



The stone floor of Maureen “Mo” Ecke’s entryway welcomes muddy feet and paws—as Ecke’s springer spaniel, Harry, demonstrates. A gift from her sister Lucy Hubbard, the primitive wooden bench was fashioned from an old town-hall pew. *Opposite:* Italian marble tops the kitchen’s custom cabinetry, while salvaged Victorian corbels serve as distinctive brackets for the Viking stove’s hood. An industrial steel stool gives the otherwise neutral room a jolt of bright color.



Let the Sun Shine in

A California girl, Maureen “Mo” Ecke infused her New Hampshire farmhouse with West Coast cheer, creating a family haven that feels warm all year long.

WRITTEN BY LIESL SCHILLINGER • PHOTOGRAPHS BY LUCAS ALLEN
STYLING BY NATASHA LOUISE KING



Steal
this idea!

Draw attention
to the view by
painting muntins
and sashes a vibrant
yellow instead
of the usual white.

“You need to create a warm, bright spot to catch the light,” says Maureen “Mo” Ecke, “if you want home to be a happy place.”



Left: Ecke whips up cupcakes with great-nephews (from left) Nolan Gillis and Dexter Harris. Opposite: Bright walls (Pratt & Lambert's Premium Yellow) and a rattan Pottery Barn sofa make sure that her “winter porch” always seems summery. A rough-hewn Sundance coffee table and nature-themed Design Legacy throw pillows enhance the room's laid-back vibe.

High on a mesa overlooking the Pacific Ocean in Encinitas, California, Maureen “Mo” Ecke lives in a two-story villa with stuccoed walls, a clay-tiled roof, and a sprawling patio off the great room—in other words, the very epitome of casual California ease.

Three thousand miles across the country, in the rural town of Lyman, New Hampshire (really just a scattering of houses set against the White Mountains), Ecke owns another home—the one shown on these pages—with off-white clapboard siding, a tin roof, a quaint picket fence, and that most iconic of New England emblems: a saltbox barn.

But before pegging Ecke as some jet-setting, bicoastal businesswoman, know this: She maintains these two far-flung residences because she has two far-flung sisters—one in California, the other in New Hampshire—and family, not fame or fortune, means everything to Ecke.

Her older sibling, Lonnie Barland, lives in San Diego, a 25-mile drive from Encinitas. “I see her once a week when I’m

there,” Ecke says. Meanwhile, their younger sister, Lucy Hubbard, resides just down the road from Ecke’s Lyman house and drops by regularly for dinner or to roast marshmallows over the outdoor fire pit. Though Ecke never imagined she would lead these dual lives, the retired lawyer feels “so fortunate” to call more than one place home—and she relishes the time to enjoy them both while surrounded by the people she loves most.

Of course, as is often the case with such happy endings, the story of how Ecke wound up here in New Hampshire, as well as in California, spans two decades and includes twists and turns tinged by heartbreak.

FLASH BACK TO THE EARLY 1990s, when Ecke worked full-time as a family-law attorney in Encinitas. “I came to New Hampshire to visit,” she recalls, “but I longed for a house near Lucy.” Around this time, Ecke met her future husband, Paul. With three children and seven grandchildren of his own, he understood her need to maintain family ties. So when they chanced upon a New Hampshire property two miles from Lucy, Ecke snapped it up: “We bought 26 acres of beautiful land for

Ecke installed radiant heat throughout the house so that her bare feet could stay California toasty, even in the chilliest New Hampshire blizzard.



only \$22,000," she says. The pair began dreaming up a house with enough bedrooms to sleep Paul's offspring, as well as Ecke's extended clan, and hired an architect in 1997.

Before hammering a single nail in the Lyman farmhouse, however, they had to carve out a road leading to the property, which is so remote that it doesn't even appear on GPS. Then in 2002, just as the couple started drawing up blueprints, Paul died following a short battle with cancer. Suddenly, Ecke was faced with the daunting task of building their dream house alone. "For a while, I thought, *Should I go ahead with it?*" she admits. But she channeled the confidence of her late husband, a man who taught his children to never give up. Ecke realized she couldn't let him—or herself—down. "Paul would have wanted me to do it," she explains. "I told myself, *Just build it.*"

And build it she did—not the 2,500-square-foot, two-story residence

the couple first planned, but a 4,700-square-foot, three-level home with a trio of guest bedrooms for Ecke's many nieces and nephews, plus an art studio to accommodate her burgeoning hobby.

THE COMPLETED STRUCTURE, though large, is sensitive to its surroundings. In addition to the aforementioned tin roof and clapboard exterior, the interior summons New England style with exposed beams, loads of beadboard, and stone floors. "I didn't want the neighbors to say, 'What is that crazy California girl doing to our mountain?'" Ecke says, with a laugh.

But despite her intent to fit in, the West Coast side of Ecke's personality bursts forth exuberantly at every turn. Outside, the New Hampshire farmhouse features wraparound decks and extra-tall windows that beckon the sun. Inside, the master bathroom's classic wainscoting and free-standing tub are interrupted by a punch

Above left: Ecke bought the master bathroom's tub from Restoration Hardware; the bold green wall color is Pratt & Lambert's Light Chartreuse. *Above right:* In the kitchen, color shines in subtle ways, like the citrus-hued ceramics stored above Ecke's home-office nook. *Opposite:* Shiny steel café chairs from Sundance cozy up to a rustic Peruvian trestle table. The modern chandelier is from Design Within Reach.

Steal this idea!

Cover a lot of wall space for a little money: Simply stretch string between two nails and suspend pretty tags, postcards, or photos from it.



Ecke named the place Star Farm, because “you can see every star in the Milky Way from my deck.”

Steal this idea!

Framed and cleanly matted, amateur photos—Ecke snapped these fall-foliage shots in her own yard—look professional and personal.



Above left: Ecke nabbed this pair of iron beds for \$160 at a yard sale, and dressed them up with Garnet Hill blankets. *Above right:* Her great-nephews, Dexter Harris and Nolan Gillis, and great-niece, Vivi Harris (*center*), kick back in the “bunk room,” which features double-decker beds purchased on the cheap at an unpainted-furniture shop and transformed with custom paint. *Opposite:* An iron bed from Sundance, plus a Pottery Barn quilt, offers a hit of color in a guest room.

of chartreuse paint. The kitchen features paneled black cabinets, white-marble countertops, a barn-wood island, and a bright-yellow steel stool. In the various guest rooms, iron beds wear bold coverlets and double-decker bunks are painted a luscious shade of lime green.

Warmth also exudes from the flooring—literally, as Ecke installed radiant heat throughout the house so that her bare feet could stay California toasty, even in the chilliest New Hampshire blizzard. Then there’s her “winter porch.” With soaring mullion windows, a laid-back rattan sofa, and egg yolk-yellow walls, the room serves as a battle cry against the potentially depressing effect of New England winters. “You need to create a warm, bright spot to catch the light,” Ecke explains, “if you want home to be a happy place.”

WHEN SHE FINALLY COMPLETED the Lyman house in 2006, Ecke named it Star Farm, because “you can see every

star in the Milky Way from my deck.” It’s a view she’s looking forward to sharing with her extended family this holiday season.

“I’m still building the traditions for the house,” says Ecke, who spends several months in New Hampshire each year. She and Lucy will gather pinecones for wreaths, then venture into the snowy woods and cut down a Christmas tree. While the grown-ups relax in front of the oversize fireplace, working on a jigsaw puzzle, the children will run around the upstairs “bunk room.” Ecke’s never exactly sure who will show up, but it’s a scene that thrills her. She understands that, like a home, a family is a work in progress—open to transformation and renovation.

Liesl Schillinger, a regular contributor to The New York Times Book Review, fantasizes about a large country kitchen as she makes pastries in her six- by nine-foot Manhattan galley.