazine.com

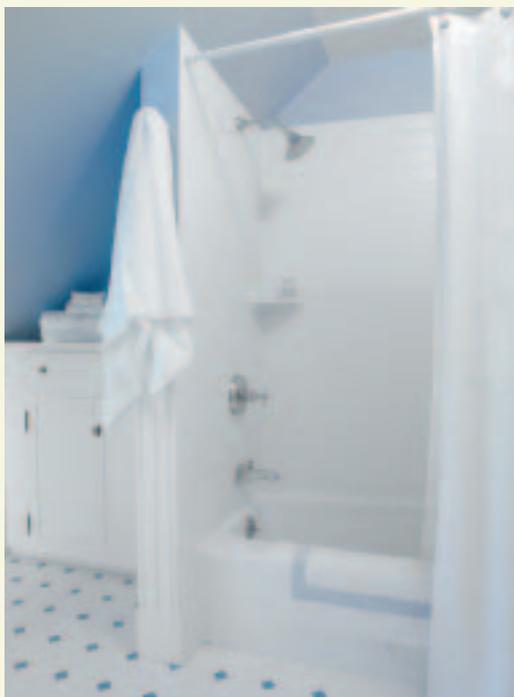
Home Improvement, a special section of *Kearsarge Magazine*, includes how-to articles to get shoppers in the fix-it, spring cleaning, reorganizing, building or renovation mood. It is distributed at local home shows across New Hampshire in March. To advertise or write educational articles for next year's issue, please contact us at the above phone number or e-mail address.

ON THE COVER

The kitchen of Foxchase in South Sutton, photograph by Andrew Wellman



Comfortable leather chairs surrounded by original, handmade woodwork create a sit-down-and-read atmosphere for the first floor library.



The family suite bathroom on the second floor kept the tub and cabinetry, but was updated with a new tile floor.



The New York room is all pine; some old (Mark Loehr owned the king-size bed) and some new (the matching pine hutch was found at Prospect Hills).

the kitchen, a small family dining area or a living room space. The open kitchen is inviting; it's where the team gathers for coffee in the morning to discuss the projects of the day. They sit at an Irish farm table that Ballin and Loehr found at Prospect Hills Antiques in Georges Mills, and chuckle when they look at the antique Belgian cupboard.

"The cupboard was found after the original kitchen plans had been made, but just before Dick and Craig Hill [Millstone Woodworking] started building the custom cabinets. Right away we did the measurements — the piece is 8 feet tall and 10 feet long. It was just going to fit," says Ballin. "We did a quick redesign of the kitchen, making the necessary changes in stove placement, electrical outlets and lighting. The cupboard was so large and heavy that it took a crew to move it into place. We all held our breath. With less than an inch to spare, the piece was in place, looking like it was made for the spot."

Honed granite countertops — lit with pendant and select track lighting — provide plenty of cooking space, and large pane windows provide a wonderful view with trees as far as the eye can see. Ballin decided against upper cabinets — no need to distract from the view — as there was plenty of storage space available in a nearby pantry. Blake and Witcher removed plaster from the fireplace chimney to expose the bricks, and an old incinerator drawer adds a touch of history.

It takes a village

Throughout the project, Ballin kept her eye on the bottom line. "I want to get everything done at a reasonable price," Ballin says. "Some clients are on a budget, so we may use pieces that they already have. Other clients may not have a budget, and want a whole new look. We're flexible. We want to do things well, do it reasonably — and have fun."

"Annie demonstrated three qualities that led to a very successful restoration. First, she was a great listener. She really understood what was in my head and was able to embrace my vision. Second, she spent money like it was her own, watching the dollars but still creating a consistent look and feel throughout the house. Third, she had an upbeat infectious attitude that brought the best out of people," says Loehr. "And wrapping around all of these qualities was her sense of taste. As I described it to her — simply, beautiful — two distinct but very connected ideas."

"Foxchase was a real family and community project," says Ballin. She notes that three of Loehr's children — Coco, Danny and Lizie — painted all the pantry cabinets, 144 shutters, ran



An antique Belgian cupboard fit perfectly on a wall in the kitchen.

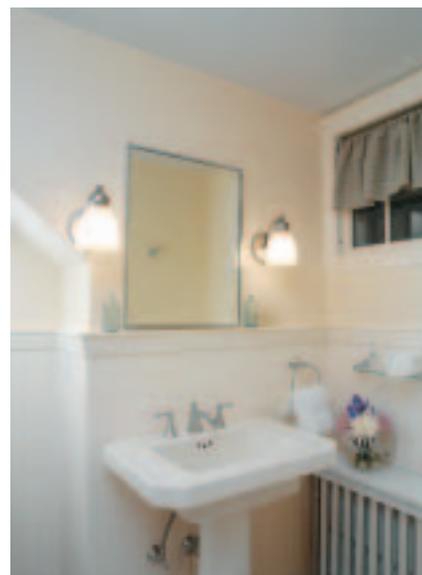
errands, polished the brass and helped Ballin and friend Sarah Whipple set up the rooms. "It's a nice legacy for Mark and his family — bringing Foxchase, one of the original places in Sutton, back. Now it's a grand place again." **K**

Laura Jean Whitcomb is the editor of Kearsarge Magazine.

Andrew Wellman was born in Rochester, N.Y., to a now retired Kodak chemist who helped develop the widely misunderstood disk camera. Wellman's passion for photography was cultivated as an assistant in San Francisco for Geoff Nilsen, master photographer and close friend. Andrew's work can be seen at www.andrewwellmanphotographer.com



The minute she saw it, Lizie Loehr claimed this bedroom as her own.



What do you do with a mint condition pink tile floor? If you're Annie Ballin, you complement it with warm tones of pink and beige.