

# Smart Style

Photographs by Chris Edwards



**To give the home's breakfast room personality and texture, Carpenter added a bold west elm rug and grass cloth walls.**

Rippling steel fences stand in Kevin Carpenter's flat backyard like subway walls in a commuter station. Fashioned from corrugated roofing, the low-cost panels are nailed to hefty posts; small juniper trees and potted shrubs enhance them. Colorful wine bottles jut from limbs of a nearby tree. The view looks like an art installation, but it's a smart ordering of open space. The fences give privacy, and behind them hide a tool shed and se-

cret garden. Carpenter, an interior designer, has classed up a frugal space with artistic flair.

"I have a thing about corrugated steel," confesses the forty-three-year-old designer with Meyer Greeson Paullin Benson, a firm known for its elegant and often grand architectural designs. He's added more of it above the front door, to make a stiff awning. Carpenter and his partner, Jerry Chabica, purchased the small house off Eastway Drive four years ago to stretch their dollars. After remodeling and upgrading a string of homes, they were ready to buy a mountain house getaway. To afford it, they selected this solid 1955 ranch as their weekday hub. Slightly more than 1,100 square feet, it sits on a street lined with similar houses built during the postwar boom, and provides them with a yard for gardening and entertaining. Although Carpenter may spend his days talking to clients about where to place French and English antiques, or what shade of silk to choose for draperies, at home he yields to the simple forms and bold graphic designs of midcentury modern design. It's not his favorite period—he doesn't have one, actually, because he loves them all—but in this diminutive space, it's the script for a confident style statement.

From the beginning, the house required an imaginative eye. "The exterior siding was aqua when we bought it," he recalls. Now a crisp black brown, it adds a handsome accent to the red brick. Inside, bright colors expand the space, pushing out the small square footage with bold patterns. The kitchen was gutted and a fresh palette introduced through big blocks of color in new flooring. Carpenter selected Marmoleum, an eco-friendly version of linoleum, in blue, brown, and cream. "It really suited the nature of the house, the age of the house," he says, adding, "The product could have been in a 1955 house—it could have been in a 1925 house." The do-it-yourselfers painted the walls brown and installed IKEA shelving, lighting, and powder-blue cabinetry.

A breakfast room adjoins the kitchen. Its walls are covered in natural grass cloth hung with art and mementos from travels, including contemporary lace from Slovenia and a white silhouette clock from Amsterdam, a cheeky spoofer on wooden cuckoo clocks of the Black Forest. A boldly patterned rug unifies the breakfast table, computer station, sofa, and cabinet filled with vintage Temporama china, a pattern popular in the 1950s and '60s. "I was in Blowing Rock years ago and bought, still in the original boxes, a four-piece place setting," Carpenter says. He's built up a hefty inventory with purchases on

eBay.

The house skips with color and, like the beautifully landscaped yard, thrives on variety. It's filled with paintings, posters, lamps, and art objects that hold personal meaning. An amateur photographer, Carpenter has placed one of his nature photographs in a prominent position in the living room. A study of leaves on an autumn day, it shimmers under special lighting. The rich greens serve as a counterpoint to a bold red poster advertising a psychic popular in the years following World War I. The turbaned head of "Alexander, The Man Who Knows" floats on a wall, gazing steadily outward. The room's eclectic furnishings—a pair of Danish modern chairs reupholstered in stripes, a petrified wood table, a turquoise chair and ottoman, a bright green coffee table, and a contemporary pole lamp by American designer Thomas O'Brien—are bound together by the stark black baseboards. "I did that to ground the room," Carpenter says. The room also has a mix-and-match of textures, including pale linen drapes with a large brown motif framing the corner window.

"This room is very awkward because it is narrow and long," Carpenter explains. "There's no way of centering the sofa." When placed under the window, the sofa was too long, going well beyond the window. To solve this design dilemma, he hung a drapery panel across a large section of wall, as though the window continues behind it. This trick, and the arrangement of the seating and accessories, makes the space comfortable and cozy, subjecting its quirkier elements to a useful order.

"I enjoy interiors that are fun, that don't take themselves real seriously," he says. "We live in houses. We should be able to live in them, not live around the furniture that is in them. You should enjoy your house."

*For the spring 2009 issue of this magazine, Laurie Prince wrote about the Foxcroft home of a family of seven.*