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Adventurous Michigan homeowners looked beyond the unassuming exterior and transformed a dated 1950s ranch into one of the hippest homes on the block.

WRITTEN BY KHRISTI ZIMMETH  
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FIELD EDITOR KHRISTI ZIMMETH



“  
I think the mid-century style of  
this house appealed to my husband  
as a displaced California boy.  
—SARAH FINNANE



**Left:** With its soaring ceiling, two-toned cabinetry, and spacious island, the renovated kitchen is “the home’s reenergized hub,” says designer Laura Zender. Sarah—seen here with the family’s Havanese, Javier—agrees: “Our life happens in the family room and kitchen.” **Above:** The mudroom was carved from space previously occupied by the kitchen. **Right:** A lush jungle-inspired wallpaper leads from the main hallway into the expansive family room.



**G**ood bones, room for the family to spread out, and space to entertain were at the top of the wish list when Sarah and Jay Finnane went house hunting in

Ann Arbor, Michigan, in 2017. Other buyers may have skipped the simple brick ranch in the city’s Ann Arbor Hills neighborhood, but the Finnanes had a secret weapon: They’d weathered extensive renovations at two previous homes and weren’t afraid to dive into a full-scale overhaul. “We saw the potential of some houses that may have scared others off,” Sarah explains.

Built in 1951, the 3,000-square-foot home came with many strengths, like an established tree-lined street close to great schools (for daughter Wren, nine, and son Cael, 11), downtown, and amenities; a large yard; and a five-bedroom, 3½-bath single-story design with dramatic angles and wood beams. Weaknesses included a tiny outdated kitchen, drab finishes, and a 1990s family room addition that, while dramatic, felt out of scale and sync with the rest of the mid-century home.

“The layout was confusing, but the soaring ceiling in the family room kept us coming back,” says Sarah. She and her husband couldn’t stop thinking about the house long after they had left. “It was such a surprise,” she says. “It’s unassuming from the street, but then you walk in and there’s this wow factor.”

Extending that wow factor to the rest of the house and reorganizing spaces for better livability were among the renovation goals. For help, the couple teamed up with interior designer Laura Zender, whom Sarah called right after the couple closed on the house to get referrals for local builders and architects.

Their solutions included moving and expanding the kitchen, opening it up to the adjacent family room, and joining the two spaces visually with white paint and dark trim. “To make it the house we wanted, I knew the kitchen needed to be more in the center of the house,” says Sarah. “We’re pretty casual, even when we entertain. I love to be able to be in the kitchen while the kids are doing their homework or playing a game and we’re all still together.” A new bar makes it a great grown-up space as well.

Other changes include a new mudroom, office, powder room, and master bath. Interiors draw inspiration from both the ▶



home's period architecture and Jay's West Coast roots. "Jay is from California, and Sarah wanted to use Palm Springs as inspiration," explains Laura, who helped the couple integrate furnishings and artwork they already owned with carefully chosen new additions. "We looked for anything fun, funky, and nature-inspired in their chosen palette."

Examples include the moody-green wall in the master bedroom and the adventurous wallpaper in the powder room. "I'd been saving the wallpaper on my Pinterest board for about two years before Sarah presented it as an idea for her room," says Laura. "That's how I knew we were a good match. It's a bold choice, and I was thrilled they were willing to go for it."

Sarah was equally thrilled with the successful partnership—and with the results



of the 11-month process: "I had a pretty strong vision for this house, but Laura helped me execute that vision and really elevate it to the next level. She took my ideas—and countless Pinterest boards!—and converted them into a home that is cohesive and thoughtfully designed yet still very us. We couldn't be happier." ⚡ For resources, see page 94.

**Above:** A deep-green wall adds drama in the master bedroom. Instead of buying all new, Laura helped the family see their old stuff with fresh eyes, incorporating preexisting art and other pieces into the new space as well as adding a couple of new-to-them antiques. **Right:** Bold, large-scale-patterned wallpaper and simple white subway tile counterbalance each other in the new powder room. **Left:** The Finnaes, who lived in the basement during the renovation, hang out in the new family room, which looks out over a large backyard.



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The new powder room is stunning without taking itself too seriously.  
—LAURA ZENDER, INTERIOR DESIGNER