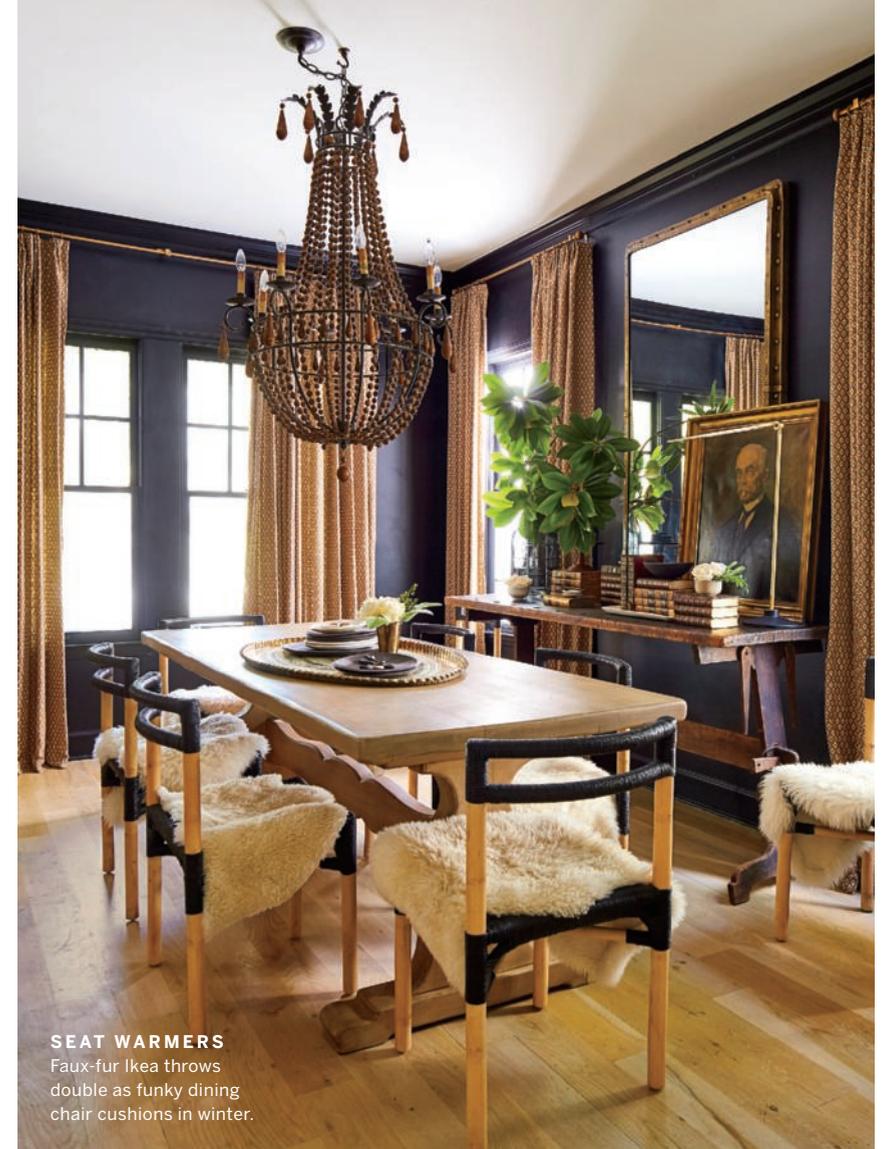


A VERY GOOD POINT

The framer realized that by adding a jumbo (22-foot-tall) gable to the house, they could create space for an extra bedroom while boosting curb appeal.



SEAT WARMERS
Faux-fur Ikea throws double as funky dining chair cushions in winter.

10 NEW RULES FOR COTTAGE STYLE

A small home can have big attitude. Birmingham decorator **Fran Keenan** proves it

BY KATHERINE OWEN
PHOTOGRAPHS BY HECTOR MANUEL SANCHEZ

“Working on family houses challenges me in a huge way,”

says decorator Fran Keenan. “You have to balance living in beauty with making it functional.” In 2012, she and her husband, Matt, moved with their three kids into a 2,500-square-foot cottage in Birmingham. The nearly 100-year-old home was in the right place but offered neither beauty nor function. Luckily, combining personality with practicality is what Keenan does best. She then kicked off a six-month renovation that involved finding about 200 extra square feet and punching up the interiors. A new gable built on the front of the house created space for an extra bedroom, and Keenan eliminated a powder bath to add a pantry and laundry area. She then dialed the design all the way up with her signature style: vibrant and eclectic yet classic and smart. Imagine freehand-painted walls, wild animal prints, thrifty finds, and knockout color combos. Most importantly, though, it’s comfortable and works well for her family. “Great decorating is all about straddling that tension,” she explains. “It feels pulled together, but you can still come in and plop down. No room is off-limits.” Read on for Keenan’s 10 new rules for cottage style.



FRAN KEENAN



1 Throw in a Wild Card

In the breakfast nook, there’s a large sign that reads “Breakfast Lunch Dinner,” which Keenan purchased on a trip to Atlanta. “I had it laid out one day, and Matt asked if it was something I was giving away,” she recalls. “I said, ‘No, it’s going up!’ ” She scours flea markets, antiques shops, and even her own attic for objects and art that make cool (and totally original) statements.

PROP STYLING: FRAN KEENAN



SIGNATURE SHADE

Keenan repeated Pratt & Lambert’s Goldenberry (15-15) on the shelving at left and in the study.

2 Work Hard; Play Hard

The family needed a multipurpose area that was part laundry room, part mudroom, and part bar. The solution? She added a wall of cabinetry in the side hall off the kitchen. In that sliver of space, she hid a washer and dryer behind skirts made from Ikea fabric, set up a bar in the cabinets above them, and placed a prep sink to the side.

3 Shake Up the Order

Because Keenan prioritized a cozy breakfast nook (where the family eats together), she wasn’t able to configure the island so it was perfectly symmetrical in the space. She tried to make everything look balanced by aligning the island’s sink with the range and hood and was strategic about lighting. “Rather than having a pair of large pendants centered on the island, I hung an overall grid of small ones from The Home Depot to light the kitchen evenly,” she says.



COLOR-CODED

Keenan takes a laissez-faire designer approach to open shelving and groups books by color, generally putting the lightest ones at the top.

4 Give a Room a Few Frills

“Splurge on your lampshades. They elevate a room in a major way,” says Keenan. She applied the same rule to windows: Flowing curtains provide softness and polish. But that doesn’t mean they were expensive. The linen ones in the study (at left) are accented with trim and hung over shades that she had in her old house. She outfitted the dining room with panels from Lewis & Sheron Textiles.

5 Graffiti Your Own Walls

One weekend when her husband was out of town, Keenan called up a friend to come help her decorate the plain white study. “He wasn’t even to the airport yet, and we had the black paint out of the basement,” she says. She aimed for a large-scale, loose Greek-key motif and let the pattern run up to the molding so it looked like the repeat of a true wallpaper. She’d intended to re-cover her sister’s old zebra-print sofa, but the more she looked at it, the more she thought it just worked. “There’s a lot of fun in not overthinking,” she adds.

6 Embrace Fresh Faces

Though much of the art in the home is by Keenan or other members of her family, some of it is totally arbitrary, such as the portrait in the dining room and the silhouettes in the study. “They are just random people that we welcomed in,” she says. “Silhouettes are particularly nostalgic and graphic at the same time, which is a pretty rare pairing.”



7

Stop 'Em in Their Tracks

Entries don't typically inspire dark palettes, but for Keenan, it was just the right thing to do. "I really want guests to pause when they walk in the house, so I used the dark paint to create drama," she explains. "The room had lots of light, so I knew I could get away with it." Plus, the rustic, salvaged wood-paneled walls help break up the look.

PRIVACY, PLEASE

A single floor-to-ceiling curtain panel, rather than a pull-down shade, covers the window in the front door at night.



9

Streamline the Bed

You won't find 15 pillows and froufrou details on Keenan's beds. She prefers a low-key formula. "I like a simple look most of the time. The more that I edit it, the more contemporary it feels," she says. For her, that recipe calls for just crisp sheets, a coverlet, and a neatly folded duvet.

10

Dress Up Your Shower

"Everyone told me not to put a window in a shower," Keenan recalls. Though having natural light in the bath was important, the window also gave her the chance to use her shower curtain like an oversize window treatment with a pelmet and drapes. For privacy and to help protect the wood from splashes, a custom waterproof roller shade is mounted outside the window frame. [SL](#)



8

Don't Be Afraid of the Dark

In the back hall, two sliding doors hide the master bedroom. "I didn't have enough room for them to swing, so I opted for a barn door. Nothing rustic would have worked here," says Keenan. "I wanted an elegant look, so I dressed them up with a pair of brass knockers." Here and throughout the house, she painted all the new doors Pratt & Lambert's Black (25-17). "Now they have so much more character," she says.

A SECOND ACT
The vanity is actually an old dresser (found at an antiques mall) that was lacquered and plumbed.

