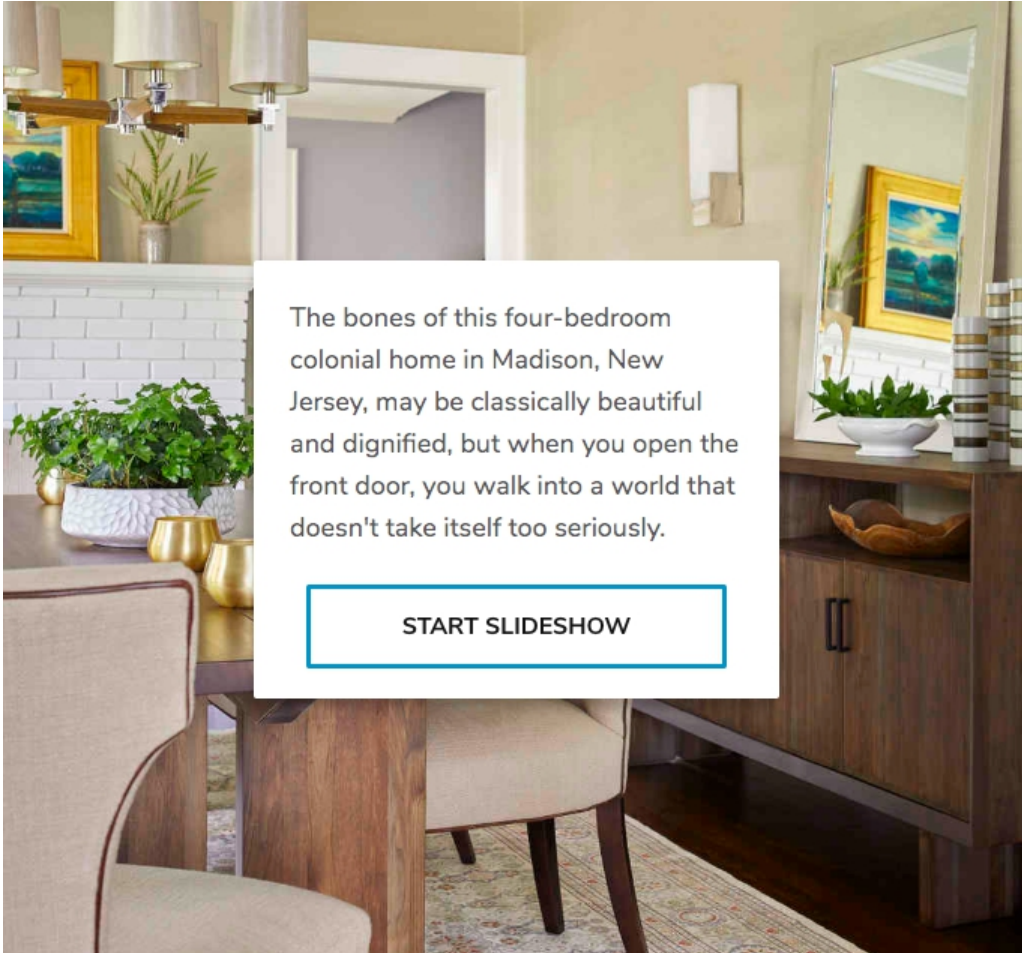
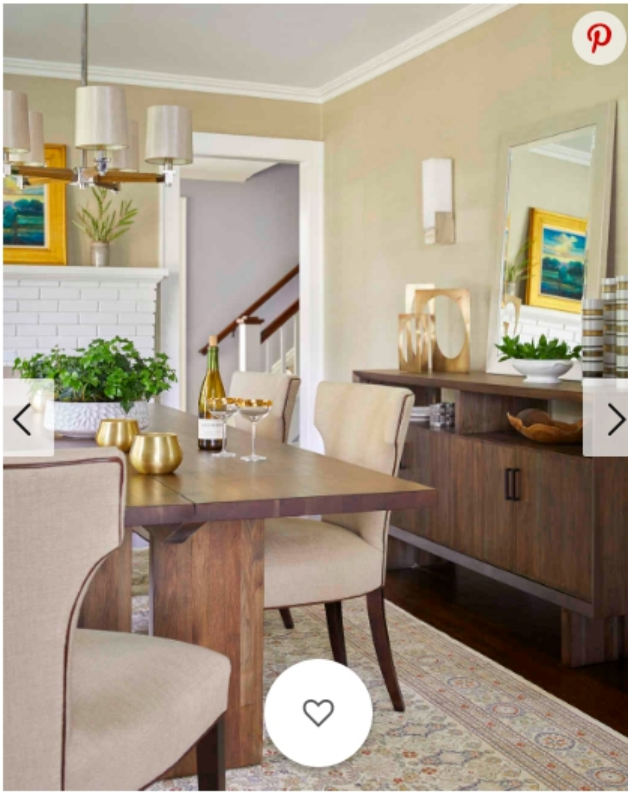


A Traditional New Jersey Home Gets a Whimsical Makeover



The bones of this four-bedroom colonial home in Madison, New Jersey, may be classically beautiful and dignified, but when you open the front door, you walk into a world that doesn't take itself too seriously.

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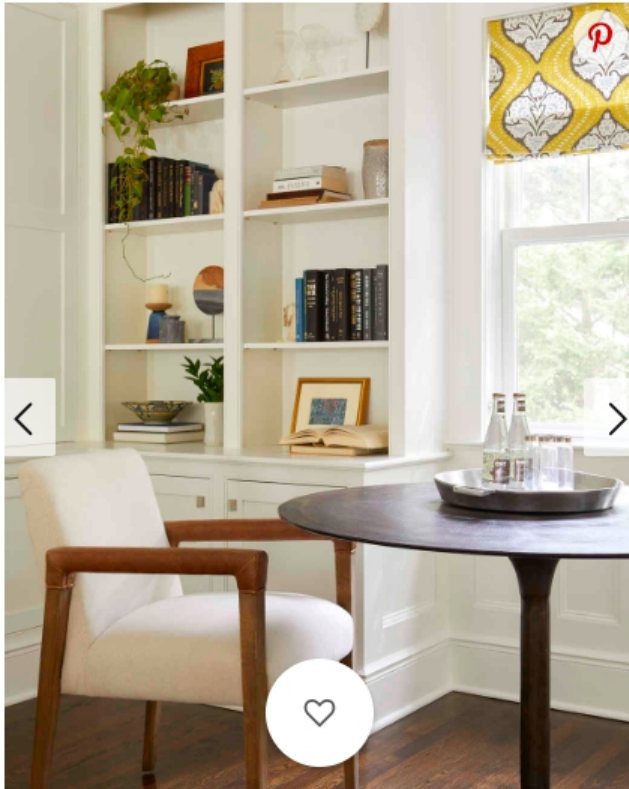
From the patterned textiles to the collection of colorful abstract art—not to mention the craft room and kitchen baking corner designed with a tween daughter in mind—interior designer Jess Cooney's latest project is a playful oasis with thoughtful consideration put into every detail.

The owner, a single mother of two, hired Cooney to work on her vacation home in the Berkshires a few years ago and the two hit it off. Though she interviewed a handful of local interior designers for her New Jersey home—a four-bedroom colonial home in the town of Madison—none of them quite grasped her vision quite like Cooney, whose design approach hinges on creating spaces that are first functional and then beautiful. So, after some convincing, Cooney agreed to make the commute down from Massachusetts for the job. "I understood that she likes things to be clean and fresh, but with lots of color and playfulness," says Cooney. "Plus, we both have two daughters the exact same ages [17 and 11], so I knew what she needed organizationally for them."

But Cooney wasn't simply doing a favor for a trusted client, she thoroughly enjoyed the project. "It's fun for me to have a serious, formal house that has all this grace and elegance, but then we're able to layer all these fun pops of color and whimsical elements over the top of it," she says. "We wanted it to feel like her city home—sophisticated, but also for a younger family, so with a playfulness about it."

Ahead, Cooney walks us through the renovation.

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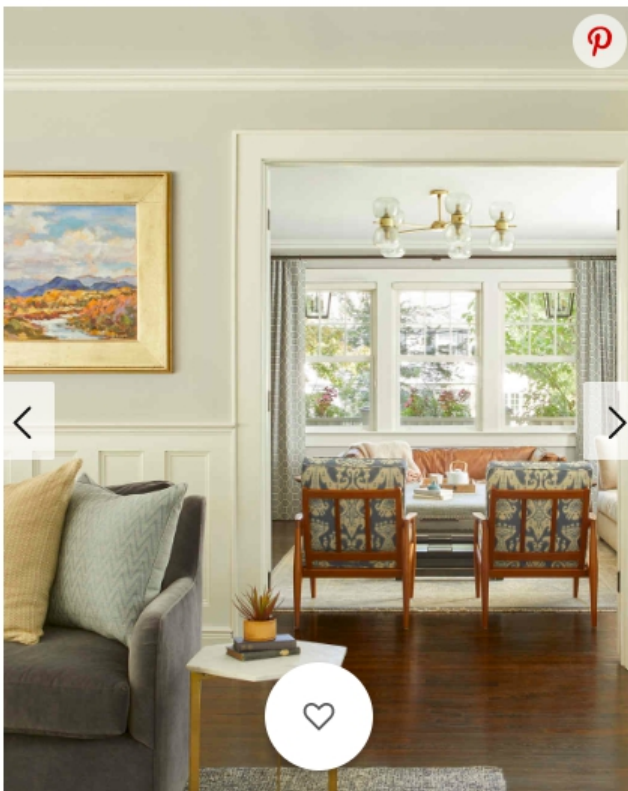
Create a Rich Base

It's important to start with the floors. They originally had a natural oak finish, but Cooney wanted something deeper to offset all the color they were planning on adding to the house. They refinished everything with a walnut stain to create a rich base throughout the house. "The deep tone helps the colors pop," says Cooney.

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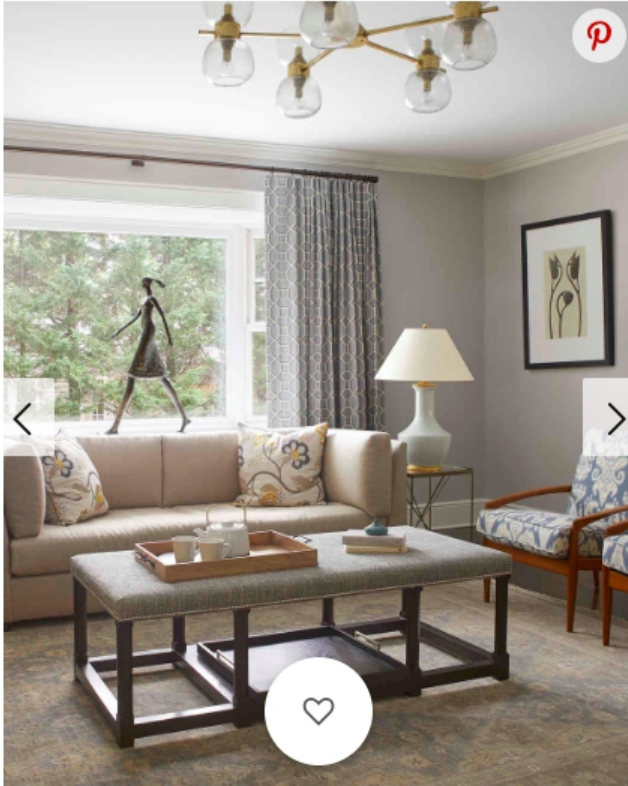


Pull from Art

The client's abstract art collection provided the inspiration for the home's yellow-and-blue color palette. "Her collection gave me insight into her personality," says Cooney. "They all had a playfulness to them, which I really wanted to draw out into the house." Each room is different, with its own distinct character, but there are elements, like the shades of blue and yellow, that tie each space together. As you move from room to room, nothing is jarring or feel out of place. Most of the artwork have gold frames, so there are gold accents woven throughout the house as well.

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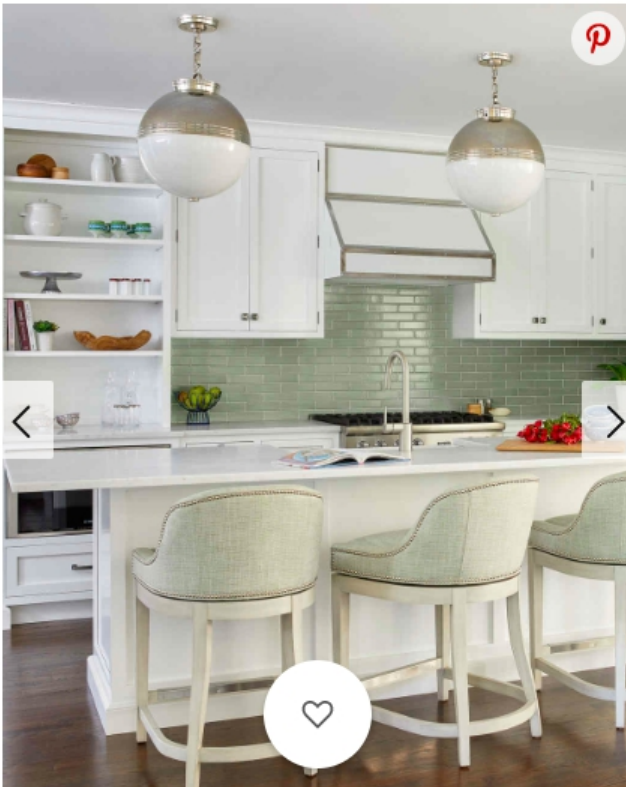


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Play with Pattern

Cooney looked at the house as a beautiful, quiet backdrop which she could liven up and have fun with. Using colorful curtains with unique patterns was an easy way to do just that, so she was so happy her client was open to mixing patterns. "It's important to not have everything be too match-y, you want it to feel more collected," she says. She chose longer drapery to create a graceful feel. Then went with large scale patterns, so when they are pulled apart, you still get nice pops of color. "If you took the curtains away, it would be a pretty serious space," she says. "They add a softer whimsical feel."

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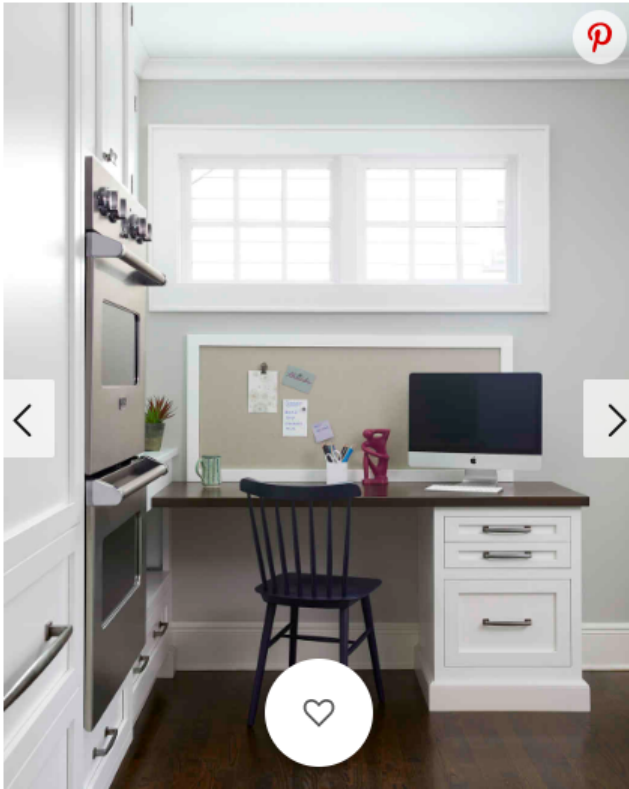


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Make Use of Small Space

"It's not a big kitchen, but it is the center of the home, so we wanted to use every inch of space," says Cooney. She put the microwave in a drawer so it's not exposed, and stacked the ovens and refrigerator in a space next to a desk where the daughters can do homework. "We mixed in some open bookshelves to give enough interest, while keeping everything else closed up," she says. They chose a light green backsplash for its calming effect and went with oversized globe lights with a vintage feel to add a touch of whimsy and tie back to the rest of the house.

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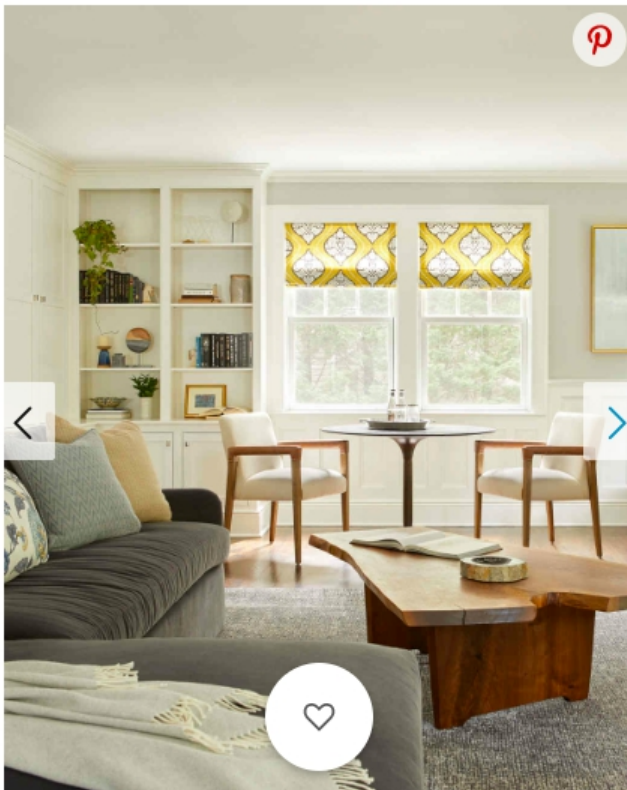


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Cater to Your Kids

The kids were at the forefront of everyone's mind during the design process. Cooney added a small table in the living room, where they could do puzzles or homework. The younger daughter loves to bake and do crafts, so they carved out a baking corner in the kitchen and made the basement into a craft room. The swivel chairs in the kitchen are upholstered with durable indoor/outdoor fabric and the custom kitchen table is sturdy and big enough to host pizza parties. Cooney had it painted white to make it feel lighter and brighter in the space. "We wanted it to be substantial but not to overwhelm," she says. "The white takes away the formality and brings fun."

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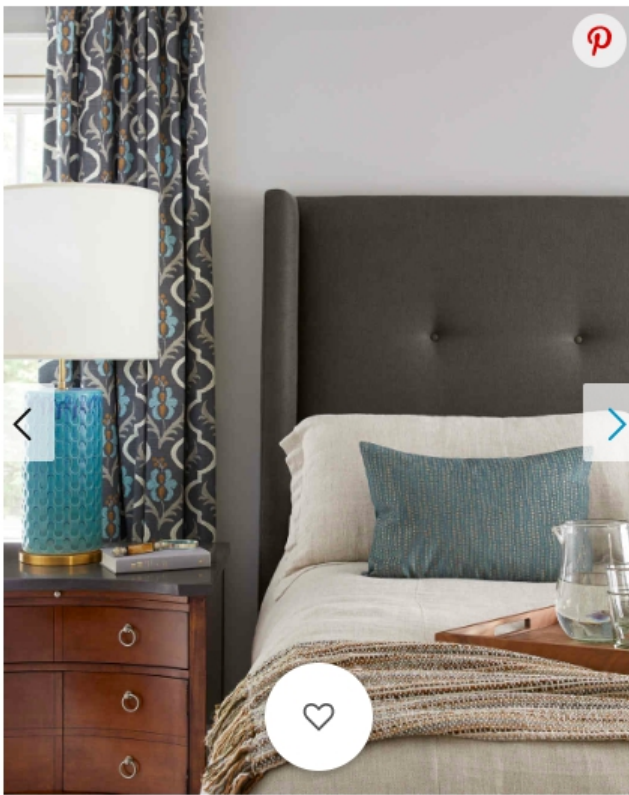
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Go Natural

Using natural elements throughout the house was really important to the designer and her client. They chose a live-edge walnut coffee table in the living room that ties back to the wood table in the dining room. The dining room is the most formal space in the house, but Cooney chose to lean some of the artwork rather than hanging it to make the space feel less stuffy. "It keeps it more playful, rather than everything being staunch and perfect," she says.

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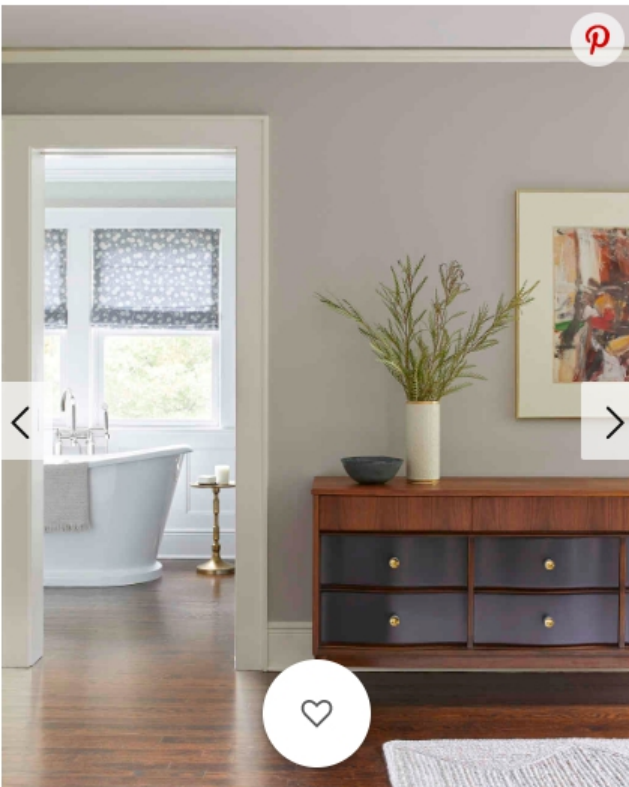
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Create Calm

The master bedroom and the older daughter's bedroom have a more tailored feel. They wanted their rooms to feel calm with a very clean palette, never overly feminine or froofy. So, Cooney went with blues and a very structured gray headboard in the master bedroom. She also chose some pieces that have a curve to them, like the nightstands and the pattern in the curtains, to balance out the masculinity. The lamps also add the essential touch of whimsy without going overboard.

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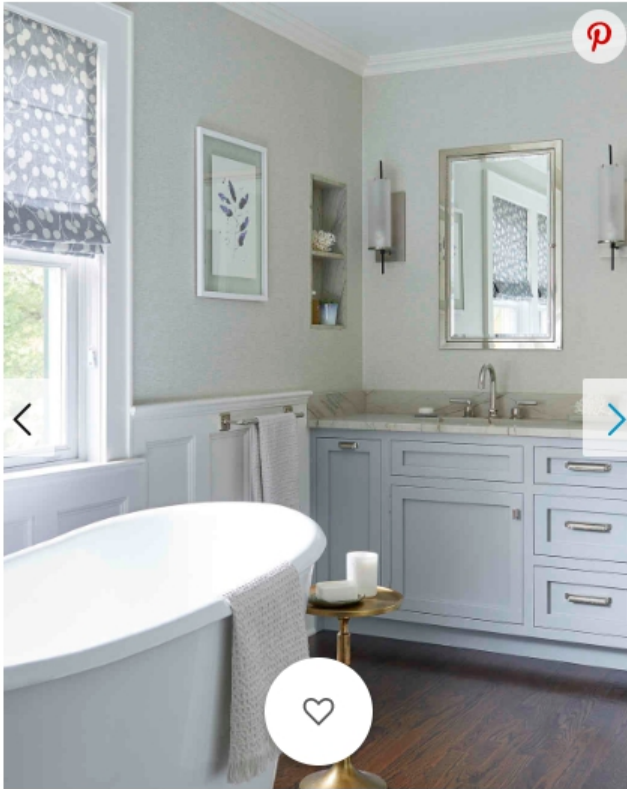
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Upcycle

The dresser in the master bedroom is one of Cooney's favorite pieces. They got it from Martha Leone Designs, who takes old furniture and customizes it for you by painting it and adding new knobs however you like. "You can pick whatever you want, and she'll redesign it," says Cooney. "It's upcycling and bringing new life to a piece."

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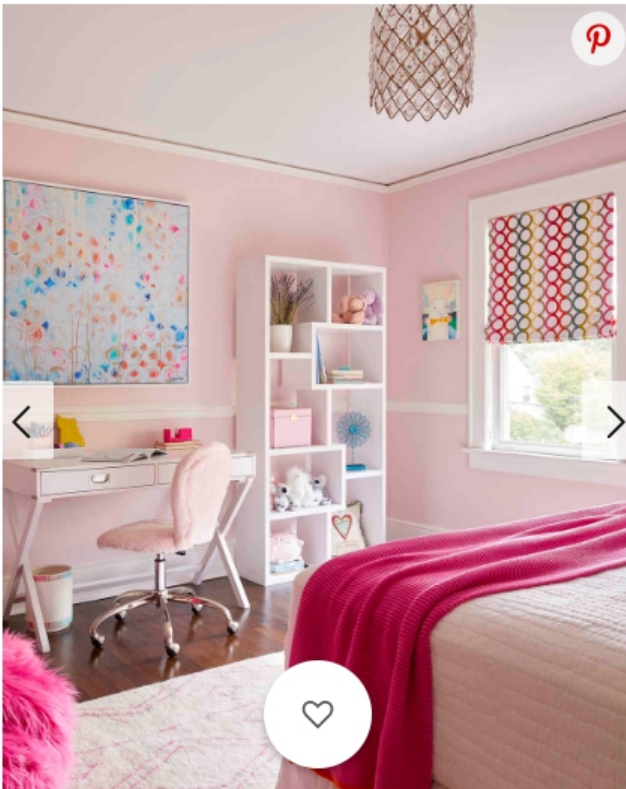
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Skip the Tiles

Cooney decided to bring the hardwood from the master bedroom into the bathroom instead of using tile. She says it gives it less of a sterile feel and makes it seem more like a dressing room rather than just a bathroom. "I just love the wood with the tub—it's so pretty," she says. Sometimes people are scared to do that in a bathroom, but Cooney assures that it's totally fine in a master bath. "You don't have kids in there throwing water, you are just stepping out of tub or shower onto a bath mat."

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Think About Touch

The younger daughter obviously loves pink, but even more so, she cares about how things feel. She wants everything to be cozy and enveloping. "She is all about tactileness," says Cooney. "Everything is about how it felt to the touch—the roman shades have a velvet feel, the chair is soft and fuzzy, the pouf is faux fur, even the pillows have are feathery and furry."

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