

ELIZABETH HOURIHAN • As work and family overlap, organization and a clear head facilitate this designer's heart-and-soul agenda



INTERIOR DESIGNER ELIZABETH HOURIHAN'S LIVING room is a rarity. A serenely sophisticated space, it's furnished for multitasking by all ages, especially for her 4-year-old twin daughters and 8-year-old son, and occasionally for clients who visit on days when she works from home. "The room is for family, friends, and work, and everyone seems to enjoy it," says Hourihan (pronounced HOW-er-han). "No TV, just musical instruments to play, board games, Lincoln Logs, Thomas the train, wooden letters, Spanish lessons once a week. I like the idea of a relaxed learning environment for my children. And, of course, it has its adult moments, too."

Her "non-color" palette — neutral gray, lots of white, warm yet pale tones in fabrics and rug, and bleached or light-painted wood for a calm backdrop for her art, antiques, and accessories — is a counterintuitive feat. "People tend to think that a light or white color scheme is not child-friendly, but

most of the fabrics are washable slipcovers, so things can always look fresh," she says. "And I avoid clutter by being very organized. In the long run, that makes life easier for everyone."



IN THE LIVING room, Elizabeth Hourihan's desk is a sentimental treasure — it was the family kitchen table when she was growing up. She and son Liam (FACING PAGE) take a break in the all-purpose room. A weathered-wood carrier (FACING PAGE, BOTTOM) holds plants and handcrafted items.



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THE SIGNED DAUM glass light fixture hanging above the dining room table was Hourihan's first antique purchase at a Sotheby's auction when she was 25 years old.

Hourihan describes herself as a “heart-and-soul designer,” the kind of person who enjoys having her family and work life overlap. She’s a full-time working mother: three days at the office, two days from home. “The truth is, my mind never stops

working at five,” she says. “I’m detail-oriented, juggle a lot, give it my best. Problem solving suits my temperament.”

Always adventurous, Hourihan earned a bachelor’s degree in architecture but segued into interior design during a six-year stint at her first job at an architecture firm in Manhattan. While there, she met her husband, Brian Hourihan, on the tennis courts in Central Park. It was love at first sight: They were engaged in two months and married a year later. When his job took them to Washington, D.C., she became top assistant to design doyenne Mary Douglas Drysdale, whose much-published work in high-end spaces earns endless accolades. “We shared an architectural background and had great mutual respect,” says Hourihan. “It was an invaluable insider learning experience for me.”

In 2002, Brian’s job as in-house lawyer for a Boston investment firm brought them to Massachusetts. At first, they lived in Manchester-by-the-Sea, a period during which their son was born and Elizabeth was hired to establish an interior design department at Carpenter & MacNeille, an award-winning design/build company in Essex. Six years ago, the Hourihans moved into an architect-designed house built only four years earlier in

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UPPER CABINETS WERE repositioned to allow space for the large decorative star. “I tried for a kitchen that doesn’t look too kitcheny,” Hourihan says.

nearby woody Wenham. At 3,500 square feet, the house was well sited, spacious, and had exceptional details, including 9-foot ceilings, long windows, front and back staircases, and a separate children’s wing. Only the floor plan needed some tweaking.

True to her efficient style, a crew from Carpenter & MacNeille was ready on move-in day to implement her hand-drafted changes. Walls enclosing a small library that jugged oddly into the living room were eliminated to create an expansive living space. In the dining room, a small corner door to the kitchen was closed off, making way for new French doors centered on the same wall, flooding light into both spaces. Kitchen cabinets were moved around to be less obtrusive, and both oven and microwave were relocated under a new white marble countertop on the expanded island. “I just played around cosmetically with the space so that it seems larger and more usable, but we certainly didn’t have to start from scratch,” Hourihan says.

Now for the next big question: Why use a “non-color” palette for herself when a recent project — alive with color and pattern — was successful enough to be featured in *Architectural Digest* (February 2010)? “Maybe because I have a degree in architecture, I see interiors in a different light than most designers. Every time I do a new project, I start fresh. No repetition.” She adds: “At home, I love the purity of my background. Who knows? Maybe having a clear mind does help in solving others’ needs.” ■