



ROBIN'S NEST

BLESSED WITH FOUR LITTLE BOYS AND AN ABUNDANCE OF ZEST, INTERIOR DESIGNER ROBIN

BY-ESTELLE BOND GURALNICK AND PAMELA J. WILSON PHOTOGRAPHY BY ERIC ROTH



PELISSIER INVESTS HER NEW ENGLAND HOUSE WITH EXUBERANT COLORS AND LOTS OF JOY.

IF ROBIN PELISSIER WEREN'T SO VERY LIKABLE, IT WOULD BE EASY TO resent her, because she does seem like Wonder Woman. Good humor intact, she juggles home, husband, four boys ages 6 and under, and a busy decorating career to boot. "Spiritually, I know I have it all," she says. "I feel it in my bones. I almost feel guilty for being so blessed."

Left: The living room walls are glazed seven shades of yellow to pick up the color of the original flower-patterned mustard tiles in the fireplace surround. **Above:** Robin describes the baseline of her style as traditional, but she also has a soft spot for modern, as seen in the '60s style of the living-room floor lamp. **Right:** In addition to being pretty, the entry, says Robin, "is a place for tying shoes or negotiating bedtimes."

The Pelissier house, decorated in Robin's luxuriously comfortable style, which she describes as "traditional with an eclectic bent," is deliberately a haven where she and husband Warren, who owns an advertising agency, can be calm—"in a good way"—amidst a flurry of activity. "We love to live in our home," she says. "The living room is there to be used. The kids can go in and curl up in a chair—not with a Popsicle, to be sure, but to relax. Friends have asked me why I didn't wait until the kids got older before buying beautiful fabrics, trims, and wall coverings. My attitude is that I prefer a little wear and tear to postponing enjoyment. Doing things right in a house pays back every day in satisfaction."

Married eight years ago, the Pelissiers bought their 1838 Greek Revival house in 1994, when Robin was expecting their first child. Located in a lovely village south of Boston, the house has come a long way since the day Robin first saw it at a brokers' open house. "It was in tatters, really broken-down," she says. There was a lot to envision, since 25 years earlier the house had been converted into two apartments. But those high ceilings and long windows spoke of magnificent bones to Robin.

Before buying, the Pelissiers had a contractor and an architect come in to give them estimates and feasibility plans. Could this old structure, within reason, be





Who says you can't have great style and sticky hands, too? The kitchen banquette, **opposite bottom**, is covered in chintz that's laminated for easy wipe-ups. **Above**, clockwise from top right: Robin, young Warren, Willie, Ethan, and nanny Paulette Anders share a snack.

Opposite top: Some people crave pickles during their pregnancies, but not Robin; she develops "a mad desire to paint." Kitchen walls went from white to Tuscan yellow when she was expecting Willie. The kitchen fireplace is used daily except on the hottest summer days.



turned back to its original one-family status? Both consultants were encouraging, and the resulting remodeling turned out to be an unusually happy experience. “This house has a great karma,” says Robin. “Every time the contractor would call, he’d start by saying, ‘We have good news.’ In other words, no horrid problems. It’s been a house full of happy surprises, such as three additional babies!”

Working with architect Sally Weston, the Pelissiers did a complete rehab. “We brainstormed with Sally,” says Robin. “She took our ideas, ran with them, and gave us much more vision than we would have had on our own.” Downstairs, the front entry was moved to the side of the house in order to create a nice front-facade balance of three windows up and three windows down. Also, several interior walls were knocked down to bring in more light, and the kitchen was completely redone. Upstairs, ceilings were removed to add 3 feet to the height of the rooms. Dentil moldings, columns, a marble entry foyer, chandeliers, and warm lighting were added. Where possible, old doors and hardware were reused.

While the redo was in progress, Robin and Warren became habitués of weekend antiques shows. They’d have a wonderful dinner, stay at a bed and breakfast, and then get up at dawn with the dealers. The majority of their finds came from annual June and September shows in Farmington, Connecticut, though they scoured the countryside as well. “Farmington became our favorite because it’s upscale and has lots of treasures,” says Robin. “It’s not huge, so it’s not hard work.” While she looked for such goodies as tufted chairs, Warren would scout for architectural items.

Robin’s freewheeling vision came in handy during those antiquing forays. At Farmington, she and Warren



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Opposite: When baby Owen was on the way, Robin got a “craving” to paint the dining room walls mocha. By good fortune, she found coordinating mauve silk draperies at a shop that sells window dressings recycled from various showhouses. **Left:** Awnings add to the appeal of the Pelissiers’ 1838 Greek Revival house. **Below:** There seems to be a mutual admiration between big brother Ethan and newborn Owen.

bought wrought-iron gates and fences for the outside and cornices for the living room that came out of a New York mansion. To fit the Pelissiers’ windows, the cornices had to be cut down and restenciled. “Now they look original to our house,” she says. Often, the couple had to hire a moving truck to get their finds home.

When it came time to move in, Robin quickly got the house humming with color and verve. It was ready for a town-wide Christmas tour just six months after moving day. Besides strong colors, she likes her work to make a strong statement. “I fall in love with things, which may seem impetuous, but that’s how I buy, and everything comes together in the end. Color, balance, and scale come naturally to me, and I think my strength lies in infusing warmth into any kind of room.”

For clients, too, she’s definitely into comfort. “One of my first questions is: ‘Where do you put your pizza and your drink when you’re watching TV?’ That tells me how a house is being used—or misused, which is more often the case. I don’t do cookie-cutter design, because I think purchases should be made on the basis of emotion and affection for the object.” She likes to mix fabrics and trims, loves reusing clients’ own things, and is a big fan of lighting, from medieval to Moderne. In her own living room, a crystal chandelier shares the scene with a funky 1960s floor lamp. Robin’s window treatments are always elegant but never typical: In the living room, she combined full-length chintz draperies with Austrian blinds that are classical in shape, but executed in black-and-white-pinstriped silk—“a hipper fabric to update the style,” she says.



FAMILIES WHOSE NEEDS ARE OFTEN SIMILAR TO MY OWN AT HOME. —ROBIN PELISSIER



Above: A beautiful oasis in a busy house, the master bedroom is a symphony of pastels. An antique down-filled chaise features the same cotton floral that lines the half-tester's side panels. **Opposite top:** A classic chaise gives the bath a sense of spa-like luxury, and, says Robin, "It's a perfect place to nurse a baby." **Opposite bottom:** A needlepoint pillow shows an appropriate sentiment for the Pelissiers.



These days, Robin has a home office and a full-time assistant. She also has a live-in nanny five days a week and another for the weekend. “When I’m around, the kids want me,” she says, “but it’s wonderful to have someone to help take up the slack. That way, my time with the boys can be playful, not just work.”

Having it all does take a high energy level, a flexible attitude, and good organizational skills. Up at 6 a.m. daily, she gives the kids breakfast, makes a work list for her assistant, and discusses her schedule with the nanny—all before 9. She takes a half-hour run, then dons her professional hat. From 3:30 to 5 in the afternoon, the kids are on hand, accessible to her home office. In a delightful daily ritual, Robin and the boys walk through the house at dusk, putting on the lights, which are all on dimmers. It’s her message to them that it’s the end of the day, time to slow down before baths and bedtime. She also admits sheepishly that she tends to market daily before cooking dinner. “I compete with the school cafeteria food, which the kids love; that’s our gourmet level,” she laughs.

Behind it all, according to Robin, her strong marriage is what makes everything work. “Warren is the foundation that allows me to prosper and be a good mother and a good decorator. It’s his enthusiasm and interest in what I do that fuels me. He loves the flurry of activity in our house, and he loves for us to entertain. And he says he loves to come home to the diversion of my world. It’s a little like *Leave It to Beaver*, and, to tell you the truth, that’s what I strive for.” ■



Architect: Sally Weston

For more information, see the Reader’s Resource on page 226.