

A SEPARATE PEACE

Far from the bustle of city life, and inspired by the maverick sensibility of Muriel Brandolini, Annette and Matt Lauer dreamed up an idyllic retreat all their own. By Jessica Kerwin Jenkins. Photographed by François Halard.

INTO THE WILD

The garden of the Lauers' Hamptons home. A table set (with chairs from Galerie Camoin Demachy) beneath a cherry tree makes a perfect spot for alfresco dining. Details, see In This Issue.

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PLAY MATES
Annette, with daughter Romy, in the garden. On Annette: Marni dress. Christian Louboutin flats. On Romy: Bonpoint dress.

ne look at Annette Roque Lauer coming in flushed from her morning horseback ride is enough to convince even the most steadfast urbanite that there's something to country living after all. Last May, she moved full-time to Laurel Hill, the Hamptons home she and her husband, *Today's* Matt Lauer, share. "I'm going to sound like a zealot," Annette says, settling down in their library with a cup of tea, "but I love the pace here, and I love the peace." Matt works in the city during the week, joining Annette and their three young children on weekends to soak up the bucolic vibe.

Seeing the tulips come up on Park Avenue was never her idea of spring. "In the city you spend six months with central heating and six months with central air, which means you spend the year at room temperature," she says. Of course, while she retreated from urban life and "never looked back," she makes her school runs in a Marni dress and kitten heels. "I didn't move to the country and buy myself a rip-away tracksuit," she says, and the Lauers' Sag Harbor home is no country shack but boasts a sophisticated decor masterminded by interior designer Muriel Brandolini, an old friend from Annette's modeling days in Paris. Like Annette's rosy glow, the house didn't come together overnight. It took time—nine years, which, in decorating terms, might as well be eternity.

They started at next to zero, with a rolling piece of land secluded in the woods and plans to build a rambling take on the classic New England cape, designed by Daniel Romualdez. As Annette grew up in the Netherlands, she didn't realize just how rambling it would be. "Feet and inches don't mean a thing to me," she says. "The architects showed us a model, and I thought it was cute." Landscaping had begun, but the grounds were still a barren desert of dirt when Annette took her first walk through their giant, empty hull of a house. "It was so cold and so uninviting," she remembers. "It had no personality."

Between the Lauers and Brandolini, however, there was plenty of personality to go around. It wasn't the first time they'd worked together—before the Lauers' marriage twelve years ago, Brandolini had designed Annette's vibrant Tribeca apartment, then worked on the couple's Fifty-seventh Street home. But they are three people with contrasting opinions. Brandolini is known for her bold choices, her whimsical use of color, and for blending unusual antiques with contemporary pieces to create a look that's lavish but laid-back. Matt, on the other hand, has a quieter aesthetic. "My husband's idea of colorful is different shades of beige," Annette deadpans. Her style falls somewhere in between.

In an attempt to please everyone, initially they agreed on a look that Annette calls "monastery chic" and Brandolini calls "Gustavian," which translated into austere white walls and lots of heavy Northern European furniture. It was a compromise all around, and it didn't work for anyone. "Try living with 'monastic' on a gloomy day," says Brandolini.

"We imagined this house without color and thought it would be very peaceful," Annette says, cringing. "Well, it was like *The Shining*."

Slowly, over the course of the intervening years, the trio exorcised traces of their first mistakes, and the house took on a colorful new patina. The rooms bloomed in striking yet subdued colors, from the library's teal-blue shelves to the kitchen's dusty guava-mauve walls and a subtle citron in the hall. The sprawling gardens grew lush with magnolia grandiflora and box hedges, and the house gradually filled with eclectic treasures that Brandolini hunted down in European design galleries, Belgian antiques shops, and the Paris flea market. In the library, the simple curves of a mid-century Danish chair by Hans Wegner set off a delicate Japanese fire screen, the kind of scrim that praying monks hid behind, while a trio of pieces by star minimalist Martin Szekely—a metal-mesh side



Hair: Ryan Taniguchi at Kate Ryan Inc. for TRESemmé; makeup: Suzy Gerstein at Kate Ryan Inc. for Dior Cosmetics. Details, see in This Issue.

table, a glass console, and a thick slab of a wooden coffee table—lend the room a surprising modern edge.

Most of the furniture migrated from one room to another before finding its proper place. "This dining room has gone through three different wall treatments," Annette says, leading a mini-tour. Coffee-brown wallpaper panels hand-painted with graceful flowering trees make a genteel backdrop for a pair of ceramic bird lamps perched on top of lacquered cabinets by François Bauchet. Offering just the sort of daring counterpoint Brandolini is known for, the room is anchored by a dark and sleek Szekely dining table and a lustrous mirror painting by Arte Povera artist Michelangelo Pistoletto.

Meanwhile, the Wegner oak dining chairs, now found in the kitchen, were stripped of their original black leather upholstery in favor of linen, and then recovered again in burnt-orange vinyl. "I imagined the kids spilling things," says



TABLE TALK
Thijs (age four), Romy (age seven), and Jack (age nine) in the kitchen. Digit chandelier by Emmanuel Babled. Solaris dining table by Martin Szekely. Dining chairs by Hans Wegner. Custom-color paint by Muriel Brandolini.

COLOR MY WORLD

TOP LEFT: The dining room features hand-painted Gracie wallpaper. Stonehenge lacquered wood consoles by François Bauchet. PB dining table by Martin Szekely. Hillestak dining chairs by Robin Day. Ceramic lamp by Beth Weissman. LEFT: In Romy's room, custom bed from City Joinery. Diana side tables by Konstantin Grcic. The metal lounge chair was found in a Paris flea market.

Brandolini. The kitchen itself is done with pink-hued walls that seem to pull a rosy tone from the granite hearth, with the stone, the chairs, and an understated wooden table (another Szekely) illuminated overhead by a metallic cluster of bubbles, a limited-edition chandelier by Emmanuel Babled.

The great room, where rattan Arne Jacobsen chairs flank the fireplace, offers an especially rich mix. Under an ornate wood-framed mirror Brandolini found in an antiques dealer's dank basement in Antwerp, beaded and fringed tribal hats sit on the mantel. "I am a beautiful-things hoarder," Annette says. "But I don't label or quantify by provenance or style, so any mix feels very natural to me." A case in point: the curvaceous bronze François-Xavier Lalanne bird sculpture, which seems to be gliding across the shining surface of an acrylic Szekely side table.

One of the last bastions of the old monasticism was Matt's office—"his Calvin Klein showroom" is how Annette puts it. (He says "Armani.") It's still a more somber room, with olive-green corduroy walls and a strong glass-topped desk. "It's outside my comfort zone," says Matt, "but I don't think that's necessarily a bad thing. A house is something that should live and breathe and change with the family."

Naturally, the addition of three children along the way—Jack (nine), Romy (seven), and Thijs (four)—influenced the Lauers' design scheme. Their original architectural plans left plenty of living space for children, and in those rooms Brandolini cut



ABOUT A BOY

Thijs in his bedroom. Felt chair by Marc Newson. Jieldé floor lamp. Unique wall upholstery by Creative Artists Agency from Maharam.

loose with candy colors and a riot of Pop carpets. “This is one of the rooms where I lost control,” Annette says, smiling as she surveys Thijs’s bedroom with its hypergraphic upholstered walls. Yet while the house is full of museum-worthy furniture—by Wegner, Jacobsen, and Paulin—it isn’t a hands-off kind of place. The formal tufted sofas in the great room? “You can jump on them,” Annette says. “Ask my kids. We run in this house. We jump. The children can bring their drawing projects into every room. We really *live* here.”

That full-fledged commitment to her children’s freedom was a big factor in instigating their move. Annette left home for Paris at nineteen as an au pair, found her way to modeling, and eventually moved to New York, where she met Matt on a blind date. Photo shoots took her all over the world, though her background—Annette’s mother is Dutch, and her father is Indonesian, French, and Chinese—brings “an innate sense of belonging wherever I go,” she says. Growing up in Alphen aan den Rijn, a sleepy town in the Netherlands, she had an old-fashioned childhood. She played outdoors for hours each day after school and never felt hemmed in. “In Manhattan there was so much chaos outside that inside the apartment I became a control freak,” she admits. “Now the kids can barge in with muddy shoes and it’s fine.”

In the summertime at Laurel Hill, the family drifts in and out, with the gardens serving as extensions of the house itself. Hornbeam hedges enclose a garden off the kitchen, and an outdoor dining area sits under a cherry tree in a leafy copse. There’s a swimming pool and a tennis court, and even a new vegetable patch, which exploded with summer squash last August. During the rest of the year, the kids still manage to put in half an hour of playtime outside before school. Matt is happy to see them thrive. “It’s hard for me,” he says. “I’m away from them five days a week, but the



FLIGHT OF FANCY

The mudroom features an antique birdcage and table from a flea market in the South of France.



SADDLE UP

Annette and Romy on a morning ride with their horses, Soñador and Bonaparte.

perks for the family outweigh the inconveniences on my part.”

And with the stables just down the road, Annette is now able to pursue her other passion—riding, which she took up after Thijs was born. “I’m a bit lazy, honestly. I liked the idea of the horse doing all the work,” she says. For some, yoga is the answer, but she finds riding therapeutic. “It really centers me.” Brandolini, for one, is stunned by her friend’s transformation. “I don’t know how she does it,” she says, shaking her head. “She is so happy there. I hate the countryside.”

Even with everything in its place, you get the feeling it may not be long before the Lauers and Brandolini launch into another all-consuming house project. “The idea that ‘this is it’ makes me claustrophobic,” Annette says. “The whole process of transforming this house into a home has been like a passionate nine-year love affair. I’m quietly hoping there will be others.” □

MUSICAL CHAIRS

In the great room, an MPVT coffee table in Corian by Martin Szekely. Rattan armchairs by Arne Jacobsen. The high-backed tufted sofas, made by Houston Upholstery, were designed after one owned by Brandolini. Pair of Muriel Brandolini’s signature chairs in antique fabrics.

