

WITHOUT STOP

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Abby Gruman decorates a family home in Water Mill at warp speed.

BY NINA THOMPSON
PHOTOGRAPHY BY DONNA DOTAN

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About a year ago, a fan of Abby Gruman's Instagram asked if she would be up for decorating an almost ten-thousand-square-foot shingle-style house in Water Mill. The property belonged to the fan's mother-in-law and the plan was to create a serene family home for summers and weekends. Before she heard the particulars, Gruman, the founder and principal of Abby Leigh Designs, found herself readily agreeing to take the project on. And why not? She'd always loved the Hamptons and had long had a special feeling for the area. Since many of the homes she'd worked on were located in New York City and New Jersey, this was a chance to strike new ground, albeit in familiar territory.

With seven bedrooms and eight-and-a-half bathrooms, a tennis court, and a swimming pool set on 4.5 acres of land overlooking horse stables, it was a large property by any measure. Yet the project had two little wrinkles. The first was that the interior design would require some ingenuity on Gruman's part, as the homeowner hoped to kit the place out in a way that would suit three generations of family members. This did not give her pause for she loved a challenge. The second concerned the lead time. Everything, it seemed, would have to be wrapped up in just six short months.

Sometimes constraints inspire creative solutions. The homeowner requested interiors that were "crisp, clean, and modern," a description that fits Gruman's style to a T. Her client wanted rooms that were sophisticated enough for her adult children yet at the same time playful enough for her high-spirited young grandchildren. She envisioned a space in which the latter contingent could roam free with no chance they might wreck a one-of-a-kind piece of furniture, stain an upholstered chair, or scuff the walls beyond repair.

As a mother of two young children, Gruman got it. And so she covered the walls in one child's room in star decals and wherever possible she chose items without sharp edges. She upholstered sofas in performance fabric and an ottoman in faux leather.

If there is a unifying theme to the design scheme it is the color blue. (All the family members are mad about the color.) To keep the interiors from appearing overly monochromatic, Gruman offset different shades of blue with creams and neutrals as well as a variety of prints and textures, particularly when it came to wallcoverings.



Thus in the main bedroom she hung a cream and blue-striped wallpaper, in another bedroom, a sea-blue grasscloth from Holly Hunt, and in still another a blue floral print from Serena & Lily. “The idea was to create a serene coastal feel,” she says. “We were going for that quintessential Hamptons vibe.”

Once she'd established the beachy color scheme, she turned her attention to the furniture. To meet her summer deadline, Gruman needed things she could lay her hands on right away. But with no antique treasures to speak of, much less anything that required a long lead time or iconic pieces with cult followings, Gruman feared the house might feel “like walking



into a showroom.” To dispel any hint of shop-feel, she intermingled hardwearing items from large retailers like CB2, Restoration Hardware, and West Elm with pieces acquired locally (ie. a pair of swivel chairs from Homenature in Southampton). To this mix she added a few bespoke items, including the sheer drapes from Holly Hunt that dress the living room windows.

Gruman is no design snob and in a few instances she sourced moderately priced, mass-produced pieces that were virtually indistinguishable from their custom-made counterparts. “I’m really picky,” Gruman says, “but I would absolutely use those pieces again.” On that front, among her favorites are a console from Bernhardt, a plaid cream rug from Stark Carpet in the living room, and a linen-upholstered bench in blonde oak in the entrance hall.

The mix of high and low looks just right. Everything hangs together to pleasant effect – proof positive that if a house is well-designed it can appeal to family members of all ages. “The property needed certain updates,” Gruman agrees, “but it had good bones, which made all the difference.”

