

It was love (again) at first sight

Jayne Atkinson hired an interior designer to stage her Great Barrington home before she put it on the market. The results changed her mind.



PHOTOS PROVIDED BY STAGED RYTE

Actors Jayne Atkinson and Michael Gill decided to keep their Great Barrington home after Staged Ryte made subtle changes to ready it for sale. One room that made the couple decide not to list their home was the bedroom. The photo on the left shows how the room looked when Stage Ryte arrived. On the right, is a photo showing how the room looked after being refreshed.

BY MELISSA KAREN SANCES

When Jayne Atkinson walks on stage or behind the camera, her character is going home. Every prop is purposeful, a visual detail

in an ongoing story. Her ideal set is slightly imperfect – reading glasses here, a coffee mug there – as though a life is on pause, waiting for her. ►



PHOTO PROVIDED BY STAGED RYTE

Staged Ryte owner Dawn Trachtenberg and actor Jayne Atkinson.

The seasoned actor is best known for her turn as Secretary of State on the groundbreaking series “House of Cards,” where she played opposite her husband Michel Gill’s President of the United States. But whether she was called to the Capitol Building or summoned to the Situation Room, her heart belonged to her real-life home in Great Barrington, where she and Gill had lived since 2007 with their teenage son Jeremy.

Cut to May 2022. Jeremy had graduated from college and found his own place in Brooklyn. Atkinson looked around her house one day and realized it had lost its luster. Those once-sparkling glass stars she’d hung over the fireplace? Duds. That orange-accented rug she’d bought for the bedroom? Burnt out.

“It gave a lot of love to us, and it needed a lot of love back,” says the actor, whose family had purchased the house from the Naults after they’d owned it for generations. An overhaul felt overwhelming, but selling required getting the house in order.

Enter Dawn Trachtenberg, owner of Staged Ryte in Ashley Falls, a village of Sheffield. “My Realtor said Dawn was magic,”



PHOTO BY DAVID GIESBRECHT/NETFLIX

Atkinson, as Secretary of State Catherine Durant, in season 3 of Netflix’s “House of Cards”.

says Atkinson, “and I needed magic.”

Trachtenberg’s wizardry takes vision and compassion. “Often after meeting somebody you go home and think, ‘We just had a therapy session,’” she says with a laugh. Sellers have

to be ready to move on, and she could tell Atkinson was all-in. Because a lot of the furniture and décor was staying put, the designer wanted to capitalize on the actor's whimsy while maximizing the house's appeal. "In staging, the word 'decluttering' is used," she says, "but I call it 'editing.'"

Atkinson understood immediately: "It's sort of like working with a living playwright."

The stars had to go, but in their place bloomed a vibrant Tree of Life. In the bedroom, the rug the stager insisted on keeping sparked an infusion of orange against soft blues and grays.

On a Friday in July, Trachtenberg left her ladder behind and assumed she'd pick up work on Monday. Then Atkinson appeared and asked to take a peek. Trachtenberg led her toward the bedroom. The orange was unexpected but delightful. Then there was the den, where, over a quaint daybed, Trachtenberg had unknowingly hung her mother-in-law's art.

Atkinson started to cry. "I just felt like I wanted to buy this house," she explains.

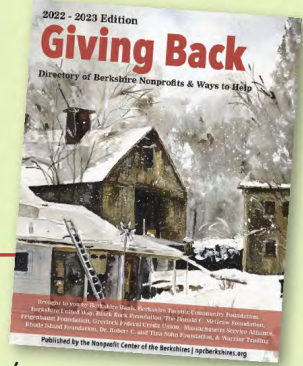
"I thought, 'Jayne is an actress. Jayne is acting,'" Trachtenberg recalls. "But when we turned the corner into the bedroom, I thought, 'Okay, she's sincerely loving every turn.'"

Later that night, Atkinson lay next to Gill wrestling with how and what to tell him. They had planned to be off on their next adventure by September. Suddenly, he said he was nervous about selling. "I feel the same way. Can I talk?" she asked, tearing up again. After his initial surprise, Gill was moved by how deeply she loved their home. That night, Atkinson texted Trachtenberg to tell her they were staying. It was a high compliment, a happy ending.

Except it wasn't an end at all. Piece by piece, room by room, Trachtenberg had reset the stage. It was the actor's cue to come home. ■

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HISTORIC HOME RENOVATION SERIES

The Bartholomew Homestead



SITUATED BEAUTIFULLY against the backdrop of Taconic Mountain and overlooking Schenob Brook basin, this farmhouse has been in the Bartholomew Family for seven generations. Built in 1804, this two and a half story Federal style house with an end chimney, was built on land which came from a grant in the 1700's from the Crown of England. Notable are American Victorian style features, including interior arches, broad double doors that roll back into the walls, bay windows and two porches added later, all designed to emphasize the interior as a continuous volume of space. The house is on its original stone foundation, has wide board floors, marble door handles and many original pieces of furniture. The upstairs bedrooms area honeycomb of connections as a safeguard for escaping fires. Corner cupboards serve as storage; some closets have been added. The ballroom size bathroom doubles as a sitting room and play area for the children. The wing on the left serves as a living quarters for hired men who worked the farm. Historical artifacts of the working farm have been integrated into the decoration of several rooms.



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