

REAL ESTATE | LUXURY HOMES

These Couples Found Love Again. How Did They Marry a Lifetime of Possessions?

Blending furniture, housewares and home design preferences took some compromise, but these duos made it work



They say marriage is all about compromise. But when you've got 11 sets of dishes, you might just need more storage.

Edward Pack, 68, married his wife, Laura Pack, 67, in 2022 following the deaths of their spouses in the 2010s. The Raleigh, N.C.-based retirees had wedding china, dishes passed down through their families, Christmas china and other sets they had fallen in love with over the years.

They donated four sets—Edward doesn't want to know which ones—and whittled down the remaining seven. (Laura wondered how she ended up with five gravy boats in the same pattern.) For the remaining sets, they built more cabinets.



“It sounds crazy for two people who are pushing 70, but we love them, and we love to entertain,” said Laura, a retired textile sales representative.

With decades of established routines, matured tastes and a lifetime of sentimental attachments to home furnishings, compromises can require even more patience and creativity for couples who marry later in life.



About 100,000 U.S. adults ages 65 and up remarried in 2022, roughly double the number in 1990, according to Bowling Green State University’s National Center for Family & Marriage Research. In 2019, about 6% of adults age 50 and over chose to cohabitate without marrying, according to the center.

The Packs met online when they were each living in the home in Raleigh that they once shared with their late spouse. “When we get married, we’ll figure out which house we want to live in and sell the other,” Edward joked on their first date in July 2020.

The house that Edward, a retired sales manager, bought with his late wife in 1991, with its landscaped yard in the charming Stonehenge neighborhood about 10 miles north of downtown Raleigh, was the one the Packs decided to keep. Using about \$400,000 to \$500,000 from Laura’s home sale, they spent about a year and a half working to blend their lives without erasing Edward’s memories from his first marriage. They hired interior designer Ayten Nadeau of I-TEN Designs in Raleigh, N.C., to assist with the project.



“I could’ve stayed the way it was. I would have been fine,” said Laura. “But he wanted it to be our house. So he said, ‘You do what you need to do to make it feel like our house.’ And it does.”

Laura’s approach was to prominently display some of Edward’s favorite belongings, including pieces from the art collection he curated with his late wife, while creating a light, contemporary style throughout the home, said Nadeau. One painting became the centerpiece of the custom forest-green dining-room cabinets holding most of their china, said Nadeau.



“Contrast can elevate a composition. Instead of forcing everything to match, celebrate differences by highlighting them,” said interior designer Jing Ju of JUJU Studio in New York City.

Edward wasn’t always easily convinced of his wife’s ideas, but he always came around, said Laura. In the first-floor powder room, Laura wanted to pair an antique phone from Edward’s antique phone collection with a print of the Beatles from Edward’s art collection. Convincing him took some finagling, said Laura.



“I asked my husband, ‘Can we bring this down and put it in the bathroom?’ He said, ‘No, you’re not putting my Beatles in the bathroom.’ I said, ‘Well let me just hang it here until I find something else,’ ” she said, adding, “It grew on him.”

It wasn’t all concessions for Edward. The amateur chef, bartender and barista got more than he hoped for in his new kitchen: a built-in cocktail bar, an espresso machine hooked up to a permanent water line, and a large island with custom storage for his favorite knives and cutting boards, said Laura. Dedicating some spaces in the house to each spouse can help couples feel at home even as they blend their styles in shared areas, said Houston-based interior designer Chassaddi Rice.



“There are likely rooms that one partner gravitates more to than the other,” said interior designer Eleanor Vogel of Eisen Design House in New York City.

“Perhaps allow one partner to have a bit more creative freedom in that area.”

When Greg Drew's bride gave his Woodstock, Ga., home a modern-farmhouse makeover, his only requests were for the kitchen. He wanted a built-in wine fridge, a microwave drawer and a large island for entertaining, he said.

Greg and Joy Drew met on the online dating service Match in 2022. They both already owned homes they purchased after their respective divorces, about 12 miles from each other, but they loved the location of his 4,500-square-foot, five-bedroom home on a golf course, which he bought for \$450,000 in 2020.



He purchased the fixer-upper, planning to renovate it, but never finished fixing it up. So when they married in 2023, he welcomed the opportunity to let Joy customize it to her taste, he said.

“Something in my gut told me not to do too much because if I met the right person—which I did—she would want to put her own fingerprints on it,” said Greg, a 59-year-old retired sales-development manager at Intel.

In summer 2023, they spent seven weeks and about \$200,000 updating and transforming the circa-1990 home into Joy's ideal modern farmhouse with shiplap walls, wood-beamed ceilings and wagon-wheel chandeliers, said Joy, a 62-year-old retired operations manager at WW, previously called WeightWatchers. In addition to its new island and wine fridge, the renovated kitchen has white-quartz countertops and a built-in pantry, she said.

The couple, who together have five children and six grandchildren, further customized the home by setting up guest bedrooms with a crib, a toddler bed and queen- and king-size beds to accommodate guests ages 1 to 41. Joy filled the house with rustic yet modern furniture in light, neutral colors. Greg said that for the most part, he didn't mind tossing the furniture previously filling the space because he purchased them from the previous owner for about \$1,000 when he bought the house, he said. He does miss his oversize leather theater chairs a little bit, though, he joked.

"Hey, we gave those to Greg's daughter and her husband, so he can go sit on them any time," said Joy.

Leather chairs can become a sticking point in design. As they settle into their new life together over the next year, "Golden Bachelorette" contestant Joan Vassos, 61, and her fiancé, Chock Chapple, also 61, plan to keep Vassos's transitional brick townhouse in Rockville, Md., Chapple's masculine home in Wichita, Kan., and blend their styles in a New York City apartment. Vassos said the couple will approach the Soho loft with an eclectic design aesthetic, pairing a large leather chair for Chapple with a minimalist sofa and a modern wooden coffee table. They plan to take the same approach for an art collection they will curate together, she said.

“Opposite design choices work really well together. In fact, I think it’s kind of what you want,” said Vassos. “He has an opinion, and I don’t know if we have the same style for artwork, so we may end up having a bunch of different kinds of stuff. Once again, opposites attract, and when it comes to artwork, I think that’s OK too.”



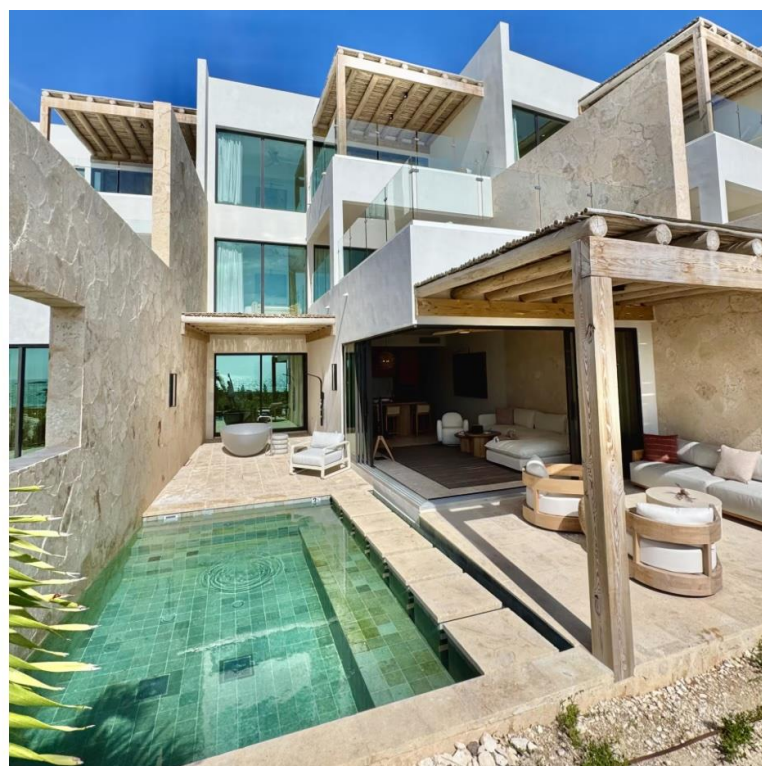
Jay Sartori, 56, and Kimberly Nicewonder, 57, met in 2017. PHOTO: JAY SARTORI

Sometimes, compromises are easy. “As you get older your priorities change and people are more willing to meet in the middle,” said interior designer Denise Davies of D2 Interieurs in Fairfield County, Conn.

When Kimberly Nicewonder, 57, built her bachelorette pad in Bristol, Va., she gave the primary suite’s bathroom mirrored vanities and feminine window treatments in soft, neutral colors. The former Miss Virginia U.S.A. executive director calls the style formal. Her new partner Jay Sartori, 56, calls the style girlie, but he says he didn’t mind using a girlie bathroom.

“It was a stunning, beautiful bathroom, but it had some girlie touches. She built the house after her divorce, and it was her house. She didn’t have a husband or a man to worry about,” said Sartori, who was recently divorced and living in the Atlanta area when he met Kimberly on the dating site Hinge in 2017.

He also didn't feel the need to customize their recently completed \$3.25 million townhouse at The Strand in Turks & Caicos, which they purchased furnished in 2021, said Sartori, a descendant of the founders and co-founders of the Sartori and Sargento cheese companies.



But in 2023, the pair decided to buy Kimberly’s late parents’ home in Bristol, which needed a large-scale renovation, prompting the couple to envision a transitional home that fused their styles and supported their blended lifestyle, said Sartori.

So, they sold Kim’s custom-built house and put about \$5 million toward renovating her parents’ home, a roughly 12,500-square-foot, circa-1984 home next to the Nicewonder family’s vineyard and country club, she said. Its new, less-girlie bathroom will have ebony-black vanities and large white porcelain tiles, said their interior designer Linda McDougald.



“Now this new house has got a little bit of both of us in terms of the style—the cabinetry, the tiles. We’re very excited about it,” said Sartori. They declined to disclose how much they plan to spend to buy the house, which is still held in a family trust. They plan to make it their full-time home when the renovation is completed in 2025, said Sartori.

In addition to his bathroom-design preferences, Sartori wanted smart-lighting systems and a modern, open floor plan, he said. Kimberly is excited that the renovation will maintain the parquet wood floors hand-laid by her father and the foyer chandelier selected by her mother, said their architectural designer Lucia Schneider. The couple, who co-founded the pickleball club franchisee Waymor Sports in 2023, are also adding pickleball courts to the property, Kimberly said.

“When Kim was in her original house that I moved into with her, we’d always say, ‘If we could do that over...’ Well, her mom and dad’s house became available, and now we’re having a chance to do it over, so to speak,” said Sartori.

