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Having owned King Charles spaniels, the Pedens delight in the art that lines their stairwell. *Facing page:* House and setting are enchanting, from the original siding and numerous collections to the mossy stone walls.



Acquiring



Minds



Vintage guitars, Staffordshire dogs, pre-war train sets—a Litchfield County couple's eclectic collections are right at home in a lovingly refurbished 1750 colonial.



Text by Megan Fulweiler • Photography by Laura Moss • Architecture:
Charles Myer, Charles R. Myer & Partners • Interior design: Paulette
Peden, Dawn Hill Antiques • Produced by Karin Lidbeck Brent



Okay, a room devoted to trains—as in shelves and shelves of colorful locomotives—is a bit unusual. And one or two dog paintings are delightful, but a stairwell chock-full of winsome canines? John and Paulette Peden are well aware that their penchant for surrounding themselves with great numbers of the eclectic items they love is not something everybody understands. You either get it or you don't, the couple is quick to admit.

Collecting is the Pedens' passion, and it just so happens that these artful souls also have an incredible knack for display. Their popular shop, Dawn Hill Antiques in New Preston, is renowned for beautiful eighteenth- and nineteenth-century finds. John is a photographer who specializes in capturing well-known musicians (think Bob Dylan and The

Rolling Stones) and high-end guitars, too. His latest project—a coffee table book entitled *The Guitar Collection*—can be found in bookstores.

Not don't-touch-this, don't-touch-that kind of people, they use their treasures in their everyday lives. Their classic porch furniture hails from the 1920s. On chilly nights, guests snuggle down under hand-stitched century-old quilts. Clearly, this duo couldn't move into just any old house. Their collections required a fitting background and room to expand.

Granted, a traditional 1750 center-chimney colonial isn't the most spacious of home designs. But here's where the magic comes in. The original house, its chestnut siding amazingly still intact and its dear blue shutters framing the



Clockwise from left: The homeowners replaced the living room's barn siding with handsome paneling. Paintings of mythical animals and nineteenth-century English transferware form an engaging tableau. The two-story addition is a harmonious addendum to the house. Like the house, the grounds appear timeless.





A vintage chandelier—"in the spirit of Brighton" says Paulette Peden—lights the porch. Facing page top: A raised hearth warms the kitchen. Facing page bottom left and right: A copper-screened porch adjacent to the kitchen is a favorite spot for the Pedens.

front door, is what you see as you approach. The poetically rural setting complete with rippling river, stone walls, sugar maples and flower gardens evokes thoughts of England. Not visible until you circle around the house is the grand addition that makes this Litchfield County dwelling as livable as it is lovable. Indeed, it's the best of two worlds.

Like Mr. Blandings's dream house, though, the country retreat also had its share of problems. Previous alterations had undermined the original structure's character. Determined to recapture its true essence, the proud new owners set out to find an architect. They interviewed several, but when Cambridge, Massachusetts, architect Charles Myer "lit up" upon seeing the owners' exuberant collections, John says, the choice was obvious. And, as time would prove, so fortunate. Like the Pedens, Myer was enamored with what he calls a "truly beautiful house."

To salvage its antique charm, modern additions were peeled away and the original house was gutted and painstakingly reconstructed. At the same time, Myer added two more-appropriate wings—one to hold the porch and the other the kitchen, with a spacious sunlit arcade and two bedrooms above. The hilly site could have been a nightmare. But Myer, along with project architect Susan Dunbar, devised the clever idea of "locking the building into the hill using a series of stone walls, terraces and steps," Myer says.

The skillful excavations put today's kitchen several feet below grade. Standing at the sink, the owners look directly into the garden. "We can go eyeball to eyeball with a rabbit," John exclaims. The twelve-foot-wide garden is framed with a stone wall sheathed in espaliered fruit trees. All the property's stone walls are dry-laid, of course, as they would have

been centuries ago. The owners have topped them here and there with diminutive antique sculptures. (Garden antiques are among their shop's hot sellers.) Like the stones, the sculptures are slowly gaining a mossy patina. "We've been so lucky. Damp weather has made the moss flourish," Paulette recounts happily.

The spacious copper-screened porch adjoins the kitchen.





How anyone can tear himself away from this welcoming room is hard to imagine. In an area where many houses sport fireplaces but few are ever enlisted for cooking, the Pedens' raised hearth is a weekend work-horse. Non-cooks claim a vintage Kem Weber armchair and direct, or pitch in and fix a salad at the cherrywood island.

"The owners really wanted to reference the old house, and they understood how the nature of certain materials could help bring the place back to life," says Myer. Case in point: all the cabinets, whose design and knobs were inspired by a late eighteenth-century cupboard, were given an oil finish to heighten the wood's luster. New walls were hand-plastered to provide an authentic texture.

The decor teems with the couple's finds, giving the space a highly personal feel. Whereas some of us can barely decide where to station a plant, Paulette mixes with assurance. One cupboard holds a stash of McCoy pottery from the '30s and '40s, French turn-of-the-century plates

and splendidly decorated midcentury Burleigh Ware jugs. "The house came first and then the shop followed," Paulette says. "We started decorating with our collections and realized we had enough to launch a store."

Nineteenth-century Staffordshire dogs atop the living room mantel look positively smug next to John's hoard of vinyl records. And that sleek '50s Fender guitar resting on a nineteenth-century lolling chair? The perfect touch. Paulette and John are masters at matching disparate collections. What's more, they adore each and every piece. (John also has a business selling vintage Fender guitars and amps.) In truth, that's probably the key to their engaging decoration. When they moved in, the living room was clad in barn siding. Today's newly installed raised paneling better speaks to the home's age. The antique Oriental rug couldn't have found a more idyllic spot. "Everything in the house is old except the TV," Paulette admits with a laugh.

And where do the owners head when they want to catch a favorite show? The train room, of course. In addition to rows of fantastic pre-war trains, there's a couch and vintage chairs for kicking back, something it's hard to imagine this wonderfully creative couple ever really have time to do. •

Resources For more information about this home, see page 124.





The train room's vintage arm chair keeps company with a wee stool snagged at a flea market. Pre-war stamped-steel Lionel trains form the bulk of the Pedens' collection. Facing page top: The guest room's interior windows borrow hall light.