

Casa Rosa No. 5

For now, Rumson couple settles on Hamptons-style colonial



The Rosas' outdoor porch is perfect for warm-weather entertaining.

Despite the lavish lifestyles of some of its inhabitants, Rumson remains at heart a conservative community, a place where the natives tend to notice, and appreciate, a new home rooted in tradition that doesn't scream, "Notice me! Appreciate me!"

So Dan and Lauren Rosa considered it high praise two years ago when locals told them their newly constructed Hamptons-

style colonial was so well harmonized with its surroundings that it looked like it had been there a long time.

The Rosas, who are in their late 30s, are old pros at blending into the neighborhood. This is the couple's fifth home in 14 years of marriage, all of them in the Navesink River area.

Why so many moves?

"We're a bit like gypsies," Dan explains, but then, so are

STORY BY SHANNON MULLEN PHOTOGRAPHY BY BOB BIELK



The Rosas chose an architectural style that would fit into the neighborhood.

many others in his line of work. He's a custom home builder in the area, partners with his father, also Dan, of the Locust section of Middletown.

Like many builders' families, the Rosas have a habit of renovating and reselling their homes, each time moving up to something more grand. Builders like Dan are particularly adept at this because they have the expertise and the ready access to the high-quality contractors who can often be difficult for the rest of us ordinary folks to corral. He built his current house, which the family moved into in August 2006, with the same crew he's worked with for years.

Dan and Lauren started out in a 600-square-foot bungalow in Atlantic Highlands, which they expanded. Next came a one-bedroom ranch in Fair Haven, which got a second story, followed by a 4,000-square-foot contemporary home in the Navesink section of Middletown, which needed work but had "good bones," Dan says. He knew that to be the case because he and his dad were the ones who built it.

Before long, the Rosas felt that familiar itch and moved again, this time venturing across the river to Rumson, which offered the small-town sense of community they wanted for their two daughters, Sophie, 10, and Isabelle, 6. They bought a nondescript 50-year-old house on Bingham Avenue and gave it a thorough makeover, gutting the insides and charming up the exterior with dormers and a front porch. They did such a good job that just a few years later, someone contacted them out of the blue and offered to buy the house, at a price the Rosas couldn't refuse.

At that point, Dan says, a "real drama" ensued. Intent on remaining in Rumson, the Rosas bought a pretty, 1.5-acre vacant parcel one lot away from the Navesink River, but the people who were supposed to buy the Bingham Avenue house backed out of the deal. The Rosas wound up moving back for a while, and for a year they found themselves owning two homes in town, until someone else bought the first house.

The process wasn't pretty, but in the

end something good came out of it: Lauren and Dan got the chance to build their "dream home."

They were well prepared to seize the opportunity. For years now, Lauren has been collecting magazine clippings, snapshots of homes and design ideas she likes. In fact, one of her favorite pastimes is driving through Shore towns like Spring Lake, camera at the ready.

"I just love houses," she says.

The new house she had in mind would integrate elements of the traditional Shore houses she so admired with the modern conveniences and casual elegance that fit her family's lifestyle, and as Dan soon discovered, Lauren, who did virtually all the interior design work herself, had very definite ideas on how that could be done.

There was the matter of the front door, for instance.

"I think the front door can really make or break a house," Lauren says, whereas Dan is more of the mind that the front door is something that ought to open, close and keep Cosmo, the family's



Above left: Lauren and Dan Rosa, in their living room, wanted a crisp, clean ambience.



The view from upstairs, still a work in progress.

Portuguese water dog, from running away. The entrance Lauren wanted, and got – a mahogany half-light door flanked by narrow windows of diamond-shaped panes – cost a lot more than Dan bargained for, but as with the transoms inside and the five-paneled closet doors with milk glass knobs and oil-rubbed bronze backplates, the compliments it elicits have given him a new appreciation for Lauren's keen eye.

"It's funny," he says, "because a lot of the stuff I argued about is what people notice now."

Counterbalancing these traditional touches are contemporary features that anchor the house in the here and now. These include a breezy floor plan, a beachy color scheme, the family room's comfy sectional and 60-inch plasma TV and 10-foot-high ceilings decked out in miles of what Lauren describes as "chunky" white molding.

"We wanted everything to be crisp and big," Lauren says. "Simple, but upsized."

And though it might look old-ish

from the outside, with its stately square columns and Dutch Colonial dormers, the house is hip to current trends, so it has things like a highly efficient four-zone heating and air-conditioning system, Styrofoam insulation, composite Hardy board sheathing, a synthetic slate roof and an integrated sound system in every room.

At 5,500 square feet, it's a slight upgrade in space from their previous home, but as Dan points out, "it lives a lot larger." The other house, for instance, had a living room measuring 26 by 18 feet that the family seemed to use only at Christmas.

"We use every room in this house," says Dan, who has a home office on the first floor. "There's no wasted space."

The foyer is flanked to the right by a sunny sitting room, decorated with rattan furniture, sea-grass wallpaper, white linen curtains and a sisal rug, and to the left by the dining room, featuring a round table set with Ralph Lauren dishes on rattan chargers, bamboo-handled flatware and amber water glasses

Opposite page, top: Traditional touches inspired by classic Shore homes.



In the kitchen, Lauren got the marble-topped island she always wanted.

that match an antique amber and iron chandelier.

Adjoining the dining room is a butler's pantry, with white, inset cabinetry and a Carrera marble countertop. Beyond that is the kitchen, which was Lauren's special project.

In her other homes, she had always allowed herself to be talked out of marble countertops because of their susceptibility to scratches and stains, but not this time.

Smack dab in the middle of her kitchen, beneath sturdy schoolhouse light fixtures, is a sprawling island topped with Calcutta gold marble. Yes, the inevitable first scratch was painful, Lauren admits, but she has no regrets.

Surrounding the island are white cabinets with charcoal-hued pietra cardoza countertops, a large Wolf stove, a hefty farmhouse sink with polished nickel fixtures, and beveled white subway tiles on the walls that gleam in the sunshine.

Once in a while, the family will gather around the big island for a quick bite, but they take most of their meals together in an adjoining room that's technically part of the kitchen. The Colonial-inspired space, floored in oak like the rest of the ground level, has a gas-ignited, wood-burning fireplace that also services the family room, and a



drum-shaped, brushed nickel chandelier that hangs over a long, dark-stained pine farmhouse table. Above the mantle is a rectangular slate chalkboard, adorned with cheery, hand-drawn artwork that changes with the seasons. A worktable against one wall is topped with a sleek computer that doubles as a flat-screen TV.

It's easy to see why Lauren's kitchen wound up on this year's Rumson a la

Carte gourmet kitchen tour, a fundraiser for the Rumson Education Foundation.

And the upstairs? Four bedrooms, but still a work in progress. Being a builder, Dan says, "one of the downsides is you never have a finished house. It's usually finished five minutes before you move."

There's that word again, "move." Just when you're starting to get the impression Casa Rosa No. 5 is a keeper, you hear Lauren second-guessing the grain of the oak floors. "That's something I'll do different in the next house."

The next house?

"You never know," says Ginny Padula, an interior designer with a new shop set to open in Red Bank who helped Lauren prep the house for the kitchen tour. A Rumson resident, she's married to builder Lou Padula and has moved more often than Lauren has.

How many times? Ginny has to stop and count. "One, two, three, four, five – we're on our sixth location," she says.

For the Rosas, though, the fifth time is definitely a charm.

"Believe me, when I move from this house, I'll be crying," Lauren says. "This one is special." ✦

TAKE THE VIRTUAL TOUR

Audio slideshow

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The Rosas wanted a home with character to fit their casual lifestyle. The quiet backyard is perfect for a siesta.