

HOME TOUR

North Shore

NAUTICAL



Winnetka homeowners Molly and Mike Foster teamed up with interior design firm Jeannie Balsam Interiors to infuse their space with Nantucket style.

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LEFT: A hallway transformed into an intimate gallery of beloved artwork, some created by Molly's mother and dear friends of the couple. **BELOW:** The historically classic yet fresh pair of black bamboo framed chairs in the Great room bridge a lighter scale frame with maximum comfort. **OPPOSITE PAGE TOP:** The Kitchen features Amish-made wood cabinetry and unique red-tinted Burmese teak countertops. The light and bright roman shade fabric energizes the room and introduces a pop of yellow that is accented in nearby breakfast nook chairs. **OPPOSITE PAGE BOTTOM:** The client's favorite piece of art was strategically moved to the Dining room where it now takes center stage and compliments the existing Farrow & Ball wallcovering.



HOMETOUR



For homeowners Molly and Mike Foster, it wasn't a new app or extensive online search that led them to interior designer Jeannie Balsam. It was something with a bit more of a personal connection: the Winnetka Community Nursery School. While serving on their fundraising committee, Molly encountered Balsam, who was donating pillows and her design services for the event. "I had heard her name around, but I'd never met her until then," Molly reveals.

The Fosters soon brought Balsam and her design team in to visit their home and seek their opinion on how to maximize their space and streamline their decor. "We've always gravitated towards New England coastal style—we had more buoys and oars than we knew what to do with," Molly shares. "We knew we needed help harnessing that—it was too kitschy."

Balsam, it turns out, has been vacationing in Nantucket with family for nearly two decades, making her a natural fit for the project. "When I walked up to the house, I instantly loved it. It looks like it was airlifted directly from Nantucket," she says. "Once I stepped inside, I felt transported east. The space had so much character and possibility."

But it was not only with the century-old house that Balsam clicked—the designer immediately connected with the couple as did her team: "Good chemistry is important with clients," she notes.

Both Molly and Mike wanted to be involved with the process: "My husband is a total guy's guy, but he also has a great eye for design. We've always shared that interest," Molly says. And this suited the design team to a T—yet another reason this group seemed fated to join forces. "We love working with couples," Balsam explains. "We're really good at listening to both perspectives and facilitating collaboration. We never take sides."

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Sun porch. Balsam and Associate Designer Annie Liddle took a white, blank space and brought in color, wallpaper, and pattern making it the family's "escape room" where everyone goes for a little tranquility.

It was about 11 years ago that the couple had moved into the home, where they've raised their daughter, now 12, and 10-year-old twins. The space is also home to beloved golden retriever Pearl. "It hadn't been renovated in 30 years, but the previous homeowners took wonderful care of it," Molly says. "We updated the kitchen, bathrooms, and landscaping, and finished the basement while maintaining that old New England feel."

During the renovation process, they were keen on salvaging everything they could, particularly the historic aspects of the house they came across. The couple's favorite discovery, concealed behind an old bookshelf, were the divots in the wall where bottles were hidden during Prohibition.

While the updates to the space helped to modernize it and make it more livable for the young family, Balsam, who has lived and worked on the North Shore for 20 years, helped to refine it. According to the couple, Balsam's team hit an especially high note with the charming sun porch/music room. Balsam explains, "Porches don't usually have a lot of oomph—they usually seem like an afterthought. But Molly and Mike took a leap of faith and allowed me and my Associate Designer Annie Liddle to take the white, blank space and bring in color, wallpaper, and pattern."

"The room is known in our family as the escape room," Molly reveals. "Everyone goes there for a little tranquility."

Another favorite space of design team and homeowners alike is a hallway transformed into an intimate gallery of beloved artwork, some created by Molly's mother and dear friends of the couple.

"A collection becomes much more powerful and emotional pulled into one space," Balsam reveals.

Throughout the house, attention to detail abounds, like the Amish-made wood cabinetry in the kitchen, a popular family spot, and unique red-tinted Burmese teak countertops. Art also plays a key role, sourced through Anne Loucks Gallery in Glencoe and through their work with Kate Lane Ferraro – Gregg Lane Art Management. "Art not only pulls everything together," Balsam shares, "but is an incredible investment."

Of the process, Molly asserts, "It was such a smooth experience—their level of customer experience was impeccable. And they find such a happy medium between splurges and where to save; what should be prioritized."

"We want to make sure everyone's budgets are realistic so there are no surprises," Balsam confirms, adding, "Our tagline is 'Classic Interiors for a Modern Life.' Working with so many people over the years at different stages of their lives, whether that's designing around toddlers or downsizing, everything is always evolving. We want to create something functional and beautiful so that people can live their best lives."

"I love it as much the day it was finished as I do now," Molly emphasizes. "They really nailed that tagline—it's exactly what they did for us."

For more information on Jeannie Balsam Interiors, visit jeanniebalsam.com.