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decorator
Barrie Benson



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a classic ranch grows up

As North Carolina-based decorator **Barrie Benson** and her architect husband, **Matt**, learned, it's possible to bring the long-stigmatized / *Love Lucy*-era ranch house into the new millennium while maintaining the retro feel. Here's how he revamped the structure and she dressed up the interiors.

photographs by **LAURA RESEN**
produced by **DARA CAPONIGRO** text by **KATE BOLICK**



Barrie and Matt Benson's 1956 ranch house in Charlotte, NC, has plenty of space for their kids, Billy and Kay, and Matt's collection of old cars (such as the family's beloved '66 Cadillac).



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living room

WHAT HE DID Matt and Barrie agreed that the characteristic stacked-slate fireplace and exposed beams should remain intact. But they banished the white wall-to-wall carpeting in the living/dining room area to make way for less contrasting, eco-friendly bamboo.

WHAT SHE DID "At first, I thought we had to make the place seriously modern to go with the architecture," Barrie explains. "But over time we realized that juxtaposing family pieces and furnishings from other eras is what makes it interesting." Here, a pair of Louis XV bergère chairs covered in linen prettily soften the hearth's sleekness, but their deep, '40s seat proportions nod to the Milo Baughman velvet '60s chairs nearby. The aqua linen curtains and the pagoda-inspired valance (Barrie's design) further ward off potential chilliness.

FLOORING (similar to shown) Bamboo "Signature Naturals" from \$6/square foot, teragren.com for stores **CHAIRS** (similar to shown) French bergère-style \$3,600 each, and **GREEN PILLOWS** (similar to shown) 18" "Greek Key" \$250 each, Belvedere (404) 352-1942 **CHAIR FABRIC** (similar to shown) "Montgomery" linen in Java \$32.99/yard, callicocorners.com **DRAPE AND CORNICE FABRIC** Linen "Middleton" about \$74/yard, Schumacher (800) 332-3384 for information **RUG** "Couristan Cross-Stitch" \$140/square foot, ABC Carpet & Home (212) 473-3000

CLOTHING STYLIST: LAUREN GOODMAN; MAKEUP: CHRISTIE LAPPAR



A gilt chinoiserie mirror gorgeously complicates the preexisting board-and-batten wall.

In the 1920s, when ranch homes first came into being, their open floor plans and long, low silhouettes revolutionized the architectural landscape. By 1950, the style was de rigueur for nine out of ten new houses built in America. But as any post-Baby Boomer is well aware, the trend didn't actually deliver: Most ranches were depressingly dim and flimsy, not the sun-filled temples to easy livability that their progenitors had envisioned. The resulting stigma didn't bother Barrie and Matt Benson when they first laid eyes on this iconic 1956 version in Charlotte, NC. The structure's clean lines appealed to their shared passion for modern design. "I looked at Matt and said, 'If anyone can live here, we can,'" Barrie remembers. This reverence for all things mid-century guided their minimal architectural refinements and a major 1,000-foot addition. But it was only when Barrie worked *against* the aesthetic, to instill her signature mishmash of styles and decades, that they transcended mere conservation to create a postmodern gem.

SOFA (similar to shown) 79" "Delancy" \$1,199 roomandboard.com **COFFEE TABLE** Florence Knoll \$747 knollspace.com for stores **CHAIRS** (similar to shown) Vintage from \$2,500 each, **FLOOR LAMPS** (similar to shown) Vintage gilt iron and marble \$2,500 each, and **THROW PUR** cashmere \$375, all at Belvedere (404) 352-1942 **PILLOWS** Kim & Garo French linen (left) \$58 and Dransfield & Ross linen (middle) \$228 Luxe Home Couture (704) 370-2644 **MIRROR** (similar to shown) Antique Chinese Chippendale-style from \$3,800 heatherandcompany.com for information **CREDENZA** (similar to shown) 40" x 20" x 48" "Delano" \$1,425 mgandbw.com for stores **SEA GRASS** (similar to shown, on credenza) "Elements II" in Tobago \$33.90/yard, waverly.com for stores **WALL PAINT** Shaker Beige #HC-45, benjaminmoore.com for stores

opposite page: TABLE (similar to shown) "Regent" \$2,600 wshome.com **CHAIRS** (similar to shown) Thomas O'Brien Collection #2060-02 \$1,905 each, hickorychair.com for stores **CHAIR FABRIC** (similar to shown) "Calais Linen" \$13.98/yard, Lewis & Sheron Textile Co. (404) 351-4833 **SOUP TUREEN** Richard Ginori "Fiesole" \$850 manorhg.com **CONSOLE** Custom mirrored \$3,860 Old World Mirror (336) 384-1119 **VASES** (similar to shown, on console) Porcelain "Aquatic" \$115 each, horchow.com **ARTWORK** Florence Leif oil-on-canvas "Light Reflections" (sold), iconinteriorstyle.com for similar works by artist **CHAIR PAINT** Pebble Rock #945, and **WALL PAINT** Quiet Moments #1563, benjaminmoore.com for stores **CHANDELIER** (similar to shown) Vintage crystal "Empire" \$6,800 and **LAMP** (similar to shown, on credenza, inset) Quartz from \$3,100 Belvedere (404) 352-1942

dining room

WHAT HE DID After Matt dismantled a boxy valance lined with fluorescent tubes above the dining room's floor-to-ceiling windows, the whole room felt more open and natural. He left one of their favorite features—the Japanese-inspired cutout screen (which looks onto the entrance)—as is.

WHAT SHE DID Initially, Barrie painted all the rooms soft white, but after discovering that colors improved things exponentially, she went with a pale blue in the dining room, which segues seamlessly into the pale green of the living area beyond. The Glu-Lam beam above the front door (support beams run through every room of the house) is painted a neutral green-brown "that's not really a color at all" but has left. Completely unmodern accessories—a '20s Empire chandelier, '30s bronze sconces and an artfully tarnished mirrored console (Barrie's own design) topped with brand-new Chinese vases—inject grandeur.



The original 20' built-in credenza—Barrie covered the panels with sea grass, for warmth—doubles as a buffet.



Barrie attached parchment shades to a '50s wood-and-nickel chandelier to take the edge off its industrial vibe.



A vinyl covering protects the fancy dragon-emblazoned Schumacher fabric from "kid slop."

kitchen

WHAT HE DID The biggest alteration by far was a 1,000-square-foot addition that gave the kitchen another 200 square feet and formed a long window- and book-lined corridor running to a playroom. Marshaling the light was key: "Deep, 5½" overhangs allow us to have full-height glass walls; they protect us from too much summer sun but allow the low winter light in," Matt explains. He replaced the original stove and fridge and installed hanging, doorless cabinets that resembled the existing versions. A "monster island"—with a CompacStone countertop and a capacious cherry-veneer base outfitted with a deep Blanco America stainless-steel sink—divides the wide-open space in two, yielding a galley kitchen, tons of storage and extra seating. Tearing up the white tile floor led to good and bad news: handsome flagstone that suffered from an overabundance of grout, which was painlessly swapped out. The flagstone covers the entirety of the addition and ventures outside too.

TABLE Eero Saarinen 54" marble \$3,150 dwr.com **CHAIRS** (similar to shown) "Ansel" \$299 each, roomandboard.com **CHAIR FABRIC** "Chiang Mai Dragon" about \$178/yard, Schumacher (800) 332-3384 for information **BANQUETTE** Custom \$4,200 (excluding fabric), Design Upholstery (704) 376-7754 **BANQUETTE FABRIC** Chenille #1065013 \$30/yard, Lewis & Sheron Textile Co. (404) 351-4833 **PILLOWS** \$158 each, Luxe Home Couture (704) 370-2644

CABINETS Custom, Elite Woodworking (704) 893-0842 **YELLOW-GREEN CABINET PAINT** Hibiscus #2027-50, benjaminmoore.com for stores **CABINET PULLS** #12700-38 from \$12.90 each, dekkorinc.com for stores **COUNTERTOPS** CompacStone from \$6/square foot, leelumber.com for information **BACKSPLASH** 3" "Fire Earth" tiles \$80.96/square foot, Renaissance Tile and Bath (704) 372-1575 **FLOORING** "Nor-Carla" irregular rubble flagstone about \$2.50/square foot, The Marble and Stone Shop Inc. (704) 376-2254 **STOOLS** (similar to shown) "Henry" \$625 each, Mecox Gardens (310) 358-9272 **LAMPS** (similar to shown) Crystal "Marlene" \$279 each, crateandbarrel.com **LAMP SHADES** Raffia \$135 each, jamieyoung.com for information **KID'S TABLE** Offi "Woody Chalkboard" \$249 and **CHAIRS** "Mini Drawer" \$124 each, moderntots.com

WHAT SHE DID Barrie maximized their already roomy home by creating multipurpose zones wherever she could. For the eating end of the kitchen, she designed an Edward Wormley-inspired settee to accommodate her family by day—they love to cozy up and watch TV or read the paper while she makes breakfast in the morning—and dinner parties by night; the oval Eero Saarinen table fits "a ton of people" (this outgoing Southern couple is nothing if not hospitable). A little mini-modern set gives the kids a spot to draw in the evenings while Barrie prepares dinner. In the cooking section, Lucite and chrome lamps with raffia shades riff off the slick counter island, and a pale-green counter backsplash energizes the room's dark natural materials.



Exposed beams and a slice of the living room's stacked-slate fireplace connect the kitchen with the living/dining area next door.



One of the home's most striking original features is its preponderance of sliding glass doors; they usher the surrounding trees and lawn—plus light and breezes—right inside.



The custom cabinet gives the playroom a grown-up air and hides toys. Barrie swears by using Oriental rugs in kids' spaces; the durable wool holds up.

courtyard

WHAT HE DID Matt turned the kitchen into a private pavilion by inserting a 542-square-foot patio between it and the garage. With an entrance onto the driveway, it also serves as a "back door" to the house. Flagstone flooring both inside and out, and new sliding glass doors by the same company that had made the originals, yield one giant room.

WHAT SHE DID Barrie furnished the patio with Woodard flea-market furniture, upholstered in tufted and piped Sunbrella fabric, at one end and a dining table (hidden from view) at the other—ample amenities for casual entertaining. The overhang means the family can sit outside even when it's raining. A huge planter holds all of Barrie's cooking herbs and a few flowers.

During parties, guests can wander through the glass doors from the playroom (in the addition, left) across the backyard to the living room (in the 1956 building).



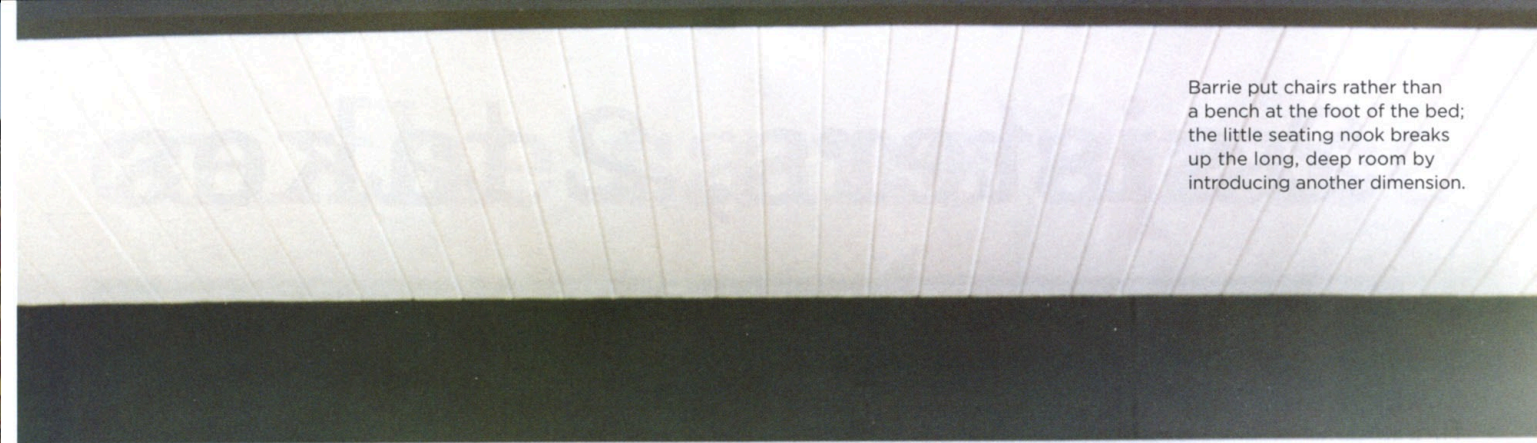
CREDENZA Custom \$6,500 Elite Woodworking (704) 893-0842 **PAINT** (on credenza) Sangria #2006-20, benjaminmoore.com for stores **PULLS** (on credenza) #8370 \$49.28 each, muffshardware.com for information **WALL COVERING** "Reed Grass" in Pumpkin \$41.99/roll, waverly.com for stores **TV 46** "Bravia" \$3,600 sonystyle.com **SOFA FABRIC** "ikat Blue" \$25/yard, ballarddesigns.com **COFFEE TABLE** (similar to shown) T.H. Robbsjohn Gibbings for Widdicomb \$2,200 Historical Materialism (518) 671-6151 **CHAIRS** Ludwig Mies van der Rohe "Barcelona" from \$3,888 each,

knollspace.com for information **BIRD PILLOW** Life in the 21st "Woodcut Feather" \$28 urbanoutfitters.com **RUG** Woven Legends \$7,800 Rugs by Robinson (404) 364-9042 **opposite page: SOFA FABRIC** Sunbrella "Canvas" in Cocoa #5425 \$14.95/yard, and "Logo Red" #5477 (piping) \$15.95/yard, outdoorfabrics.com **PLANTER** Emissary iron #1312MP from \$148 Décor Decor (770) 457-8000 **PILLOW FABRIC** "Monteverdi Woven Plaid" about \$226/yard, Brunschwig & Fils (800) 538-1880 for information

go to dominomag.com to see photos of Barrie's other decorating projects.



Letterpress posters from a favorite annual bluegrass festival and a vintage Edward Wormley globe are boyish, yet in keeping with the overall retro vibe.



Barrie put chairs rather than a bench at the foot of the bed; the little seating nook breaks up the long, deep room by introducing another dimension.



bedrooms

WHAT HE DID Not so much—after paying all that attention to the rest of the house, the Bensons decided they needed a rest before tackling the bedrooms. When they do, they'll update the energy-inefficient crank windows and the "less than great" closets.

WHAT SHE DID "The more I layer in this house, the happier I am," Barrie says of her tendency to pile on texture and color to soften the architecture's starker elements. Five-and-a-half-year-old Billy's bedroom is a playful twist on his parents', with a custom bunk bed in the same orange as their Edward Wormley chairs (right), and green curtains echoing their heavy raw-silk headboard and nightstands (both Barrie's own design). In the master bedroom, Barrie took texture to the hilt, laying a Moroccan wool rug over a sisal carpet and adding grass-cloth walls and oil paintings. Two-and-a-half-year-old Kay's room picks up on the green strain—but is mostly pink. "Having a boy first made me want to go all-out on the girl front," Barrie says with laugh.

BUNK BED \$4,800 Elite Woodworking (704) 893-0842 **BEDDING** Sheet sets \$58 each, and blankets \$145 each, garnethill.com **DRAPE FABRIC** (similar to shown) Linen "Slubby" in Apple and Azure \$29.99/yard, calicocorners.com **WALL PAINT** Green Wave #681, benjaminmoore.com for stores **DAYBED** (inset) "Overlapping Squares" \$399 westelm.com **opposite page: PILLOW SHAM** Hamburg House \$195 and **PILLOW CASES** \$75 each, Isabella

(704) 377-4919 **BLANKET** \$67.95 thescottishweaver.com **ROUND PILLOW** (on chair) Indian "Zari" \$140 ABC Carpet & Home (212) 473-3000 **SIDE TABLES** \$850 Elite Woodworking (704) 893-0842 **SHAG RUG** (similar to shown) 6' x 10' vintage Moroccan \$6,200 madelineweinrib.com for stores **ARTWORK** David Dooley "Cow and Calf" (center) Hodges Taylor Gallery (704) 334-3799 for similar works by artist



In Kay's room, a mix of fresh and homespun pillows reconciles the homemade quilt with the modern bed.