

For Meredith Vieira, living in the moment meant rebuilding her family's home from the ground up.

THIS IS
TODAY

BY CANDACE ORD MANROE PHOTOGRAPHY BY GORDON BEALL



The new foyer's mahogany table illustrates how the redo is "a step up" from her previous country style, Meredith Vieira says. Left: Meredith's existing dining table was refinished to work in the revamped house. A patterned wall covering and silver-leaf chandelier elegantly dress the space.



"It all started with a banquette.

I wanted one."

Flexing her sound-bite muscles, Meredith Vieira boils down the year-long, life-altering redo of her family's home to those two simple sentences.

The new co-host of NBC's *Today* show had been seated in a banquette at a Manhattan restaurant with her husband—author and former TV news producer Richard Cohen—when she experienced an epiphany. "I had grown up in a house with a kitchen banquette," she explains, "and I suddenly realized I missed it. Then Richard said he had always wanted a fireplace in the kitchen, so we talked about renovating that one room."

What began as "toying with the idea" of a modest renovation for the home north of New York City that Meredith and Richard had shared for the last five years with their children—Ben, 17; Gabriel, 15; and Lily, 13—immediately morphed into more. It ballooned into plans for a full-blown, eco-friendly reconstruction that would leave only one original interior wall standing—a bit like dropping off the sedan at the dealership for an oil change and driving away in a roomy new SUV hybrid.

"We went from wanting a banquette and fireplace for the kitchen to reorienting the whole house," Meredith confirms.

Yet there was nothing imprudent, indulgent, or even terribly impulsive about this family's decision to go for broke.



Painted cool blue in a custom color created by interior designer Stanley Hura, the living room features three windows (only two are shown) that look out to the front portico. They echo the triad motif introduced by the portico's triple arches, **bottom left**, a key theme of architect Radoslav Opacic's new Tuscan design. **Left:** The foyer's long bench is covered in Beacon Hill fabric. The clock, paintings, and accessories are antiques.

Nail heads trim the living room's Lillian August sofa covered with Robert Allen fabric, and marble adds texture and rhythm to the fireplace. French doors open onto the new courtyard, the nucleus of Opacic's U-shaped, revamped floor plan. **Right:** The nail-head trim and tufting are repeated in the study. Paint is from Benjamin Moore. **Bottom right:** Meredith bought her jogging companion, Jasper, purported to be an Aussiepoo (Australian shepherd-poodle mix), to please the boys. At his first grooming, she was told he had "a lot of terrier in him," which was more my style anyway. We've always had mutts from the pound."



The only crazy thing we did
was to get two kittens.
Stanley shrieked: "Claws!"

—HOMEOWNER MEREDITH VIEIRA



(They nearly did, notes Meredith, only half-joking: "I told the kids, expect no vacations. This house is it!") The first question posed to them by area architect Radoslav Opacic made it clear they had good cause to completely overhaul their 1930s Craftsman-style home, and cosmetics had little to do with it.

"Rad asked us where we lived in the house. We sort of looked at each other and responded, 'In the driveway.' It hurt to admit it, but we really had been living like the Beverly Hillbillies, except on the wrong coast. Richard and I would sit in our lounge chairs in our underwear Sunday mornings along our long stretch of driveway, drinking coffee and reading the newspapers. There was something quite disturbing about that picture, especially for our neighbors," laments Meredith.

The hillbilly image convinced them to address the deeper issue. "The way we lived before wasn't very practical," says Meredith's assistant, Amanda Bushey, who actually has never lived with the family though she is definitely considered part of it. In fact, pressure to complete the reconstruction within one year—a condition that Meredith insisted be part of the contract—was all about Amanda. "She was getting married, so we had to have the house done by October [2005]," Meredith



A showcase for the beautiful reclaimed white oak flooring used throughout the house, the new kitchen includes Viking appliances and an island with a deep copper sink.

Top left: Just off the kitchen, the family room has a pair of the family's favorite old leather chairs, repaired and good to go.

Middle: A Philips flat-panel TV takes center stage. The door leads to the outdoor kitchen and dining area.

Bottom: The whole-house revamp began with one small wish: Meredith's desire for a breakfast banquette; leather from Ralph Lauren.

We live outside
 nine months of the year.
 Though we have neighbors,
 we feel isolated because of the
 way we're nestled in the trees.

—MEREDITH VIEIRA



Left: Furnished in antiques, the new outdoor kitchen just outside the family room includes a grill and under-counter fridge and a sink on the opposite side (not shown). The home's courtyard lies beyond the archways. The floor is New York State bluestone.

Above: Two sides of the courtyard are enclosed by the house. Access to the family room is near the patio table and chairs in the background.

Right: The third side of the center courtyard—formed by the reoriented garage—features a fireplace with a Chesney's mantel. The new outdoor furniture is by Smith & Hawken.





Above: The new master suite overlooks the courtyard. The four-poster bed and chairs are from Hickory Chair. Lamps are from Restoration Hardware.
Top center: Given Meredith and Richard's careers, it's no surprise that flat-panel TVs are in nearly every room, including their own.
Top right: A handmade Persian rug warms the master sitting area.
Right: Meredith's bath connects to the bedroom through a dressing room with a closet designed by California Closets. Opacic designed the custom vanity. The tub plus all other plumbing fixtures and tiles, **left**, are from Waterworks.



explains. "We had a rehearsal dinner and a wedding reception to give here, so we had to be back in the house. It was the bride-to-be who really got this wonderful crew motivated. Nobody wants to mess with a nervous bride."

Opacic modeled the redo's new architectural style on Tuscan villas, though Meredith is reluctant to use that term to label her home. "Our house is not grand, so I hate to describe it as a 'villa,'" she explains. "Richard and I have always loved Italy, especially the villas in Tuscany, and the light in the Hudson River Valley is very similar, so this seemed like the appropriate style. Not fancy, but elegant and inviting, with an emphasis on texture, color, and flow—and bringing the outdoors in, so we wouldn't have to live in the driveway." Opacic's challenge was to provide all of that without ranging far from the existing footprint—building restrictions were that tight.

"It was a game of adding and subtracting to stay close to the footprint and still gain livable space," he says. By reorienting the house and garage, rearranging the interiors, and adding a third-floor tower office for Meredith and Amanda, he managed to pump up the square footage by about 2,000 feet. In classic European fashion, he created a new center courtyard as

the nucleus, then wrapped the house around it, reshaping the original ell floor plan into a U.

"I told Rad and interior designer Stanley Hura to make it really cool so the kids would want to spend time at home now, before it's too late. Be careful what you wish for," she admonishes, ticking off the sleepovers and parties coming up—just next week—for the "hordes." But how could they resist having gangs of friends over to hang out in their new college-style "quad," with a commons room opening onto their upstairs bedrooms, or in the new media room in the basement, intended to bring the entire family together. (And it does, when Meredith and Richard aren't squeezed out by all the teens assembled on Fridays to catch the latest episode of *Monk*.)

Outdoors—not in the drive—is now a gathering place, too. "We had a country house but sold it when we realized the mice enjoyed more time there than we did," says Meredith. "But we missed the great outdoor celebrations we had there on holidays." With a new outdoor kitchen and comfy lounge and dining areas around the pool and the two original terraces—"the one thing I refused to give up," notes Meredith—the property now has all the features that make celebrating the holidays at home



The shapely pool adjoins the outdoor kitchen and courtyard.
Opposite: Thirteen-year-old Lily's bedroom overlooks the woods that give the 2½-acre property its sense of privacy. A Hunter ceiling fan, a Mitchell Gold + Bob Williams tufted chair and ottoman, Drexel Heritage side tables, and carpet by Karastan furnish the room.
Opposite bottom: A center commons room is accessible to the teenagers' bedrooms.



a joy." We're real homebodies. This is where we prefer to spend our time," she adds.

Equipped for the first time with an elevator, a handicapped-accessible bath (Richard's) that's "not in your face," and extra-wide doorways, the house is ready for the future. "Richard has MS, as does his dad, who is in a wheelchair. It only made sense to make our home comfortable for his dad when he visits, and for Richard or any one of us, in the future—we don't know what it may bring," Meredith says.

Meredith brought back Stanley Hura, who had decorated the house when the family first bought it, to design the revamped spaces. "Richard loves blue, but I couldn't envision using it without having rooms feel cold. Stanley made it work," she illustrates. Hura provided her with options for every element from doorknobs to dressers, then she made the final decisions. "It was really scary," she says. "You fly by the seat of your pants and pray that it works." For today, and tomorrow. ■

Architect team: Radoslav Opacic, Ivanka Olcott, Cristianne Ortiz, Miguel Palma, Janet Roseff, Anthony Schembri, Natercia Walko **Interior designer:** Stanley Hura
Landscape architect: Richard Quigley **Editorial coordinator:** Sandee Roberts
 For more information, see sources on page 205.