

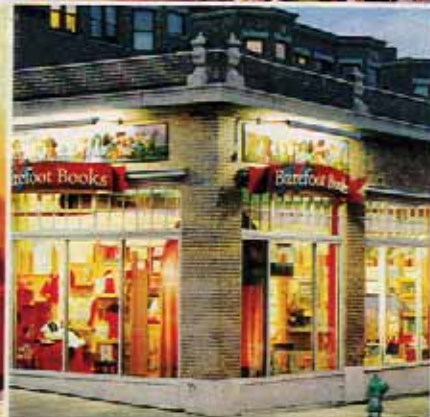
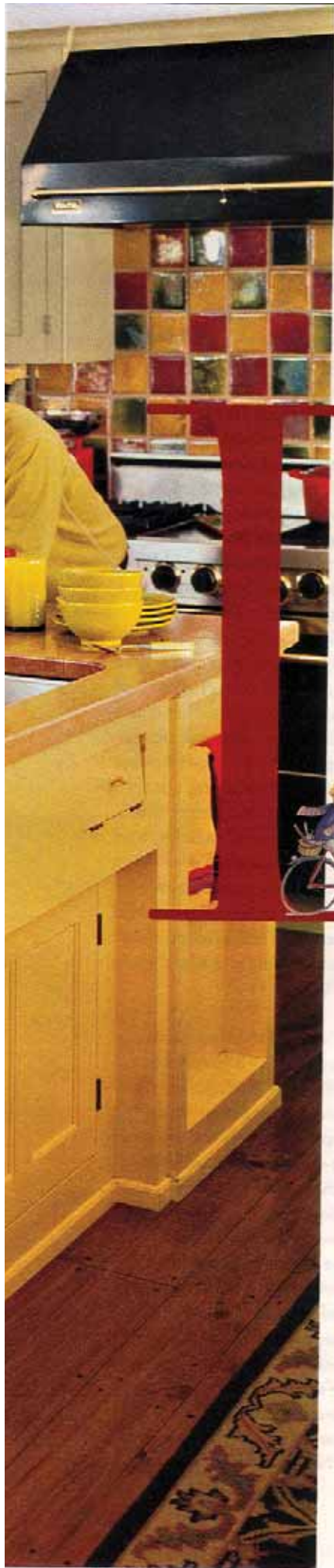
In her renovated home, Nancy Traversy created a children's reading room featuring open shelves packed with books she publishes (one of the books' characters appears below). Daughter Erin emerges from the Dutch door. (See our related story, Reading Club, page 178).

It's a storybook life

BY KRISTINE KENNEDY PHOTOS BY EDMUND BARR PRODUCED BY STACY KUNSTEL



"It's a space you live in, so why not make it comfortable?" says Nancy of the kitchen. The sofa is a place for sleepy kids to hang out in the morning or for Nancy to work on her laptop. Breakfast is eaten and coloring done at the table alongside the island. On Sundays, Martin, the chef in the family, whips up the kids' favorite: roast beef with Yorkshire pudding and gravy.

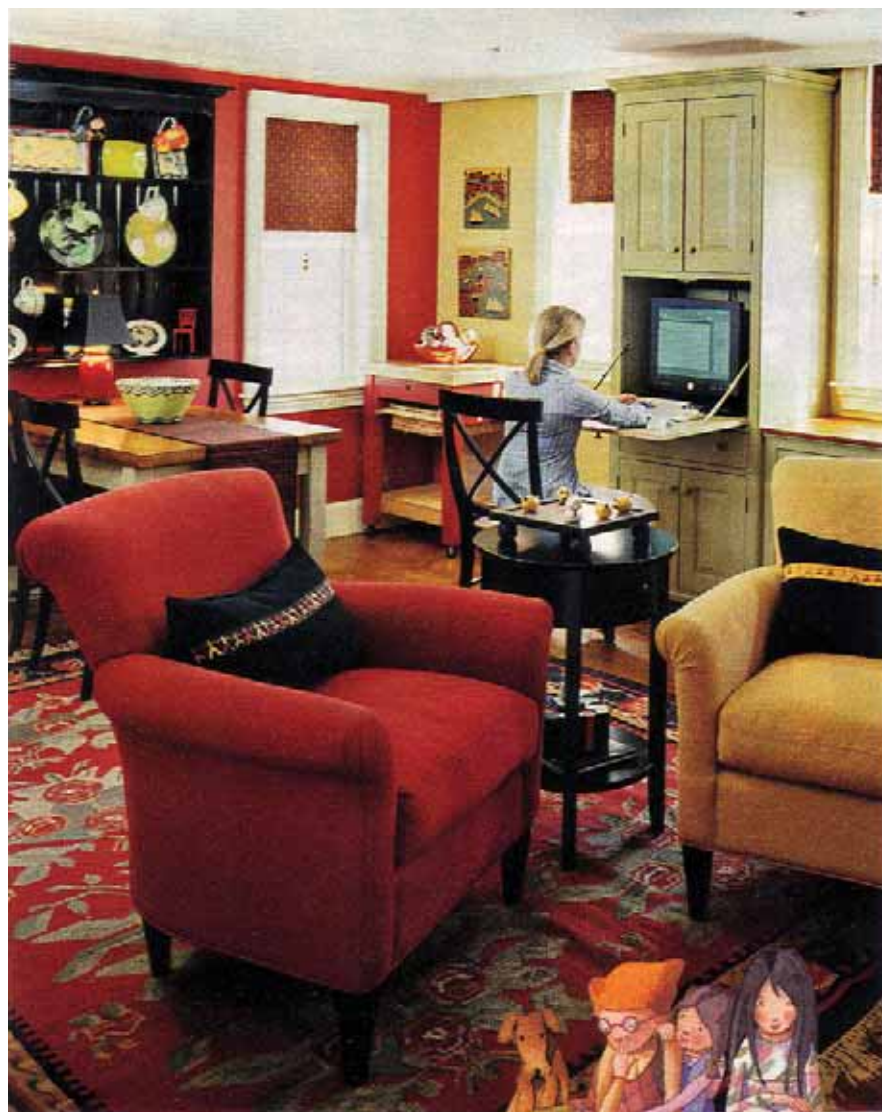


ike one of the daring characters in the children's books she publishes,

Nancy Traversy is living colorfully, after moving her family from England to Concord, Massachusetts. Her use of art and story to cultivate children's tolerance, curiosity, and imagination guides her company, Barefoot Books. Nancy's philosophy extends from her business plan to her personal life and determines how she raises her four children and spends her time. It also inspired the design of her fanciful home.

"I never really knew I could do any design until I started doing books," says Canadian-born Nancy, who worked in finance in England for many years, although she didn't fit the corporate mold. These days, a full expression of her whimsical aesthetic is obvious in the home that she shares with husband Martin Lueck, daughters Meaghan, 13, Kristen, 11, Erin, 10, and son Jordie, 8. Their straight-laced Colonial, built in the 1790s, belies the enchanted atmosphere inside. "With books, we've tried to create stories and art that are innovative, imaginative, quirky, and have a sense of the unexpected," says Nancy. "When we moved into this house, I thought, 'I want it to be imaginative, I want it to be unexpected.'"

Nancy (above left) says she was brave enough to decorate her home the way she did "because I'd just done this completely mad store." Located in Cambridge, Massachusetts, Barefoot Books (top and above right) shares her home's color scheme and its drama. In the store, banners hang from the ceiling and a reading throne graces a platform.



Because of numerous additions and renovations over the years, including Nancy and Martin's kitchen redo, the home's structure has a fun-house quality with multifarious floor and ceiling elevations and three quirky staircases. Layered onto this eccentric floor plan is what, at first, appears to be an unbridled display of colors, patterns, and shapes. Once eyes have adjusted and the mind accepts that it has entered a fantastical place, the home's carefully coordinated contemporary design comes into focus.

As a starting point, Nancy turned to a collection of original art by Rachel Griffin, a textile artist whose work illustrates some of the Barefoot Books. Griffin's art is playful enough for kids yet sophisticated enough for adults, a description that also fits the house.

Nancy's beloved colors of red, ochre, purple, and black are used in various combinations, and are always grounded by chartreuse—one color that runs throughout the rooms. This palette also regularly appears in Barefoot Books. The predominant repeating pattern throughout the house is a sporty checkerboard, on rugs, candlesticks, and shower curtains. Nancy's painstaking attention to detail is evident everywhere: beads edge curtain valances, a colorful tile pattern accents the kitchen range area, and exactly the right shade of green highlights a floor.



The kitchen is long and multifunctional with two areas divided by a double-sided fireplace (right). "I love coming home from work and having a warm and enclosed comfortable space," says Nancy. On one end of the two-room space (above left) are upholstered chairs facing the fireplace and two pull-down desks where the kids can do homework. The display shelf, an inexpensive piece from a previous kitchen, is painted high-gloss black for a sophisticated touch. The foyer (left), which is painted mostly shades of green, is more monochromatic than most of the house. "There's so much happening in all the rooms around it, I feel like it's nice to have a little oasis of calm and simple in the middle," says Nancy.

A photograph of a living room with a red accent wall, a white fireplace mantel, a striped sofa, and a dining table with chairs. A young girl is standing in the background near a doorway. The room is decorated with various pillows, a lamp, and framed pictures.

As long as
you know the
colors work
overall, it
doesn't really
matter which
color you use
on which
surface.

NANCY TRAVERSY



When Nancy and Martin acquired the house in 2001, they liked its large size but not its small powder blue kitchen. "I saw it and thought: We need a heart to this home," says Nancy. "We could be in the kitchen and the kids could be doing their homework, and we'd all be together." Thus began an 18-month renovation that expanded the kitchen, opening it in two directions. The new space has room for a sofa, many seats for breakfast and homework, and a double-sided fireplace. The house design is geared toward family life and nurturing children, the same goals that Nancy had when she started her book business.

After she left the corporate world, Nancy joined a small design company in a financial role. "Through that period I became more interested in things that were visual," she says. She then started a consulting agency to help small creative businesses get off the ground. That's when she met Tessa Strickland, a Random House editor who wanted to start a children's book publishing company. The two joined forces in 1993, launching Barefoot Books from their living rooms. "We felt there was a need to expose children to the values and traditions of other cultures," says Nancy, who

The children have always shared bedrooms (right). Textile art by Rachel Griffin hangs above the bedroom fireplace. Nancy customized a catalog chest (above) with painted stripes and new fabric panels. At the windows, \$20/yard crepe fabric is stitched in dramatic shapes and accented by small amounts of a more expensive designer fabric in a star pattern.







has taken her children to Europe, Australia, South Africa, and Egypt. To illustrate the words, the women chose to hire undiscovered artists who could blossom with them. The artists were affordable and often more distinctive than well-known illustrators. "We wanted to put equal emphasis on the art," she says.

By 1998, Nancy thought it was time to focus on the North American market. "By this time I had about 16 employees coming into my house every day, and I had four kids under 6," she says. To bring this grassroots business approach to America, Nancy knew she'd have to move here.

While Barefoot Books sells books and related products directly from its Cambridge store, catalog, and Web site (www.barefoot-books.com), one of their grassroots efforts was to launch a program based on Nancy and Tessa's experience starting out. The Stall Holder program lets parents who need a flexible schedule sell the books directly from their homes. "Women like us, they are people who see that we started from home, we had kids," says Nancy. "We know about trying to balance."

In her home, Nancy's love of playful, colorful design sets the scene for a fulfilling family lifestyle. "The children's clearest family images are in the kitchen, Sunday dinner, and in their rooms at night," says Nancy, whose personal life is also enhanced by her design. "What I wear, what I want to be surrounded by, and my books, they're all the same," she says. "I think it's very unusual to have something that goes right through your life." ☛

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The children share the bathroom (above), located between two bedrooms. For the kids' vanity and shower wall (left), Nancy had several tiles custom made to match her color scheme, and then filled in with inexpensive white tiles. The multicolor check shower curtain fabric is repeated in the bathroom window treatment.