



O at Home
Winter 2007

N A T E B E R K U S

Knock, Knock, It's Nate!

In this issue, we celebrate the design smarts of our readers. Though hundreds of you sent in amazing ideas, only three were rewarded with surprise visits from Nate and a spot on Oprah's TV show.

And the winners are...

Kristen Hollister

Nate's Take: "There's great consistency in this house. Kristen has decided what her taste is, and she's gone step by step, room by room, to create an entire environment that reflects it right back to her. She's also a master at symmetry, which calms the eye and allows her to be more experimental throughout the rest of the space. There's nothing in this home that I would change."

Kirsten Hollister was busy with her usual morning chores—vacuuming, preparing her 7-year-old son, Owen, for day camp—when a handsome man appeared at the front door with a huge bouquet of hydrangeas. "My husband, Andy, didn't recognize Nate, so he thought it was a bit strange," she recalls, laughing. As for Kirsten's initial reaction? Well, a different sort of shock set in. "I was sad about my wardrobe choice," the former fashion-company office manager confesses. "I was in front of these cameras, caught in schlumpy jeans and flip-flops—I definitely wasn't ready for my closeup!"

Fortunately, though, her house was. Nate immediately raved about the natural elements that carry through from room to room—a centerpiece of antlers on the dining table, an urn filled with seashells in the living room—and the way those rough-hewn touches contrast with the home's finer details, such as narrow legs on much of the furniture.

Kirsten had honed her eye for design while living in Switzerland—her husband works for a Swiss-owned company—with her family for three

years. "I knew it would be good for our son and us to experience another culture," she says. It also jump-started a new obsession: Northern European design. Visiting Swiss friends' homes, Kirsten studied how they seamlessly melded the modern with the old and appreciated the merits of small spaces. Along with that education, she acquired some major souvenirs: a giant Swiss armoire, an antique sofa and zinc lanterns from Europe, and a motley assortment of vintage floral paintings and wood-framed mirrors. "Let me put it this way," she says. "We arrived in Switzerland with a 20-foot crate and left with a 40-foot crate."

When the family returned to Minneapolis, Kirsten started redecorating their 1,700-square-foot home, trying to emulate what she'd seen abroad. She was bold in her paint-color choices—rich chocolate brown in the family room, pumpkin orange in the entryway, a dark gray-green in the living room—and mixed her newly acquired antiques with modern pieces that run the gamut from pricey Kartell lamps to cheap-but-chic Ikea finds. In her son's room, she installed a German-made *spiel bett*, a bed built to look like a ship.

Working with a small house was a challenge, but one that Kristen took on the newfound enthusiasm when she came back from Switzerland. "In Europe, I realized that what we consider a small space in America would be considered palatial in the rest of the world. It changed my perspective on space. I decided that wherever I am, I'm going to make it beautiful." And not only beautiful, but comfortable for her family as well: "Things can't be perfect with a 7-year-old in the house, so I decided to stop obsessing. Now if something gets dinged, I just call it patina." Good advice for us all.



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Jenn Feldman

Nate's Take: "Jenn obviously has an amazing eye for craftsmanship, and that's what pulls together her high-low approach to decorating. Her themes are strong and well carried through, whether it's the blue, white, and brown palette or the figurative porcelain. There's a tremendous attention to detail here, and it makes everything in Jenn's home look like a million bucks."

"Gosh—this is like getting engaged!" Jenn Feldman exclaimed when Nate showed up on her doorstep with a big hug and the news that she was one of our contest winners. "I never saw it coming." Then she promptly burst into tears and blamed it on hormones (fair enough—she'd just given birth to her son, Sammy, three weeks earlier).

Rewind to 2005, when Jenn left New York to be with her fiancé, Todd, in Los Angeles. The couple bought a run-down condo in Beverly Hills, enabling Jenn—who had lived in rentals all her life—to finally realize her dream of renovating a home from top to bottom. She wanted to fix up the place before they moved in, so she gave herself a 30-day deadline ("I work best under pressure") and set to it, hiring a crew to lay new ebony-stained hardwood floors and repaint every surface of the apartment. Each weekend, she'd scour the city's flea markets in search of hidden treasures, snagging a Buddha-head sculpture on one visit, more glass decanters the next. "No one believes that the stuff in our house is from flea markets," Jenn says. "But I see potential in everything."

She credits her discerning eye to a creative lineage—her mother is a gardener, her great-grandmother was a painter. And her artistic background—she studied painting and photography in college. Decorating the condo, however, was about much more than creating a pretty place to live. "My husband's parents died when he was relatively young, and it had been a long time since he'd had a family home," Jenn says. "This house was monumental for us—I wanted to create an environment that reflected who we are and the new life we'd begun together." So she filled the rooms with family photographs, heirlooms and mementos from their travels, like the black-and-white pictures of Paris

they snapped on their first trip together. In selecting the furnishings and accessories, Jenn drew inspiration, as Nate put it during his visit, "from all over the world and all over the mall."

"I'm never biased," she explains. "I don't care whether something is \$5 or \$5,000—if it's unique and it speaks to me, that's what counts." Her home reflects this democratic attitude: In the living room, Jonathan Adler stools sit on a \$98 rug from Lowe's. In the master bedroom, the plush bed is draped with a blanket from JCPenney that Jenn had monogrammed. She splurged on a large painting of an orchid by a street artist named O—which now holds pride of place in the living room—but saved on art elsewhere in her home by framing pages sliced out of botany books.

Nate admires Jenn's gutsy mix-and-match, high-low approach. "These rooms look like they were assembled over time," he says. "You can't create a house like this in a day." But if you're Jenn Feldman, you can—somewhat miraculously, and with much gusto—do it in a month.

Kimberly Dellamonica

Nate's Take: "When people decorate with a theme, as Kimberly did with her tropical retreat, they often think that buying accessories to 'fit' that theme is enough," Nate says. "But Kimberly and her husband went above and beyond—they redid the doors, the hinges, the walls. Even the vanity in the bathroom was roughed up to look like old wood. It's more than just design, and that's what makes this home so successful."

For Kimberly Dellamonica, a perfect house is one that's "tropical, tranquil, luxurious and really inviting—I want people to feel comfortable as soon as they walk in the door." Mission accomplished, says Nate. "This place is like a sanctuary, a Zen retreat."

When Kimberly and her husband, Mark, began renovating their lagoon-front condo near San Francisco, she took her cues from her favorite holiday destinations: Southeast Asia, which she frequented in her 10 years as a flight attendant, and Mexican resorts such as Las Ventanas al Paraíso and Esperanza, both in Cabo San Lucas.



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"I love the beach lifestyle," Kimberly explains. "So I told my husband, 'Let's just do it in our house.'" Luckily, Mark, a businessman by day, was game for some hands-on work at home. "I'll say, 'Honey, I want floating stairs,' and he just gets his hammer and nails and goes for it," Kimberly says. Mark also fabricated sconces for the stair wall and installed decorative beams in the dining room. By building the look into the home's very architecture, the couple kept the house from veering into the realm of tropical kitsch.

Nate also notes how Kimberly kept her design choices consistent. "Everywhere you look, there are natural materials. And she chose soothing colors on the first floor—that's very typical in resorts. The whole place feels grounded and organic, even down to the accessories." In the living room, for example, a palm-wood sculpture hangs over the mantelpiece, an Asian steamer basket serves as a cocktail table, and a majestic palm invokes the tropical forests of its native Madagascar. Nate appreciates what these design decisions reflect about the couple and their home: "They really honor themselves and their guests by having everything so beautifully arranged," he says. "It shows what a couple can accomplish when they work together."