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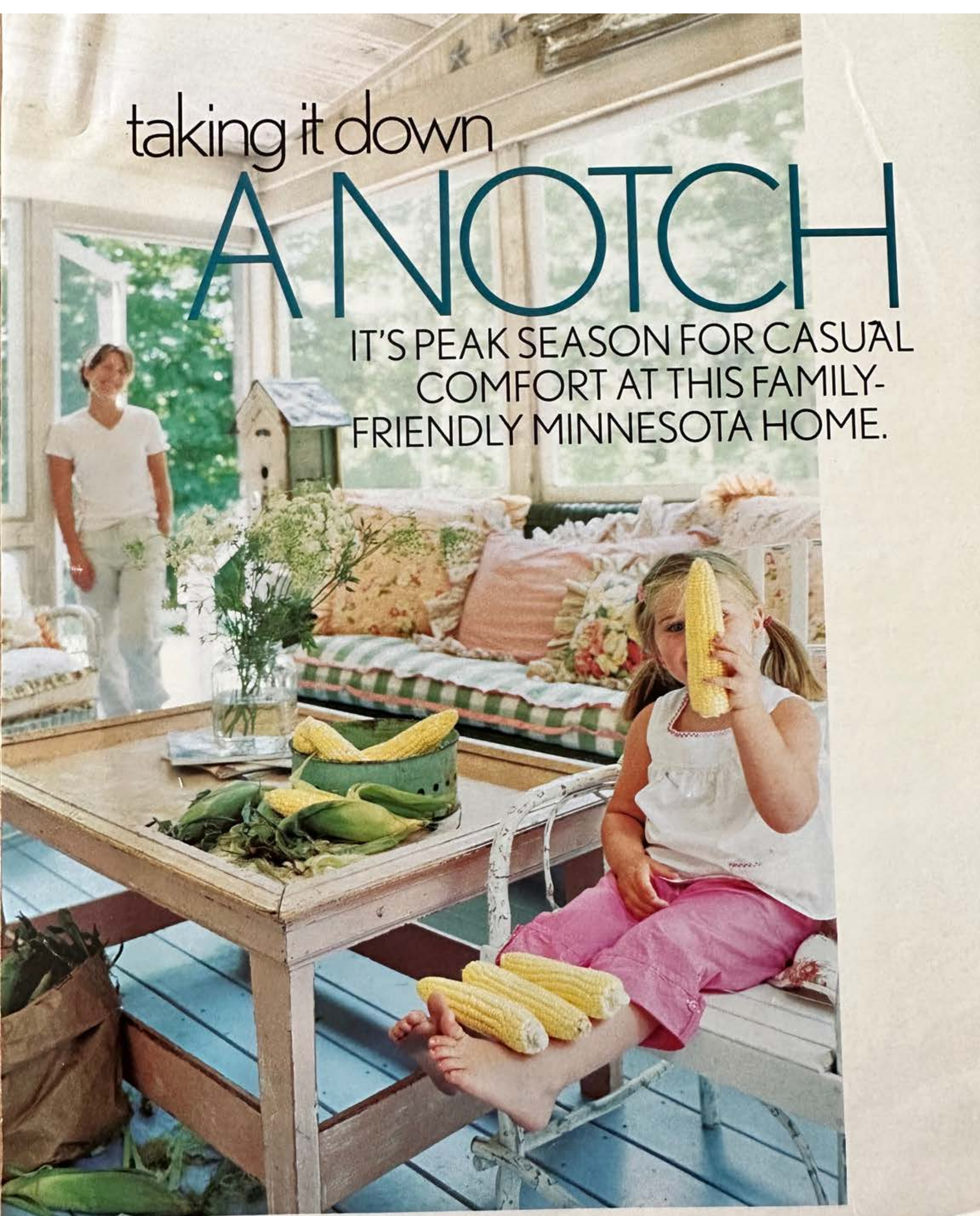
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taking it down

A NOTCH

IT'S PEAK SEASON FOR CASUAL COMFORT AT THIS FAMILY-FRIENDLY MINNESOTA HOME.



A comfortable screened porch off the family room makes a favorite spring and summer gathering spot for Heather and Jay Strommen and their four children. "I told Jay that I wanted the screen door to slam with that great summer sound," Heather says. Here, she looks on as 4-year-old Ruby tries her hand at shucking corn.

Heather Strommen is that rare person whose eyes brighten at the thought of spring cleaning. Nothing so conventional as washing windows or dusting baseboards, mind you. At the Minnesota home she shares with her husband, Jay, and their four children, getting ready for warm weather means paring down and airing out: rugs come off the hardwood floors; chairs and sofas get dressed in cream-hued slipcovers; knickknacks are thinned to make room for beachy photos and a seashell or two. It's this time of year, as the days slowly lengthen and temperatures start their steady climb, that brings out the best in Heather's low-key style.

"That's when I love my home the most," she says. "It's really clean and simple—not too fancy, not too sweet."

She has spent four and a half years turning the 1960s Cape Cod-style cottage into a casual, cheerful setting for their bustling family life. Tucked on a wooded street in Deephaven, the idyllic enclave where the couple first put down roots eight years ago, the house fell into their



Summery slipcovers in serene stripes boost the airy feel in the living room (right), Heather's favorite space. Red paint, cherry-shaped cutouts on the shutters, and a picket fence give









she painted the walls in soft neutrals and chalky pastels, installed beadboard wainscoting, and replaced brass knobs and pulls with glass ones. The only structural changes came in the kitchen, which was gutted and given an old-fashioned feel. During a foray to an antiques shop, Heather found a white cupboard, which got a spot between two built-in breakfast-room units and informed her vision for new custom kitchen cabinets. Glass panes in select cabinet doors show vintage dishware; others bear fabric and chicken-wire inserts.

A large island at the kitchen's outer edge divides it from a cozy family room that's a hub for homework, hobbies, and just hanging out. "The six of us and the two big dogs live in the kitchen and family room," Heather says. "Sometimes I wonder why we have the rest of the house."

Heather is an avid antiques hunter and flea-market shopper, and the resulting

Dentil molding trims the antique cabinet (left) hanging on the breakfast-room wall. Heather rubbed brown wax on new cabinet doors for an aged look, inspired by her vintage piece. "It took forever," she says. "The end result is great, though, because I don't worry about the kids bumping into them and nicking the paint."





For the bedroom that Miles shares with 8-year-old Jack, Heather found mismatched “hired hand” beds (left) at an antiques store. The cowboy boots and suede jacket belonged to Jay when he was young. The vanity in the boys’ bath (above) was fitted with a blue-and-white sink to match the room’s color scheme. A little red pail doubles as a toothbrush holder.

storied patina permeates the house, from gently worn furnishings to old-fashioned collectibles. A select find often becomes the point from which an entire room takes shape. On one flea-market jaunt, she spied a coffee table painted soft pink, which she promptly grabbed for the screened porch. That inspired the jumble of textures and colors that brings the porch to life in warm weather, when floral and gingham cushions top the wicker sofa and rattan chairs.

It’s this space that captures the home’s essence, with its table for propping up

bare feet, cushioned chairs for curling up with a book, and banging screen door announcing the comings and goings of kids hard at play.

“The decorating makes it cozy and homey, but it is our children that make our house a home,” Heather says. “Without their four smiling faces running around and tripping over our two dogs, it wouldn’t be much of a home.”

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CHANGING YOUR DECORATING
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HEATHER STROMMEN





Ten-year-old Emmie lounges on her parents' bed as she and her mom chat about the day's plans (above). Heather and Jay added the stone fireplace surround as a tenth-anniversary gift to each other. Jay suggested installing a beadboard ceiling to play up the room's cottage feel (right). "He's so willing to help make the house better than it is," Heather says.



hands through a lucky coincidence in 1999. With a fourth child on the way, the Strommens were straining the seams of the home they owned at the time. Reluctant to leave their close-knit neighborhood, they set their sights on remodeling—until Heather got wind of a rumor that a larger house down the street was about to go on the market. “We didn’t even know the people who lived there,” she says. “We just knocked on the door and asked if they were going to sell.”

The answer was yes, and the owners invited Jay and Heather inside for a tour. By the time the Strommens left that day,

they were smitten with the home’s four bedrooms, multiple fireplaces, and graceful lines. “I was walking around squeezing my husband’s arm harder and harder,” Heather recalls. “I kept saying, ‘We don’t have to do a thing to this house!’”

But Heather’s lifelong passion for design had her itching to add her stamp. To give the home the air of a vintage farmhouse,

Although he hasn’t taken lessons yet, 6-year-old Miles likes to amuse himself at the piano (left). The 100-year-old instrument once belonged to a friend who gave it to Heather as a surprise, knowing she’d admired it for years. “It’s my most special piece,” she says. The family room off the kitchen (above) showcases Heather’s favorite palette: green, pink, and cream. French sliders lead to the screened porch.