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NEW Country

WITH A DEFT MIX OF THEN AND NOW, DESIGNER ALLISON WILLSON CREATES A RETREAT WITH THE HEART AND SOUL OF A MODERN FARMHOUSE.

Design by **ALLISON WILLSON** | *Text by* **BARBARA SGROI** | *Photography by* **VALERIE WILCOX**

On the open-plan main floor, designer Allison Willson defined the living room with carefully placed furniture and a rug to ground the space. **White armchairs** (flanking fireplace), Sarah Richardson Design; **white and wrought-iron accent chairs**, Elte; **footstool**, Snob.



BELOW: Like a giant exclamation mark, a wall-mounted, oil-rubbed bronze charger and handsome pendant anchor the living room. **Pendant**, Georgian Design Centre; **charger** by Martha Sturdy, Hollace Cluny; **console**, The Door Store.



Homeowners Heather and her husband, Jonathan, with their two kids, Vivienne, 7, and George, 3.

The beauty of a home is not found in the things,



but in the accumulation of experiences and memories within its walls. It's the pencilled lines on the kitchen door frame marking a child's growing height, the bonks on the mudroom's wooden bench made by years of joyfully kicked-off winter boots and the dribbles of wax on the front porch step left by Halloween pumpkins. But when this young Toronto family — two busy professionals, Heather and her husband, Jonathan, and their two kids, Vivienne and George — moved into their new country home in Kimberley, Ont., two years ago, it was a blank slate: the paint was barely dry, the woodwork was pristine and the floors were still unscathed by the posse of little feet to come.

Purchased in 2016, the 20-hectare property had nothing more than a long-abandoned farmhouse and an old barn on it, but the panoramic view of fabled Beaver Valley was so spectacular it gave Heather and Jonathan goosebumps. "Looking back,

WE WANTED TO BRING IN AS MUCH NATURAL LIGHT AS POSSIBLE, AND CREATE A CONNECTION BETWEEN INDOORS AND OUT

-Heather, homeowner



In the mudroom, an antique pine bench is practical and “adds a sense of history to a new space,” says Allison.

Bench, Vintage Fine Objects; **rug**, Elte; **wall colour** (throughout), Simply White (OC-117), Benjamin Moore.

OPPOSITE, BOTTOM: From the left, the principal bedroom, covered patio and hallway connect to the great room and porch. The mudroom leads to the guest bedroom and children’s bedrooms on the second floor.

WEB

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"That table is indestructible!" says Heather of the dining area's rustic, kidproof wooden table. "Every stain and spill just adds a memory and more character." **Dining table, RH; dining chairs, Crate & Barrel; antique pine dresser, Cristina's Antiques; mirror, Serena & Lily.** **OPPOSITE:** In the entry, a vignette of casually arranged flowers, found antlers and a pastoral landscape set the tone the minute you walk in. **Cabinet, Alf's Antiques; table lamp, Elte; custom mirror, Elgin Picture & Frame.**





Get the Look

New Traditional Greer Framed **wall mirror** by Distinctly Home, \$450. At Hudson's Bay.

Janeen **table lamp** in White, \$760. At Robinson.

The Whole Point **painting** by Jennifer Harwood, \$350. Through Art Interiors.



Medium Joshua **vase** in Black, \$98. At Pottery Barn.



Barnboard **sideboard** in Reclaimed Wood and Clear Finish, \$2,193. At St. Jacobs Furnishings.

Handwoven Rigo Jute **rug** in Off White by NuLoom, \$80. At The Home Depot.

Wicker Bay Rattan **umbrella basket**, \$120. At The Home Depot.



buying the property was quite a leap of faith," says Heather. "Our daughter was three years old, our son just four weeks old, and we had never built a house before. But it ended up being one of the best decisions we've ever made. We wanted a place for us, but also for our larger family — I grew up with a big extended family, and those times together were the best memories of my childhood."

The 4,000-square-foot, five-bedroom home they envisioned and had built is a series of interconnected clapboard-clad structures in streamlined, iconic shapes that are inspired by the agrarian aesthetic of the farmland that surrounds it. "We wanted a house we could grow into over the years," says Heather. Also on their wish list? High ceilings, white walls, oversized windows and a sense of spaciousness. "We wanted to bring in as much natural light as possible, and create a connection between indoors and out." As the kids dive into piles of leaves that whiz by the windows in a happy blur of autumn colours, Heather adds with a smile, "We wanted to *feel* the seasons."

The build took a year, but the couple had been thinking about this project for much longer and were confident about the look and feel they were after. For help, they turned to their dear friend,

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Produced by Jennifer Koper (Get the Look)

"Quintessential farmhouse touches such as wrought-iron shelf brackets, antique dishes and cutting boards create the casual aesthetic we wanted," says Allison. **Range**, KitchenAid; **counters, backsplash**, Caesarstone; **stools**, Elte Mkt. **OPPOSITE, TOP LEFT:** At lunchtime, daily bread from the local bakery is served, farm-style, on simple white dishes. **OPPOSITE, BOTTOM RIGHT:** Field flowers picked on the property decorate the hallway linking the great room to the principal bedroom. **Table**, The Door Store; **pendants**, CB2.





With their low-sheen finish, reclaimed elm floors are practical and low-maintenance in a high-traffic area like the kitchen.



Toronto designer Allison Willson, who had worked with them on the decorating of the family's home in Toronto. "The exterior architecture inspired a contemporary farmhouse look," says Allison, adding that the challenge was to bring warmth and authenticity to the new-build with its wall-to-wall white interior "that's buried in snow half of the year." So she layered in textures that were as comforting to the eyes as to the touch (think nubby bouclé-covered chairs, braided wool and sisal rugs, reclaimed elm floors, a neutral palette and a carefully calibrated mix of clean-lined contemporary furniture and vintage pieces blessed with the patina of age). "The goal was to make this new house feel lived in and reflective of the family who lives here," says Allison.

Now that the family spends every weekend and holiday at this home, as the seasons change so, too, do the signs of country life: there are skis and snowshoes in the mudroom during the winter, and hiking boots and bathing suits are strewn about all summer long. There's a firepit for marshmallow-toasting outside, a telescope poised for stargazing in the backyard and Muskoka chairs on the patio for

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LEFT: The principal bedroom's clean-lined headboard and neutral grey, linen and cream palette create a calming vibe. **Nightstand, RH; table lamp, Serena & Lily.**

BOTTOM LEFT: A pair of cosy bouclé-covered chairs by the bedroom's picture window are the perfect spot to enjoy the view. **Armchairs, Cornerstone Home Interiors; coffee table, Elte Mkt.**

BOTTOM RIGHT: A new dresser made from reclaimed wood adds texture and history. **Dresser, Pottery Barn; mirror, RH; pendant (reflected in mirror), Wil & Co.**

watching surprise performances. "Late in the evening, there are hundreds of fireflies," says Heather. "It's such an incredible light show that sometimes we can't help but wake the kids up to see it."

Since they built the house, Heather and Jonathan play host for all family holidays. Thanksgiving is a buzz of happy noise as parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins arrive to celebrate the season, stay for the weekend and gather round the dining table for a big turkey dinner complete with the fall harvest from their vegetable garden. And at Christmas, everybody hikes through the snow on the property in search of the best tree to cut down and drag home for decorating. "For years, our parents have created happy memories and holiday traditions for each of our families," says Heather. "Now, my husband and I are so grateful that we can do that for them." **H&H**





“We knew we wanted a soaking tub where you could have some quiet time,” says Heather. The stone tile floor and jute rug echo the home’s organic decorating. **Tub**, Mirolin; **chair**, CB2; **accent table**, EQ3; **rug**, Dash & Albert.