

PUTTING DOWN ROOTS

AIMING TO EXPRESS THE DESIGN INFLUENCES OF THEIR NATIVE NORWAY, A COUPLE UNDERTAKES A DOWN-TO-THE-STUDS RENOVATION OF A NEW ENGLAND HOUSE TO MAKE IT FEEL LIKE HOME.



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ABOVE An antique rail with porcelain-and-brass hooks turns a back entrance in Ingunn and Torggrim Joergensen's house into a handy mudroom. The cedar trunk and rustic barn door are from local antiques stores. **OPPOSITE** Ingunn and Torggrim are childhood sweethearts who grew up on an island in Norway. They moved to Maine for a short-term assignment for Torggrim's work, never imagining they'd make a life here. But their whole family, including now-grown children Milla and Jacob, fell in love with the community.





ABOVE Salvaged from Rockland Harbor, a knotty old beam gives the house a feeling of age. One of Ingunn's paintings hangs above a folding bench bought at a flea market. **ABOVE RIGHT** The Joergensens' Cape Cod-style house in Kennebunkport, Maine, was built in 1996. They made minor tweaks to the outside but moved walls and peeled back the interior to the studs in order to infuse it with their native Scandinavian style. **OPPOSITE** Torgim made the dining table for their north-facing porch. He and Ingunn changed the porch columns from round to square to give the house a less classical, more Arts and Crafts feel.



t HERE ARE MANY WAYS TO CONVEY GRATITUDE, AND INGUNN Joergensen's way is to practice it daily with a simple thought: "Every single morning when I look at this house, I think, 'Holy cow, how blessed we are,'" she says. "It's kind of a love story. I'm not kidding."

But her devotion to the 1996 Cape Cod-style residence in Kennebunkport, Maine, wasn't always so strong. She and husband Torgim both grew up in Norway before immigrating to the States as adults. After five years of renting, they decided they would put down roots in the community where he works as a business developer and she as a fine artist.

They bought this house as a short sale because it had been terribly neglected. "It needed so much work, it was slightly overwhelming," Ingunn says. After more searching, they realized that might be a blessing. "We wanted a house we could make into our own, with an open living concept and a look that would be simple and unpretentious," she says. "We went back to see it on this beautiful winter day, with fresh snow and the sun shining, and we looked at each other and said, 'OK, this is it. This is the house.' It has such a great soul." A mile from town on several private acres, the house promised a lifestyle that reminded them of their homeland. They hike and ski, and Ingunn takes her two giant schnauzers to the nearby beach most mornings.

To give the house their preferred Scandinavian country style, they tore it back to the studs and relocated a powder room to open up the floor plan. "I love multifunctional rooms that flow into one another," Ingunn says. As they rebuilt, she likened the process to creating a soup: The broth was the minimalist surfaces of flat white or gray walls with squared window trim and no crown molding. The most important ingredient was the wood floor made from 10-inch-wide white oak planks that have been wire-brushed and oiled. "They're not low-maintenance—it takes me two to three hours to scrub them—but I wouldn't change them. I love them," she says. For garnish, she brought in flavorful elements like salvaged beams and wood that had been preserved under water during the area's logging past.

As an artist, Ingunn was happy to get her hands dirty to make the details right. When the top of the kitchen island arrived, the maple wood was an unappealing yellow tone. "I Googled how to make it gray, and I found a





ABOVE Dark gray walls create a cozy atmosphere in the living room. Eschewing crown molding for a crisp line around the ceiling makes the room feel modern. The concrete that was applied to the fireplace surround has a few cracks due to the heat, but Ingunn approves: "I love it even more. To me, imperfection is perfection."

guitar builder who does that," she says. So she followed his recipe, washing the raw wood with tea then using steel wool dipped in vinegar to blacken it. She aged another favorite surface, the hot-rolled steel that appears on the side of the island, by setting the steel out in the snow for several weeks until it rusted. And after plasterers finished skimming the fireplace wall with concrete, she sanded it until the surface had a velvety matte texture.

Many of the couple's furnishings remain in storage in Norway, so they started fresh in this house, with understated upholstery covered in natural materials. Ingunn designed a few pieces, such as the coffee table that mixes old wood and industrial metal, and she haunted flea markets and antiques shops. She likes things that have a story—several antique trunks came from old shipping vessels—and naturally pays close attention to the artwork. Some are her paintings (she's represented in a local gallery and online) and many are by friends or artists she admires. Other pieces, such as the portrait of a woman



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—HOMEOWNER INGUNN JOERGENSEN



that hangs in the living room, just speak to her. “I found her dusty and tucked away in an antiques store in town,” she says. “The portrait was printed on cloth and has a very elaborate gilded frame, so she must have meant a lot to someone.” Not everyone has been a fan of this particular piece. Ingunn’s grown children thought the woman’s eyes followed them around the room. “She has been quite the conversation piece over the years,” she says with a laugh.

The unique, art-filled home is a natural gathering place, which is precisely how the couple planned it. “We wanted a super-unpretentious house that people just feel welcome in,” she says. They never dreamed they would stay in Kennebunkport, but the community has embraced them. That warm feeling is mutual. “We have amazing friends here. People drop everything to help you,” she says. “We came from a place in Norway that’s pretty similar, but this place is hard to leave now. We’re very grateful.” □

ABOVE A favorite antiques store find, the old portrait is part of an artful composition Ingunn created combining potted plants and a cow’s skull sculpture on a weathered trunk. “My favorite surface is flaky,” she says. “I don’t like super-fancy things. I like to see the story in a piece.”





LEFT Ingunn loves the look and feel of hot-rolled steel and used it to wrap this side of the island. Soapstone countertops, which will age to the perfect-imperfect look she favors, were a splurge, but the couple saved money using stock cabinetry painted chic ebony.

ABOVE Casual wicker and slipcovered chairs pull up to the dining table where the Joergensens love to host dinner parties. The wood table has a few nicks and scratches from use, just like the white oak plank floors.

ABOVE RIGHT Chalk-finish paint and a wide shelf made from salvaged wood turn a long blank kitchen wall into a functional area. **RIGHT** A simple bookcase holds cookbooks and extra dishware in a typical composition that strikes a balance of lovely and useful. **BELOW RIGHT** The two prefer an open floor plan, so they didn't want the kitchen to feel strictly utilitarian. No upper cabinets means wall space for art and open shelves. **BELOW LEFT** Herbs and flowers grow near the kitchen, where a south-facing window catches light all day long.



THIS PHOTO A desk in daughter Milla's bedroom holds a small cabinet that came from Ingunn's great-grandparents.

A flea market rug warms the floor. Walls are painted the same white as the new trim around the windows. "The trim is simple. We didn't want anything ornamental. We wanted the architecture to feel clean, clean, clean, clean," Ingunn says.





LEFT To update the entryway, Ingunn installed slate tiles with subtle dark grout. Then she gave the stairs a clean, modern look by removing one railing and painting the treads black. **ABOVE** For a striking bathroom light fixture, Ingunn had electrical conduit pipe installed on the mirror frame and draped hanging lightbulbs over it. Slate tile floors are warm underfoot thanks to a radiant heat system installed throughout the house. **BELOW** In the peaceful master bedroom, Ingunn mixes tonal bedding in natural linens and cottons. A rustic trunk holds extra linens and serves as a side table.





ABOVE LEFT Just as she did in Norway, Ingunn cultivates plant life indoors and out, and always has cut flowers when in season. **ABOVE** The glass greenhouse was a Facebook Marketplace bargain, Ingunn says, "and that's where the easy part ended." It needed a proper foundation on their sloping yard, so they built one from old railroad ties.

BELOW "One of the reasons we fell for this property was the big, beautiful mossy roof on the garden shed," Ingunn says. They've since turned it into the coop for their chickens.

OPPOSITE To create the earthy floor of their greenhouse, Ingunn and Torgrim pulled up old bricks from a pathway they no longer needed; a stonemason friend made them into a floor. They mainly use the space to relax and commune with nature or enjoy cocktails with friends. "It's a peaceful place to be," she says.



