

GENTILITY *in the* HILLS

A RISING STAR DESIGNER CREATES A CALMING CANVAS
AS THE BACKDROP FOR HIS GRACIOUS GATHERINGS

Not many people search for a house a stone's throw from their siblings. But for Frank DelleDonne that was paramount. Like many European families, the DelleDonne clan gathers every Sunday for dinner, and there is never a whimper over the standing date. "We are rare in that we love to spend time together," he says of his three siblings and eight nieces and nephews, ages two to 21, who fill up his Summit home with colorful stories and laughter. On Christmas it is a sit-down dinner for 40 family members. "It is magical," he says of the into-the-wee-hours holiday celebration.

Magical, too, is the story of a nondescript 1950s ranch house in a hilly neighborhood that was torn down and built back to be a jewel of a country house. Add to the tale the visitor at an open house last year, who discovered more of DelleDonne's work—which led to his name appearing in October on *House Beautiful* magazine's list of the 25 Top Young Designers in America.

But for DelleDonne, living in the house and sharing it with others eclipses the accolades. He and his partner, tax attorney Jeffrey Hollander, lived in the ranch to get a feel for the land before a new one was even conceived. Working with architect Paul Klesse of Short Hills, with whom he has collaborated on many projects, they took a year to design it and a year to build.

By KATHLEEN NICHOLSON WEBBER — *Photography by* JOHN GRUEN



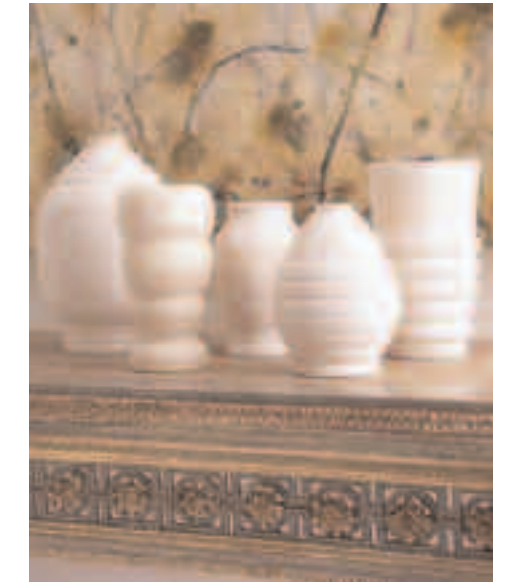
In the master bedroom, DelleDonne designed the tight-back sofa with curved arms. The frame he had painted the color of driftwood.



The designer wanted the most luxurious details—including a wood roof, copper gutters, a French-made limestone fireplace, and miles of millwork he designed and had his own shop create. And, for the kitchen, he designed two tall, slat-front cabinets, made to mirror an antique armoire he spotted in the Hamptons.

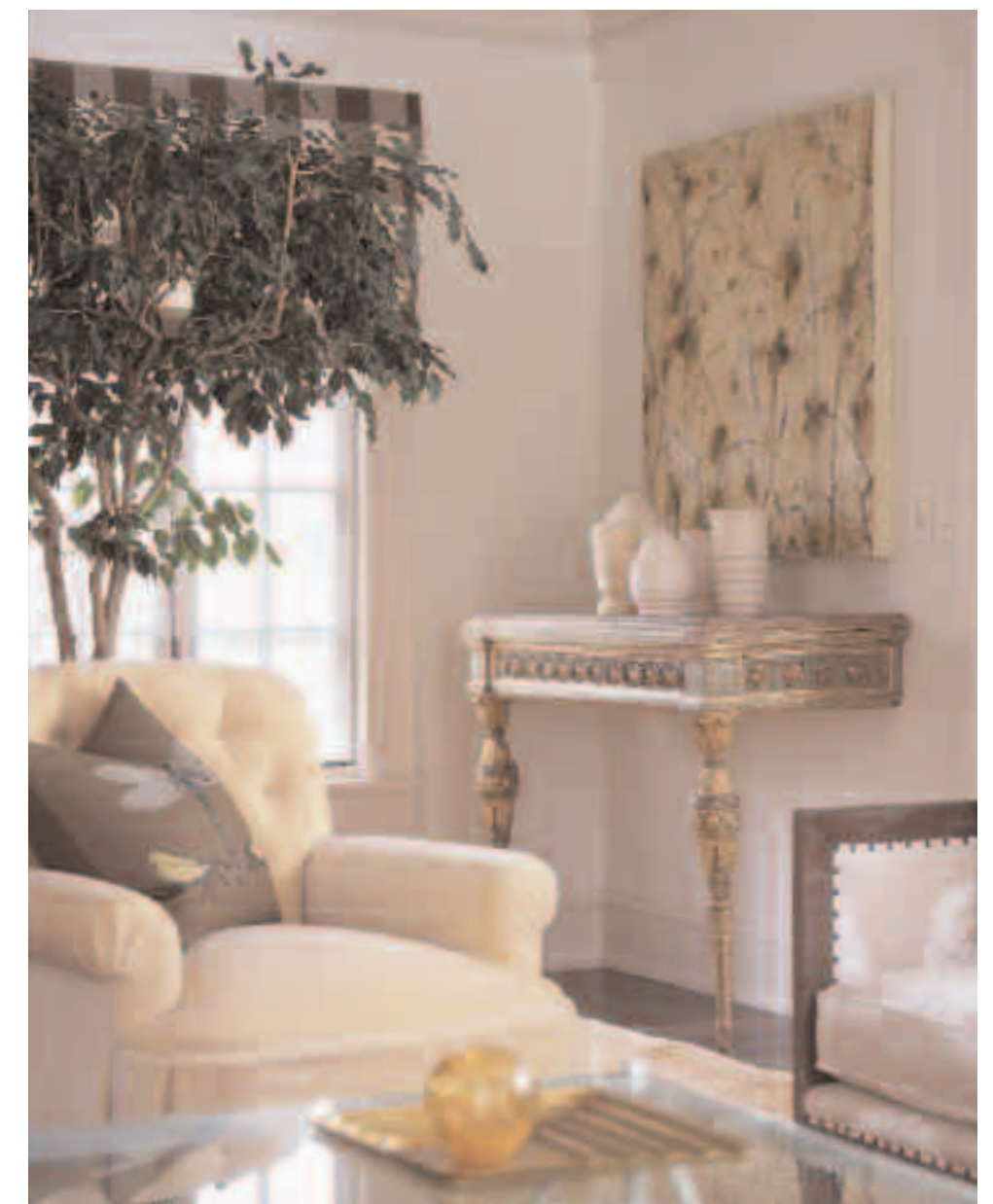
Nearby in the great room, photos of family, spanning the decades and generations, are proudly displayed. A picture of a simple worn door, still a vibrant bluish green, stands out from the sea of smiling faces. It is the door to DelleDonne's grandmother's house in San Bartolomeo, Italy, a home that serves as inspiration for his own. "There was a rawness in that house," he says, "a warmth in its simplicity. Nothing was shining or sparkly new. The veneers throughout were something you just can't find anymore." One artifact from the house in Italy is a 300-year-old tall ceramic jar, used to store olives, DelleDonne held on his lap during the flight home from Italy in 1994. "I felt like Indiana Jones with that jar," he says. "It is one of my favorite pieces."

He enjoys spending time in his kitchen, which is open and designed to be functional. At night, as you look out the huge window over the sink, the tall trees of Summit sparkle as the sun sets. He enlisted the help of Joan Picone of European Country



In the formal living room, an 18th-century Neapolitan table, bought at an estate sale, holds 1920s unglazed pottery from France. A contemporary piece of art from the couple's collection is juxtaposed with the antiques below.

OPPOSITE PAGE: *The foyer, featuring dark-stained white-oak floors, contains DelleDonne's custom designs: a curvy runner, English-inspired pendant light, an antique-looking mirror, and a honey-colored burl-veneer table that greets guests.*





LEFT: The oversized stainless steel hood commands attention in this eclectic kitchen. The circular chopping block is best suited for the tall cook. Calcutta marble is on the island and backsplash and the slat-front cabinets are DelleDonne's custom design. **BELOW:** A peek into the dining area, through the Moroccan style doorway, reveals a hand-painted table top on an antique base. The French plates he calls great all texture. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** The grand kitchen features DelleDonne's custom designed millwork.



Kitchens in Millburn (also Pittstown and New York City) in the room's planning. "I didn't want it to be overdone, so I chose furniture pieces that did not connect," he says. There is the tall, circular chopping block the 6-foot-3 DelleDonne had made so he does not have to hunch over while preparing meals. Next to it is a large marble-topped island. The same Calcutta marble is behind the stove. His grandmother's home had an identical backsplash; hers had beautiful olive oil remnants of many a family meal.

"This house is about quality, not size," DelleDonne says of his 3,800-square-foot retreat. "We have three bedrooms upstairs. We could have had six and sacrificed the 26-foot cathedral ceiling in the kitchen and great room, but we wanted this openness. I love to watch people's reaction when they walk in here. Their eyes go right up."

The whole house is painted a space-enhancing white, and many of its upholstered furnishings are shades of cream or wheat. "I deal with color all day. I wanted to come home to a calming environment," he says.

DelleDonne is elegantly dressed in crisp black slacks, shiny designer loafers, and a starched white shirt—looking like a throwback from another era. He began his career as a colorist for a fashion design house, soon giving in to his true love: interiors. He studied at the New York School of Interior Design, then looked in his native New Jersey to put down roots. Slowly his client list has expanded to some of the most well-heeled residents of the state—many of whom have second homes in New York City, Aspen, or Florida.



“I tell all my clients to take their time while doing a project. I don’t care if we do a room a season, or a room a year, just do it right,” he says, tossing in a metaphor for clarification: “Would you rather have the big diamond with flaws or the smaller one that is flawless?”

He underscores space planning in his designs. “If the canvas is not right, then what you fill it with doesn’t matter,” he says. His canvas has grand ceilings, many windows, and French doors that let light pour in, as well as beautifully disguised storage places that make way for his custom-designed furniture and his well-edited array of antiques. “I have a handful of good quality antiques I have picked up in Italy, London, the Hamptons, and California,” he says. The couple also collects contemporary art.

His client’s love his custom light fixtures, woodwork, furniture, and his prowess at layering. “There needs to be a hierarchy of order. If everything pops when you walk into a room, then your eye doesn’t know where to go.

DelleDonne has quickly grown attached to the memories the house now holds. “If I ever sold it, it would have to be to someone who appreciates it,” he says, as if he has lived there for decades. After all, it is his San Bartolomeo in Summit.



OPPOSITE PAGE: In Hollander’s library, the ceiling beams are in orderly rows. There is something harmonious about repetition. It is like a song by DelleDonne, who hand-combed the pine walls and slathered them in wax to make them look antique. Computer equipment is hidden behind doors and in drawers. **TOP:** Just outside the formal living room and master bedroom, beneath a pergola, an outdoor retreat awaits. **BOTTOM:** The master bathroom is a shining combination of marble, porcelain subway tile and satin nickel.

