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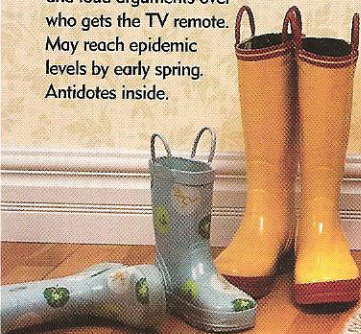
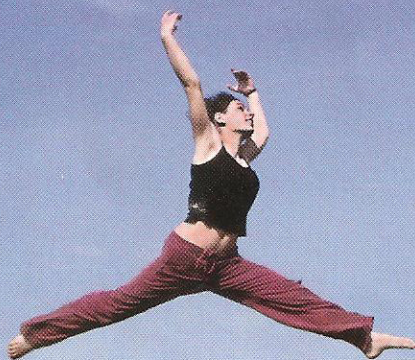
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WHERE *Fairy Tales* COME TO LIFE



The house and studio of children's author Jan Brett are as magical as her books.

BY MEG CADOUX HIRSHBERG
PHOTOGRAPHY JOHN GRUEN

THERE ARE TWO WAYS TO ENTER the whimsical, animal-filled world of renowned children's author and illustrator Jan Brett: Turn to page 1 of any of her 32 books, or walk through the front door of her Massachusetts home. Both Jan's books and her home are filled with exquisite, colorful detail and meaningful mementos from her travels and childhood. Jan and her husband, Joe Hearne, a bassist with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, have crafted a home that supports, reflects, and blends their artistic lives.

Although located in a Boston suburb on less than two acres, the house borders conservation land and is visually oriented toward the backyard. The setting is wooded and cozy. Over the past 25 years, Joe and

Opposite: A painting from Jan Brett to her husband, Joe Hearne, celebrates their trip to Martinique, where they researched "The Owl and the Pussycat." Left: For her dining room, Jan needlepointed six delightful chair cushions, each with a different animal scene.

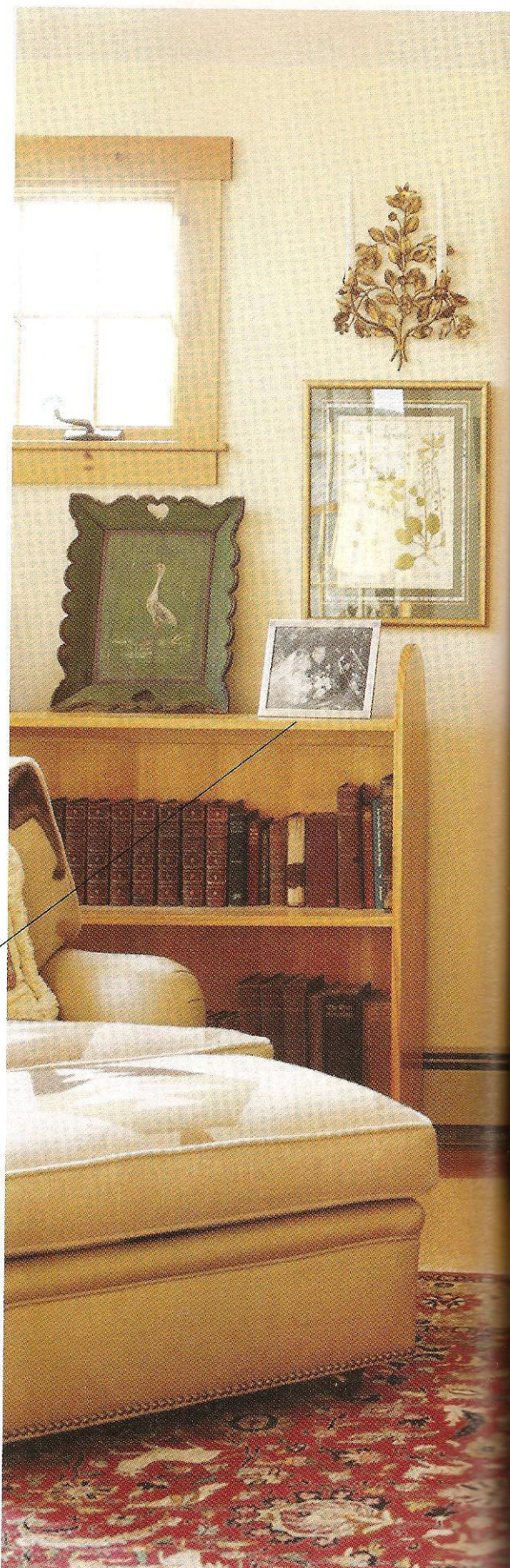
In 26 years of marriage, Jan and Joe have traveled to 24 countries together. Their deep bond is evident in their home. Jan has made a book of drawings for Joe depicting his many admirable qualities—from “imaginative” to “mechanically minded.” She adds a new page each year.



Jan have made several additions to the house, which was built in 1978. In the process, they have converted a tight 800 square feet into an open-concept, light-filled 3,000 square feet. Architect Jim Kelliher of Axiom Architects in Hanover, Massachusetts, designed all the additions. “Jan told me she wanted the house style to be ‘New England folkloric,’” Jim says. “The house still has a New England feel, with some separate rooms like the dining room and kitchen, but the rounded doors and archways and the stair tower make it playful.”

Jan and Joe spend a couple of months each year traveling to research her books and touring with the BSO. The influence of these trips is evident in the design of their home. Numerous excursions to Scandinavia are reflected in their choice of unstained, honey-colored, varnished pine for all the interior trim. In Frankfurt, Germany, the couple admired the marble borders edging the carpet in the Alte Oper (Old Opera House). That led to their distinctive flooring design—sisal hemp carpet bounded by light maple wood, which is incorporated into much of the house. “The sisal has a soothing feel,” Joe says. “It reminded us of the raked gravel we’ve seen in so many Japanese gardens.”

Daughter Lia and husband Tom sitting in Joe’s 1954 Jaguar roadster. Jan keeps this photo in a prominent place because the young couple are Marines serving in Iraq and, in her words, “I need to see them every day.”



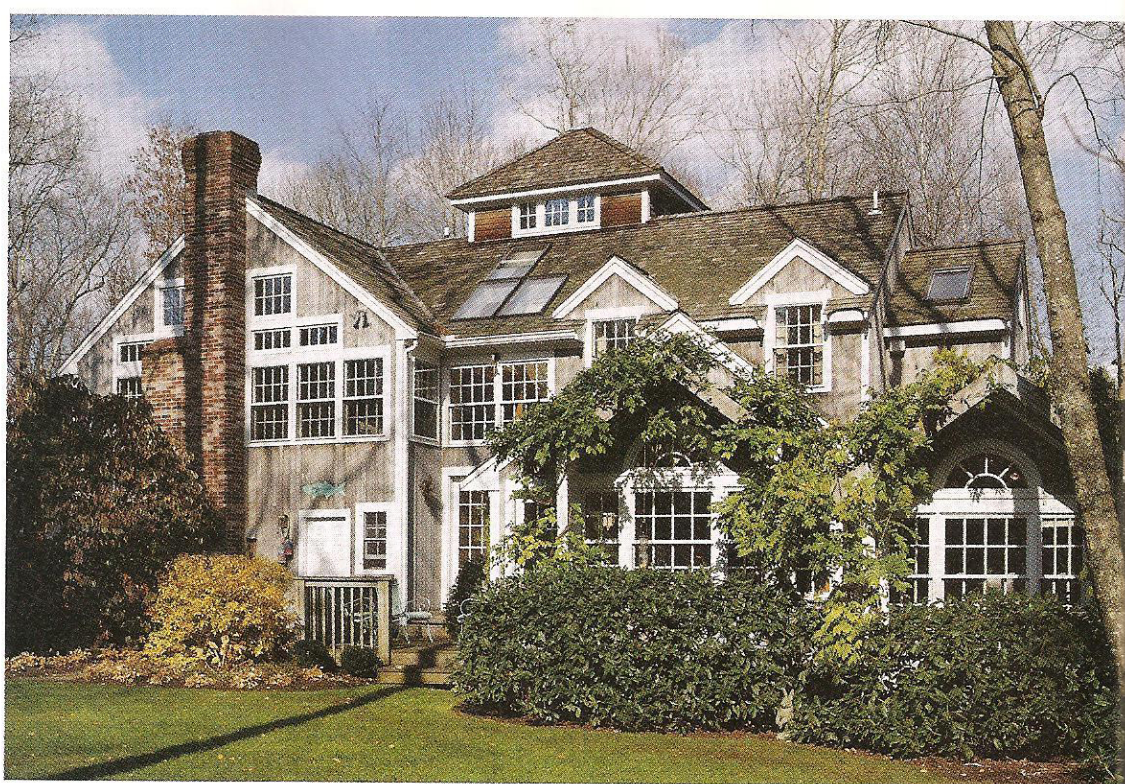


A trip to Bavaria for "Berlioz the Bear" brought Jan and Joe to Berchtesgaden, hometown of their friend Edith Gilson, owner of the Cupboards and Roses antiques shop in Sheffield, Connecticut. That's where the couple bought this c. 1887 decorative cupboard. Notes Jan, "It was a lot easier to get it home from there."

Jan admires last names that evoke creatures. Her husband's name, "Hearne," is close to "heron"—a most adept and stately bird—so it's their representational animal. This heron is from a Pendleton blanket scrap; Jan needlepointed the border to create a pillow.

This majolica nut dish is a George Jones piece and one that is "definitely put away on a high shelf when youngsters visit," says Jan. Jones, famous for his brilliantly colored ceramics, started a factory in 1861; today, his pottery is sought after by collectors around the world.

A stepping-stone pathway under an arch of hemlock and hydrangea leads the visitor through a living tunnel, opening onto an expansive, beautifully landscaped backyard. Also in the back, just out of view, are two immaculate chicken coops for Jan's white-crested black Polish bantams.



Jan Brett on Creating an Artist's Retreat

- Find a space where you can close the door, especially if you have a young family. I like to get away from the chatter of TV and other people, though I often listen to classical music while I paint.
- Pay attention to lighting. If you work a lot at night, as I do, full-spectrum lights can help keep you more alert. They can also help with your mood, especially during winter. During the day, good natural light and a view are ideal; my studio looks out onto my backyard and a bird feeder.
- Surround yourself with items that inspire you. My great-uncle, Harold Brett, was a well-known artist. He did a drawing of me when I was 5 years old that I keep in my studio. After he completed my portrait, I knew that I wanted to be an artist, too.
- I use large, flat drawers to keep items I need close at hand, such as reference photos and brushes. I also use a big bulletin board to tack up book ideas and artwork.
- Create an artist's space for your kids, too! It can be as simple as reserving a part of the kitchen table and supplying them with three essentials: a ream of inexpensive paper, colored pencils, and an electric pencil sharpener. Don't be too ambitious with materials—I didn't use watercolor until I was an adult. Colored pencils are more nuanced than crayons or markers. Most important, give kids the time they need to do art. Let them use their imaginations, and don't focus on the finished product. If your child wants to draw nothing but bricks, brick after brick, let him or her do just that.

Jan Brett is a lively woman with blue eyes and shoulder-length blond hair. She is an avid collector, and her home reflects her passion for animals: Wooden lions roar from bookends; ducks paddle in artwork; painted herons guard her fireplace. An extensive collection of majolica ceramics (shaped into ducks, lily pads, and a porcupine) is on display throughout the house, as well as Grenfell hooked silk mats depicting various animals.

Even Jan's silver and turquoise bracelet is etched with feathers. There are boxes fashioned from porcupine quills, spotted clay eggs from Africa, and woven blankets depicting polar bears. And, of course, a seemingly infinite population of hedgehogs—stuffed, ceramic, wooden, crystalline—many given by fans in honor of Jan's iconic animal, represented frequently in her books.

What astonishes the visitor is that despite an endless array of art objects from around the world, Jan and Joe's home does not feel at all cluttered—instead, it pulses with interior life. As with Jan's drawings, an observer sees something new every time she looks. "Jan has an ornate but orderly way of doing things," Joe explains. "There's tons of detail, both in her books and in our home, but there's a cleanliness to it."

Their architect agrees. "We gave Jan the palette to work with in the house design," Jim says. "Her touches are what make the house fun to be in."

Jan's home also reflects her passion for family. "I'm inspired by [them]," she says. "They've been living in nearby Hingham—where I grew up—



Far left: Wooden springerle cookie molds were the inspiration for Jan's "Gingerbread Baby." Original art from the book is framed on the wall below. Left: A fireplace screen was commissioned by Richard Leibowitz, the craftsman who also made the front door (see "The Detail," p. 58).

PAINTING JAN BRETT BY THE NUMBERS

By any measure, Jan Brett is one of the nation's most successful and popular children's authors and illustrators. She has published 32 books, which have sold more than 30 million copies. Her books regularly occupy the NEW YORK TIMES's number 1 slot for children's picture books. Her Web site, janbrett.com, receives 10 million visits per year and contains more than 3,800 pages of activities for children. Jan receives more than 10,000 letters and e-mails a year, and she says she loves this connection with her young fans: "Kids often send me drawings of animals and ask me to write a story about them. Their pictures inspire me with their vibrancy." Jan and her husband, Joe Hearne, have three grown children and three grandchildren. She first dreamed of becoming an artist when she was 5 years old.

The rounded doors and archways and the stair tower make the house playful.



The Detail

The front door of Jan Brett's home is a clue to the artistry within. The door originally appeared as an illustration in her book *Annie and the Wild Animals* (1985). Husband Joe Hearne suggested the door as a birthday gift for Jan in 1992. Delighted, she drew Annie's door at 100 percent on a template of butcher paper. Joe found blacksmith Richard Leibowitz, who hand-hammered the fanciful figures (note Jan's signature hedgehog) in wrought iron. The embellishment is fastened to a custom-made pine door with square-cut iron nails.

RESOURCE

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since it was founded. I am so rooted in this area. And my sister, uncle, and great-uncle all are or were also artists."

Heirlooms are everywhere: Jan's living room sofa belonged to her great-uncle, artist Harold Brett; the rocking chair next to it was made by Jan's great-great-grandfather; a dining room chest displays a model wooden whaling ship finished and rigged by Jan's father, George, when he was a teenager.

One wall of the master bedroom is devoted to the framed paintings Jan makes for Joe each year, por-

traying their favorite experience from the year past. The couple loves to gather family and friends for dinner, so their latest home addition, two years ago, expanded the dining room (which can now seat 16) and upgraded the kitchen.

A loft above the living room serves as Jan's library. An entire section of it is devoted to Norway, another to the Arctic, yet another to books on coins, which Jan delved into for her latest book, *Hedgie Blasts Off*. "Small nuances make things real for me and for the reader," Jan says. "I try to include visual



Three flights of stairs create a tower leading to a cozy room with a wonderful view of the backyard. The chandelier, made from naturally shed mule deer antlers, adds a magical feel to the space.

details in my drawings that readers may not even recognize or know about, but that nonetheless make them feel that they can walk right onto the page.”

Ultimately, their home reflects Jan’s ongoing explorations—of her world, of her past, of her art. “I tell both kids and adults to create the mental space for their art by listening to their muse, that quiet voice that points you in a certain direction, that says draw this, or write this, not that,” Jan explains. “For me, it’s the same as listening to my six-year-old self, who sits on my shoulder. The beauty of art is that it lets individuality flower—whatever you create is something only you could have made.”

“Jan’s business is to create,” adds Joe. “She gets endless ideas from a place I call ‘Jan-Land.’” If Jan’s enchanting books and home are any indication, Jan-Land is a magical place indeed. 🍄

To order Jan Brett’s books, go to YankeeMagazine.com.



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