

PLAYING
WELL

together



After decades as a duplex, a Minneapolis home returns to its single-family roots to harmonize with a couple's diverse creative pursuits.

BY SHAWN GILLIAM
PHOTOGRAPHS BY SPACECRAFTING

Sewing, beading, and birding rank high among Nina Hale's passions. And then there's upholstery, the apparel program at MCTC, and a burgeoning interest in quilting. "I have this giant wheel of hobbies," she says with a laugh. "In one of my social media profiles, I call them 'old lady hobbies.'"

No matter what you call them, Nina's hobbies and their related experiences—including birding in places like Vietnam, where on a recent visit she snapped hundreds of photos of rare and endangered birds—fill her life following early retirement from a career as an ad agency executive. They also largely happen in the 1896 home she shares with her husband, singer-songwriter and novelist Dylan Hicks.

That home, in Minneapolis's Lowry Hill East neighborhood—which Nina affectionately calls by its nickname, The Wedge—spent many of its years as multiple units. By the time she and Dylan purchased the home 30 years ago, it was a duplex. And while they maintained it as such until 2016 (renting out the first floor, living on the second and third), it made sense to bring everything back together once Nina started spending more time there.

Renovation work focused on the former rental unit. Because Nina and Dylan already had a full kitchen on the second floor from the duplex days, they had the freedom to reimagine



Dylan Hicks's music room (opposite) features acoustic treatments on the ceiling and walls. Nina Hale's studio (this photo) accommodates hobbies such as sewing. S.A. Woodwork custom-built the cutting table with storage for patterns below.



the first-level space to suit their unique needs. “I have hobbies, but Dylan has work, so we needed to sort of separate that,” Nina says.

The couple turned to PKA Architecture’s Kristine Anderson and Peter Atkins. Anderson had already worked with them on two previous renovations, the first alongside her longtime mentor, the late architect Lars Peterssen. (A 2006 renovation transformed the third floor into the owner’s suite and Dylan’s office; one in 2015 outfitted the second floor with a new kitchen, bath, and Dylan’s “vinyl room.”)

“The nice thing about Kristine is that she totally gets me,” Nina says. “She gets my aesthetic and all the quirky stuff, so she comes up with ideas that are the perfect fit.”

The first floor’s living and dining rooms were repurposed as a music space for Dylan. And what once served as that level’s kitchen now serves as Nina’s studio, which stretches into a 500-square-foot addition with space for sewing machines, a large cutting table, and a long desk built into a wall of windows. “I’m down here for eight hours every single day, and I love it,” Nina says.

Dylan and Nina’s spaces maintain a bit of a division—part of the original goal—but still feel connected. “When Dylan’s playing with his band, Nina likes to hear him—and that sound is reverberating through the house and probably outside,” Anderson laughs. ■

COLORFUL PERSONALITIES

Art by Oona Brangam-Snell (on the mantel) and Walter Martin and Paloma Muñoz (above the ironing board) hangs in the dining room (above). The ironing board looks like a work of art, but it’s simply an old ironing board Dylan had powder-coated red at an automotive shop. Also on the second floor is Dylan’s “vinyl room,” which contains thousands of records and CDs (below). “We originally met when we were teenagers working at KFAI Radio,” Nina says. “We both had big record collections, but Dylan’s was much bigger.”



“From afar, it just looks like some warm gray tile,” Kristine Anderson, managing principal/designer at PKA, says of the music room’s fireplace surround. “But when you get up close, you see it’s cassette tapes” from the Cassette Decos line by Clayhaus.

A NEW TUNE

The first floor’s former living and dining area now houses Dylan’s music room—a long space with a grand piano on one end, comfy seating around a fireplace and turntable on the other. The couple’s art collection includes a work by Ed Ruscha above the fireplace that once hung above Nina’s parents’ fireplace. Today, the couple mostly collects art by women and people of color, including Julie Buffalohead, Willie Cole, and Wendy Red Star.



“Nina likes to get

OFF THE BEATEN PATH, AND WORKING WITH HER TAKES YOU INTO ANOTHER UNIVERSE OF WHAT’S OUT THERE.”

—KRISTINE ANDERSON, ARCHITECTURAL DESIGNER

PLAYFUL RETREATS

The third floor’s main bedroom (above) may be compact, but it opens wide to a balcony in the treetops. “In the summer, it feels like they’re in a sleeping porch,” Anderson says. The renovated bath on the first floor (left and right) is wrapped with a mosaic called *Creatures of the Night* from New Ravenna’s *Kiddo* collection. “Before we did it, I joked that I was going to have a ‘Mount Curve’ bathroom, but then, of course, I steered it into my own crazy direction,” Nina says.



NEVER TOO SERIOUS Dylan’s third-floor office (above and top left) takes full advantage of the home’s highest ceilings, with bookshelves that scale the walls wrapping the space. The shelves are painted a custom blue to match the exterior of the Guthrie Theater. “I went to the Guthrie with all of my paint swatches and put them up against the walls to try to get the color as close as possible,” Anderson says. Brazilian design duo Humberto and Fernando Campana’s iconic stuffed animal chair occupies a nook nearby (top right). The watercolor drawing, by St. Paul artist Carolyn Swiszc, is a study for the cover of Dylan’s second novel, *Amateurs*.



“INSTEAD OF HAVING TWO SEWING MACHINES RIGHT UP AGAINST EACH OTHER, I’M ABLE TO HAVE THEM WHERE I CAN ALWAYS BE *looking out the windows*.” —NINA HALE, HOMEOWNER

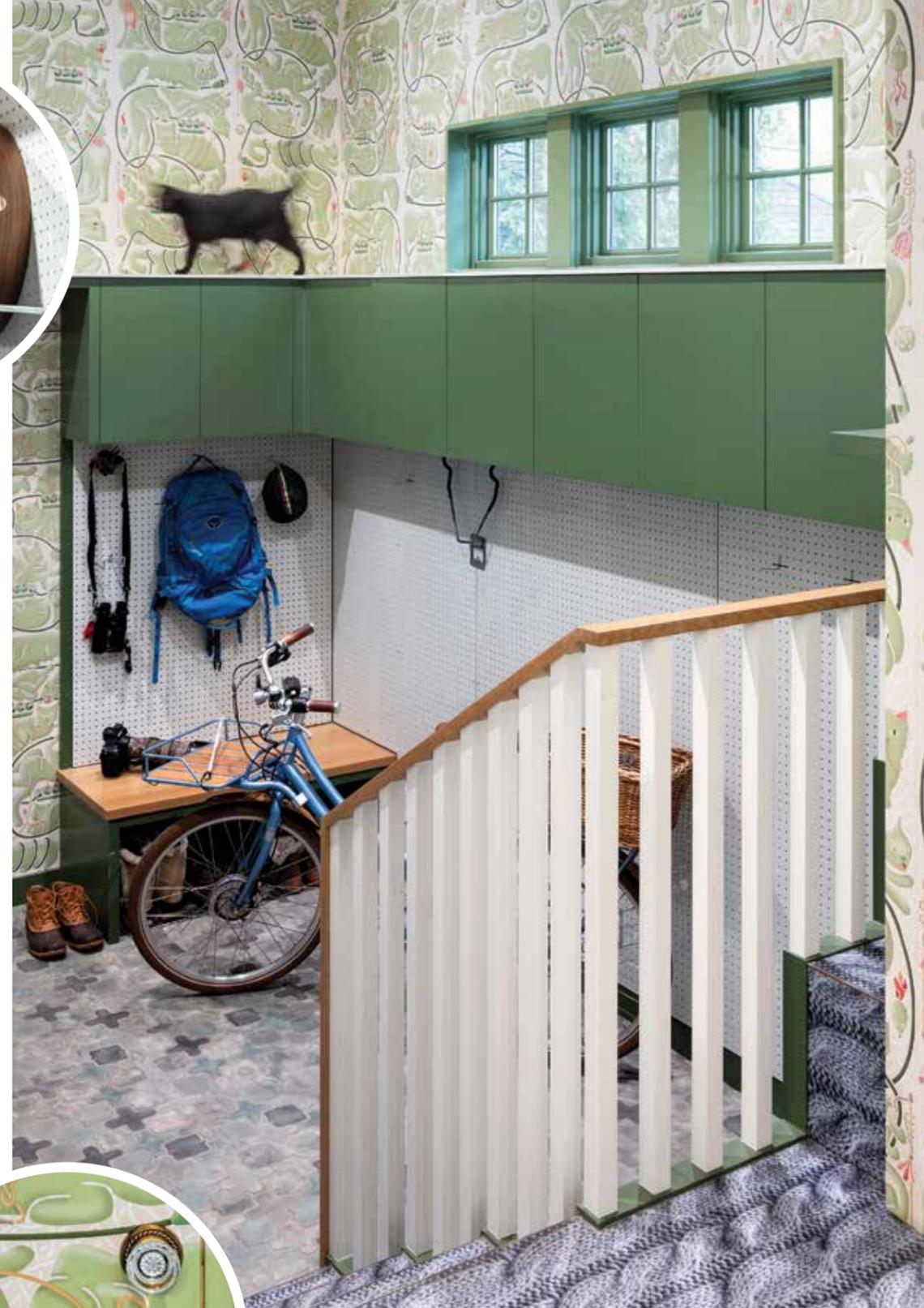


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The mudroom’s catwalk includes a bubble where Nina’s cat Orlando and the couple’s son Jack’s cat, Jeffrey (shown), love to hang out. “It’s like a little folly moment for the cats,” Anderson says.

CONVENIENCE AND CHARACTER

Nina’s studio includes plenty of room for multiple sewing machines and a 10-foot-long built-in desk (opposite). “Everyone said, ‘You don’t need a desk that long,’ but I said, ‘No, no, no, I do, because I have all of these hobbies and sometimes have all of my camera gear spread out because I’m doing my bird photos, or I’m doing my beading, and it’s great if I can lay out everything at once,’” Nina says. The mudroom (right) on the ground level, also part of the most recent remodeling, not only provides a play space for cats—it also allows Nina to easily wheel in and store her electric bike.

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An NLXL wallpaper design by Dutch artist Erik van der Veen called Cluttered Cats and Cords adds a tongue-in-cheek touch. Anderson laughs, “It’s more funny and playful than it is dark.”



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