

THE GREAT ESCAPE

Galen and Nellie Criqui wanted a carefree place to raise their kids. So they built a farm-style retreat that turns country tradition on its head, with bold colors and a playful sense of humor.

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Galen and Nellie Criqui kick back in their open kitchen with children (from left) Sabina, 9; Christopher, 7; and Colyn, 3. **OPPOSITE** The Criquis designed their Springfield, New York, home to look like a classic red barn.



Monday through Friday, Galen and Nellie Criqui live in high gear: He works as a commodities trader and coaches a high school basketball team in their Essex Falls, New Jersey, hometown; she spends her days volunteering and shuttling their three kids (Sabina, 9; Christopher, 7; and Colyn, 3) to school and sports practices and Brownie meetings. "We're your typical overscheduled family," Nellie says, "running from game to game, between birthday parties and all the other events."

But at the end of the week, the Criquis escape to a different, much slower way of life on their 178-acre farm in Springfield, New York. Here, minivan trips are replaced by tractor rides, and school oxfords get traded in for mud-covered Wellies. The most important events on the family's schedule? Frog hunts, casual hikes, and marshmallow roasts. "Galen and I wanted a place where our kids can run free, get dirty, and look up at the stars," Nellie says of the couple's 2006 decision to pursue this alternate reality. "There are almost no responsibilities up here."

When the two first visited the sprawling property, overgrown grass covered their car, but they fell hard for the land's rich history. Formerly a passageway for the Mohawk Indians (the surrounding area served as a setting for James Fenimore Cooper's novel *The Last of the Mohicans*), the acreage's only standing structures were the rubble of homesteader cabins. So while Galen and Nellie built their house from scratch, they also embraced the storied, rural setting—with new construction designed to look like a big red barn.

Inside, wide-planked pine floors, exposed nail-heads, and simple black hardware on the doors pay homage to traditional rusticity, but the open floor plan feels completely contemporary. Ditto the bold color palette and witty references to classic country icons. In the living room, a vibrant, pop-art cow painting rests on an old wooden gate (hinges still intact) that's flanked, *American Gothic*-style, by a rustic, oversized fork and spoon. The room's upholstery fabric

"It's all about the old with the new," Nellie Criqui says of her family's home.
"I like mixing really nice pieces with things that look good but are inexpensive."



ABOVE In the living room, Ikea chairs spring to life with cushions upholstered in a bold Scandinavian-print fabric. **BELOW** Sabina peeks from behind one of the home's sliding barn-style doors.





ABOVE Nellie and Colyn join the family dog, Heidi, on the back porch. **BELOW** Nellie's collection of Grateful Dead album covers adorns a wall in the master bedroom.



Add lighthearted spirit to a matched set of chairs by painting each a slightly different shade.

ABOVE A Restoration Hardware chandelier hangs over the dining table, custom-built from old barn wood; the Windsor chairs were bought at an antiques shop. **BELOW** Christopher makes pals with a pond frog.



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features a nature-themed painting—albeit one with cartoonish, Scandinavian-style trees. And what appear to be matching Windsor dining chairs are, upon closer inspection, 10 seats each painted a slightly different shade of green. Nellie and Galen even hung framed Grateful Dead album covers—which Nellie’s collected since the age of 13—over their bed.

“It’s all about the old with the new,” Nellie explains. “I like mixing really nice pieces with things that look good but are inexpensive.” The couple sought out vintage items that could double as furniture: An old chocolate crate and a wooden beer barrel both serve as occasional tables. The Criquis shopped Ikea for practical but fun kids’-room furnishings and simple living-room chairs. Still, they didn’t hesitate to splurge on a custom dining table, fashioned from reclaimed barn planks, or luxe Carrara marble countertops for the kitchen. In that room, Nellie also opted for lower cupboards only, with open shelving above—a move that was both cost-conscious and aesthetic. “The exposed cups and dishes really give the kitchen an old-farmhouse feeling,” she says.

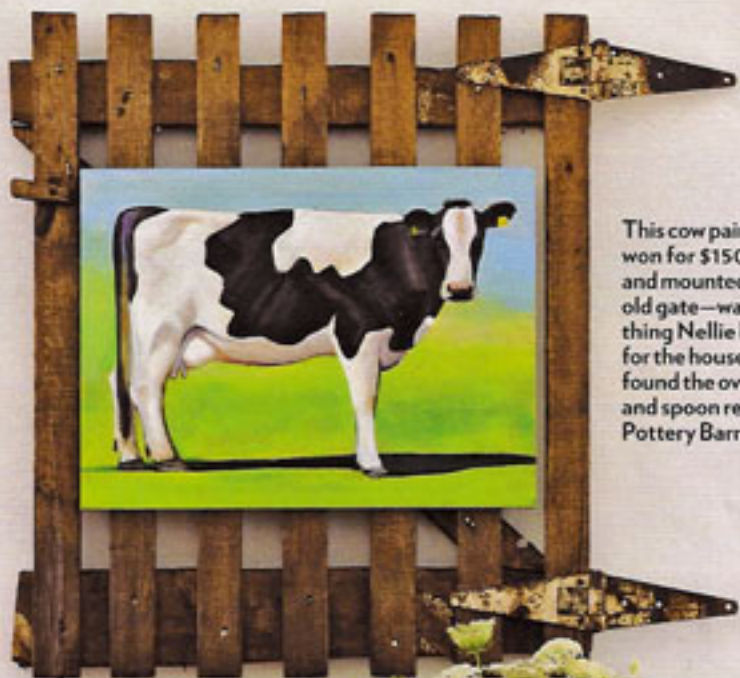
As proud as Nellie is of her family’s comfortable, cleverly decorated home, she admits that it’s the great outdoors that really matters. Along the property’s driveway, hand-painted signs point the way to “Sabina’s Pond,” “Pond Chris,” and “Colyn’s Creek,” reflecting Nellie and Galen’s motivation for buying the place: to build a retreat where their children can be carefree. “The other day, the kids caught a salamander that Colyn wanted to bring to New Jersey,” Nellie recalls. She didn’t let the creature hitch a ride, but there are other important things the Criquis bring back with them every Monday. As Nellie says, “We always return to our regular lives with clear heads for the busy week ahead.”

Corinne Garcia is the editor of Edible Bozeman, a regional food magazine in Montana, where she resides with her family.



ABOVE The bunks, linens, and rugs in the kids’ room all came from Ikea, and the blue bench once stood in Nellie’s childhood bedroom. **BELOW** Knotty pine planks—hung horizontally—give the powder room rustic charm and a spa-like feel.





This cow painting—won for \$150 on eBay and mounted atop an old gate—was the first thing Nellie bought for the house. She found the oversize fork and spoon replicas at Pottery Barn.

