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Gather on the Porch

15 PROJECTS TO MAKE IT PRETTY

country REFLECTIONS

A CONNECTICUT FAMILY SHAPES AN 1850s BARN INTO A NOSTALGIC HOME THAT CONNECTS WITH NATURE.

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PHOTOGRAPHED BY REED DAVIS

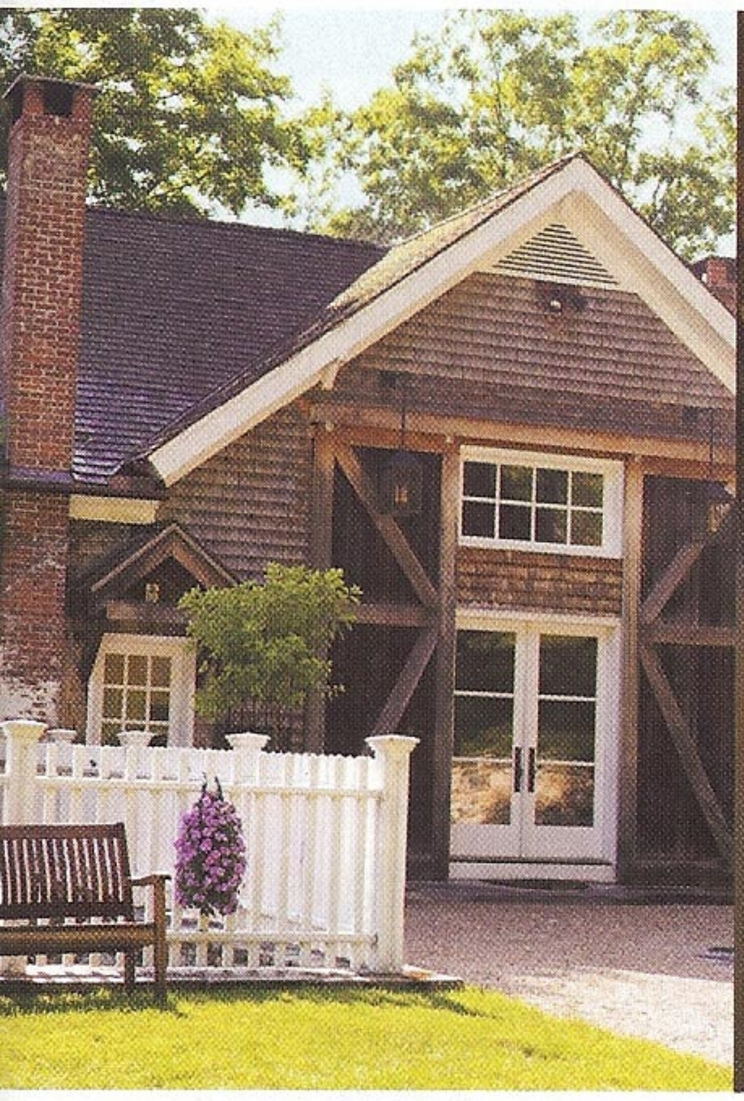
Buttery sunlight and blue sky stream white-bright through walls of windows at Rita Knudsen's Connecticut home. "It's so open, and with all the glass, the country is in the house at the same time as out," Rita says.

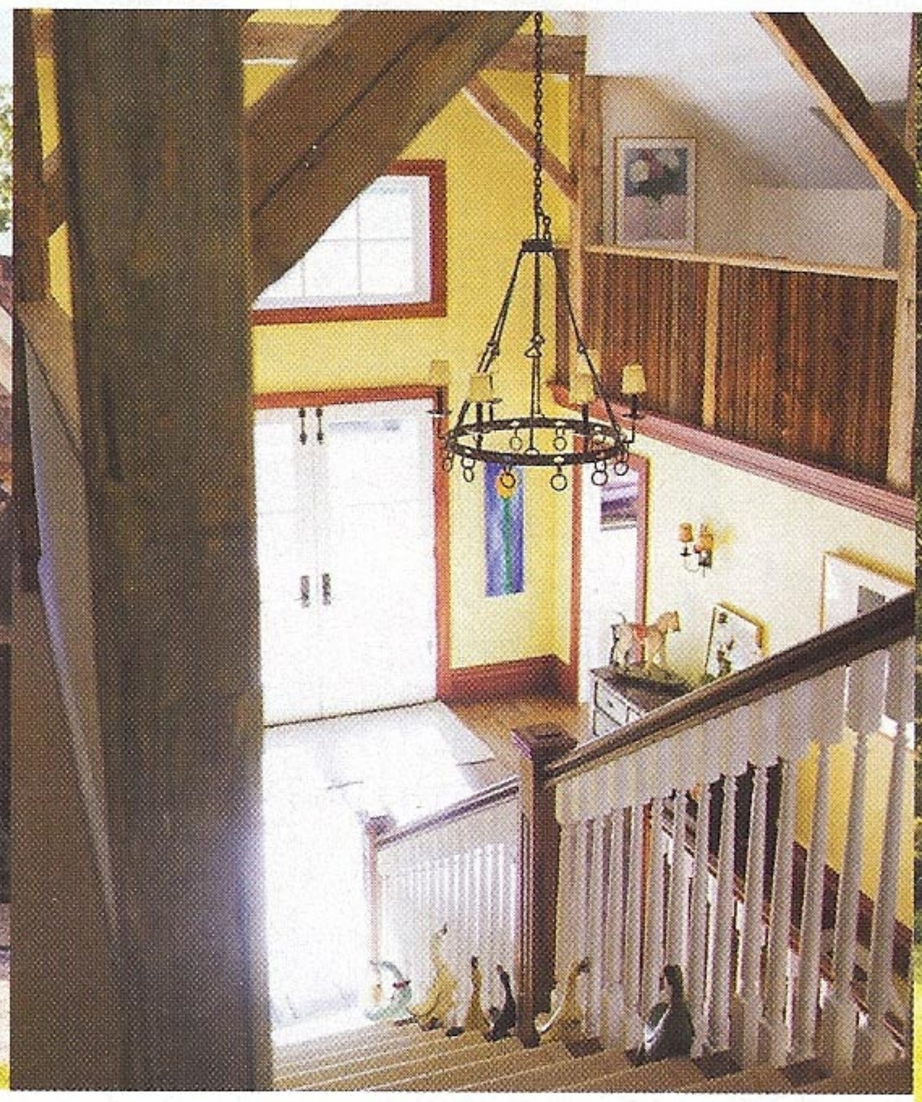
With husband Colin, Rita found this cedar-shake abode in a thicket of trees more than a decade ago. Originally built in 1850 as a barn on a working farm, the house was so hidden that it became a project to clear away old growth. In doing so, the Knudsens opened up glimpses of the gurgling stream that wends through the property and ends in a soul-soothing waterfall that splashes year-round. They also created crystalline views that allow every morning to begin on a serene note. Rita's four children skip through culverts and catch fat trout. On summer nights, friends gather on the patio and along the rebuilt pergola, a cocoon where grapevines wind through lattice.

"All of our personalities melded into what our home is," says Rita, who accentuated the home's barnlike feel by handpicking antique wood beams from a Pennsylvania warehouse. The dark knotty wood adds dimension and authenticity to the two-story foyer, where steep staircases were rebuilt into gradually ascending ones. Upstairs, Rita divided a flat into two cozy bedrooms and two baths, imbued with character from vintage-style fixtures.

Fabrics and furniture simultaneously reflect sophistication and whimsy: Handcrafted textiles, made vivid with fruit and vegetable dyes, complement eclectic antiques and curious finds from abroad. Where you least expect it, Rita uses unusual keepsakes as furniture, such as a child's daybed from India posing as a living room coffee table.

Every hutch, stool, and wall hanging is a piece Rita loves. "I never buy one thing because it's going to fit perfectly," she says. "I buy it because it's amazing and beautiful. I buy because it's insanely gorgeous and it's one of a kind. If you love what you buy, it's going to work."





OPPOSITE A hand-painted table bounces sunlight off cheery dining room walls. **ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT** Maintaining elements of the original barn, including this door, preserves the authentic tone of the Knudsen home. The addition of knotty, hand-hewn beams in the two-story entryway furthers the feel of a barn, where today stone geese march up the stairway. Just outside the door, nature's beauty awaits; the Knudsen kids take full advantage of all the country amenities, including a handmade tree swing.

LEFT Bringing in bamboo shades to complement a teak bench injects a touch of Zen into Rita's country bath. **BELOW** Folk-art dolls from Rhode Island find the perfect perch on a whimsical hand-painted cabinet. **OPPOSITE** A soft blue on the walls makes the perfect canvas for Rita to layer on color in bedding, a bauble-framed mirror, and bright cabinet knobs.

EXPRESS YOUR PERSONAL STYLE

RITA KNUDSEN'S HOME IS ALL ABOUT LIVING WITH WHAT SHE LOVES. RITA BUYS ONLY THINGS THAT SPEAK TO HER, THEN FINDS WAYS TO MAKE THE MIX SING.

SEEK BALANCE When a sunny-yellow wooden chest caught Rita's eye in Mexico, she didn't hesitate to bring it home. She balanced the bright tone (nice for a child's room) with an array of pastel-hue handmade dolls.

INJECT UNEXPECTED DELIGHTS Rita's bathroom began as pure country, with a cast-iron claw-foot tub, old-fashioned sconces, and white-painted beaded-board wainscoting. A sleek, Asian-style wooden bench adds a wonderful surprise to the vignette.

WELCOME WHIMSY Fanciful moments can be found throughout Rita's home, from the rocking horse in the entry to the geese on the stairs and the girly, hand-painted twin beds upstairs. Pairing the curves and stripes of the beds with vintage patterns on linens and pillows creates a room where it's impossible not to smile.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, TURN TO SOURCES BEGINNING ON PAGE 106.