



SEEING THE LIGHT

Built more than a century ago, a Rutherford home needed a complete gut job, but the promise of sun-drenched rooms was worth the effort.

By **Donna Rolando** Design by **RS Mannino** Photography by **Julie Blackstock, Blackstock Photography**

As a builder and architect, Rosario Mannino was not deceived. He saw the same dilapidated colonial his wife was reluctant to set foot in. But Rosario could look beyond the demo work to the home's hidden potential—and eventually Elisa could too.

Sure, the 1900 two-family colonial revealed both water and fire damage, but unlike the couple's former Rutherford home, it abounded in natural light, and that was something Rosario knew how to enhance.

"My initial reaction was definitely skepticism," recalls Elisa. "I remember asking Rosario if it was a joke. As we entered the home, it was floor-to-ceiling junk." But for Rosario, the light that poured in as they climbed to the

Blue and white come together for a cool vibe in this modern Rutherford kitchen, abounding in natural light ramped up with a skylight. Though compact, this kitchen can easily handle a family of four and guests at the island or dining area. Special features are the white picket backsplash, the calacatta gold quartz countertops and the red oak plank flooring.

{ PERSONAL SPACE }



From left to right: The Mannino custom cabinetry tucks away the microwave drawer for aesthetics plus convenience; brass elements such as the globe pendant lights over the island add interest; the living room reflects the same blue-and-white palette in a minimalistic design that features an abstract painting, a West Elm sofa and an orange-infused Horchow rug.



second floor proved invigorating. Though initially hesitant, Elisa gained confidence that no matter the obstacles, this project had the makings of home sweet home for the couple and their two young children.

The eight-month transformation started in March 2019 with Rutherford-based RS Mannino acting as builder, architect and contractor. There was nothing modern about the original layout with its enclosed kitchen and dining room, but Rosario reconfigured the entire unit to meet the family's lifestyle. He also gutted right to the frame and added structural steel where needed.

"Skepticism turned to excitement," says Elisa, who couldn't wait to contribute her own vibe. She looked to Benjamin Moore's Newburyport Blue for the kitchen's base cabinets—a "relaxing" contrast to the decorator's white cabinetry above. One of Elisa's favorite features, a skylight is centered over the custom shiplap white hood as the natural solution for a deep alcove with few windows.

Though the kitchen is compact, the island fits five with navy-and-white bistro stools by Serena & Lily and tucks away appliances such as the microwave drawer. Too much stainless steel might have overpowered the setting, says Rosario, who solved the problem by paneling the Dacor dishwasher. The white ceramic hexagon tile that completes the backsplash also provides needed simplicity.

Other standout features are the brass in the globe pendants and hardware, countertops of calacatta gold quartz by Silestone

and weathered red oak plank flooring throughout.

For added storage, Mannino Cabinetry designed full-height pantries that extend into the dining area, flanking the window on either side.

Mission accomplished: The open living room and kitchen optimize together time and accommodate guests.

The couple avoided the trap of overdecorating with the living room's modern and minimalistic style. Harmony was achieved by taking a page from the kitchen's blue-and-white color story. The West Elm sofa is blue like the ocean with decorator's white above for a skylike contrast. The Horchow rug pops with orange, while the coffee table's weathered top is a soft touch of character.

The couple also had fun with décor in the main bathroom, where encaustic cement tile plays against the taupe, Carrara-topped vanity. Classic subway tile over the Kohler tub takes a twist with an irregular pattern and gray grout. Bonus: Moving the bathroom created more living-room space.

In the entry foyer, a classic element in older homes, new life was achieved with v-groove shiplap on the walls and Carrara marble floor tiles. Both inside and out, the décor is contemporary and chic. From the curb, one views the original bevel siding restored with a monochromatic dark gray and an inviting front porch that uses pilasters to emulate supportive columns.

"I love keeping the original urban fabric of the street and neighborhood," says Rosario of his finished work. "I would definitely do it again."