

Ryan Rabuska and Jeff Pelletier's lakeside home is a tribute to modern cottage style. The dining room captures the play of contrast with an industrial-look dining table topped with reclaimed wood that's flanked by modern white chairs and an 8-foot mirror. "I love that the mirror has traditional molding, but then it's painted black, so it makes it fresh and modern," Jeff says.

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HIGH CONTRAST

A TIGHT PALETTE OF BLACK AND WHITE PUNCHES
UP THE ARCHITECTURAL CHARACTER IN A
COUPLE'S LAKESIDE RENOVATION.

One of the first details that captured Ryan and Jeff's attention was the open floor plan anchored by a two-story bluestone fireplace. "I knew the first thing we needed to do was to get a can of white paint to lighten and brighten the space," Ryan says. Shiplap installed on the ceiling emphasizes the soaring A-frame architecture.

Glass railings make the loftlike primary suite feel even airier.

Ryan Rabuska has an eye for shapes and silhouettes. The interior designer enjoys nothing

more than spying a sculptural table lamp sitting forlorn on a thrift shop shelf. "I love finding things people get rid of—things they don't think are cool anymore," he says. Almost as soon as he spots it, Ryan is dreaming up just the right paint color to give his found treasure a reimagined life.

The familiar scenario played out on a much larger scale a couple of years ago when he and his partner, Jeff Pelletier, snapped up a lakeside property in Wolcott, CT. The couple were taken by the 1973 A-frame's profile, notably its two-story wall of windows and the fireplace that stretches to the peak of a vaulted 36-foot-tall ceiling. But they were less enamored with the exterior's drab color scheme and dated interiors—a combo of wall-to-wall carpet in the bedrooms, orange-tinged



floorboards in the common areas, and dark bluestone that clad the fireplace and weighed down surrounding spaces. “It kind of reminded me of the Brady Bunch house,” says Jeff, who owns a dance studio nearby.

Undeterred, the experienced DIYers got to work on a punch list of upgrades that they unified with a palette of white and cream set off with crisp contrasts of black and brown. As dramatic as the transformation is, there was one thing they didn’t change—the floor plan. “We loved the layout and wanted to stay true to that, so we didn’t move any walls,” Ryan says. Instead, they elevated the look with some clever, inexpensive moves, such as installing white shiplap on the great-room ceiling, painting the lower kitchen cabinets matte black, and adding warm but sophisticated wood accents, including shelves they made with boards salvaged during the renovation. The new floors look like oak hardwood but are actually luxury vinyl planks. “We have a dog and wanted it to be super durable,” Ryan says.

Their goal for the renovation was to create a modern lake cottage feel, reminiscent of the Cape Cod homes that have long inspired them while on vacation. “We love midcentury modern and more streamlined looks, but we also love traditional touches like polished brass and antiques,” Ryan says. “We wanted to play with the fact that the house is on a lake and to incorporate those cottage elements.”

The couple first focused their attention on the kitchen, which is visible from all the common rooms downstairs. “We have always wanted a black kitchen. Even though we love the look of white, light spaces, we also love rooms that are



The couple created a niche in the front entry hall by carving out space from the back of a closet. The wood shelves were made from the old railings and mantel they removed during the renovation. “There wasn’t room for a console table to drop your keys, so we decided to create this catchall space,” Ryan says. Arching the niche and doorway helps establish the cottage-inspired feel Ryan and Jeff admire.



A chunky white shelf, *opposite*, replaced the upper cabinets, which helps the small kitchen look larger. A rail of pegs, which the couple made themselves, is both stylish and functional. “We added that detail to give the kitchen more of a cottage story to tell,” Ryan says.



A mix of metals and wood tones warms the kitchen’s clean lines and modern edges. Jeff (on left) and Ryan chose contrasting finishes—polished nickel hardware, *antiqued* brass sconces, gold faucets, and stainless-steel appliances—to help the space feel curated and visually interesting.

"OUR GO-TO IS OBVIOUSLY WHITE, BUT WE'RE NOT AFRAID TO MIX IN WOOD TONES AND DIFFERENT TEXTURES SO THINGS FEEL LAYERED AND NOT FLAT."

—RYAN RABUSKA, *homeowner*



A wood canopy bed and arched lattice mirror create a sense of architecture in the guest bedroom. Ryan transformed secondhand lamps by making handles out of craft clay and adhering them to the bases with superglue. "After I spray-painted them, I rubbed mud on them and wiped them clean so they would have an aged, antique look," he says.

BIG VALUE, LOW COST

Easy home upgrades that boost style and appeal.

LIGHT FIXTURES

Invest in one or two quality, eye-catching light fixtures to highlight main areas. The dining room and kitchen (over the sink or an island) are prime candidates.

WOODWORK

Architectural woodwork adds character and can help disguise imperfections in old walls. Painted shiplap, for example, is durable, budget-friendly, and can stand up to splashes, making it a popular choice for kitchens and bathrooms.

STORAGE

It's one of the most coveted amenities and can make your home live so much larger. Consider installing open shelving or a built-in bookshelf. Or bring in a few pieces of hardworking furniture, like a freestanding armoire or cabinet, storage ottomans and benches, or a portable kitchen island.

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moody and cozy and have the opposite effect," Ryan says. They replaced upper cabinets with open shelving and faced both the range hood and peninsula base with vertical shiplap. "Adding those details and painting the shiplap black made it look more custom and modern," Ryan says.

Like the thrifted lamps he transforms, Ryan modified almost every surface inside the house and out with paint, right down to the furniture. A mix of matte and glossy sheens emphasizes the patina and timeworn textures, giving once-plain rooms instant history. In the living room, the couple crafted a one-of-a-kind coffee table using a salvaged door (which Ryan scored near their former apartment dumpster long ago) for the top. Ryan gave it a lustrous finish with high-gloss spray paint to intensify the door's weathered imperfections. "There are parts of the house that are new, but then they're balanced with something I found at Goodwill or an antiques store," he says. "It's those things that make you want to look around. They make a neutral space interesting."



BEFORE

In the primary bedroom, an alcove wrapped in wood paneling acts as a headboard for the platform bed. Painting the paneling cream sets it off from the white walls but in a visually quiet way.



A short walk from the house, the private dock on Hitchcock Lake is outfitted as an outdoor room. Casual furniture, poufs, plants, and solar string lights make the dock an idyllic place to spend time.

The courtyard spans the length of the house, allowing for multiple conversation and dining zones. The 14-foot-long dining table was made by a carpenter (Ryan found them on Facebook) who specializes in picnic tables. "It was really affordable because of the material, and we just stained and sealed it," Ryan says. Strings of lights and a firepit evoke a lakeside restaurant.



"As soon as we saw the house, we knew it was begging for a good coat of black paint to make it feel like a modern lake house," says Ryan, who chose Behr Limousine Leather for the exterior. "It was pretty controversial. Our neighbors asked, 'Is it black?' And we said, 'Yes. Yes, it is!'"



BEFORE

