

life by DESIGN

Interior designer Erin Gates has become (*literally!*) a household name for those interested in creating a sophisticated, yet practical and functional home. The *Elements of Style* blogger debuted her first book, *Elements of Style: Designing a Home & a Life*, in 2014 and is now sharing her best tips in her newly-released title, *Elements of Family Style: Elegant Spaces for Everyday Life*.

photography by
SARAH WINCHESTER



MINI | Thank you for inviting us into your home! Tell us about the place.

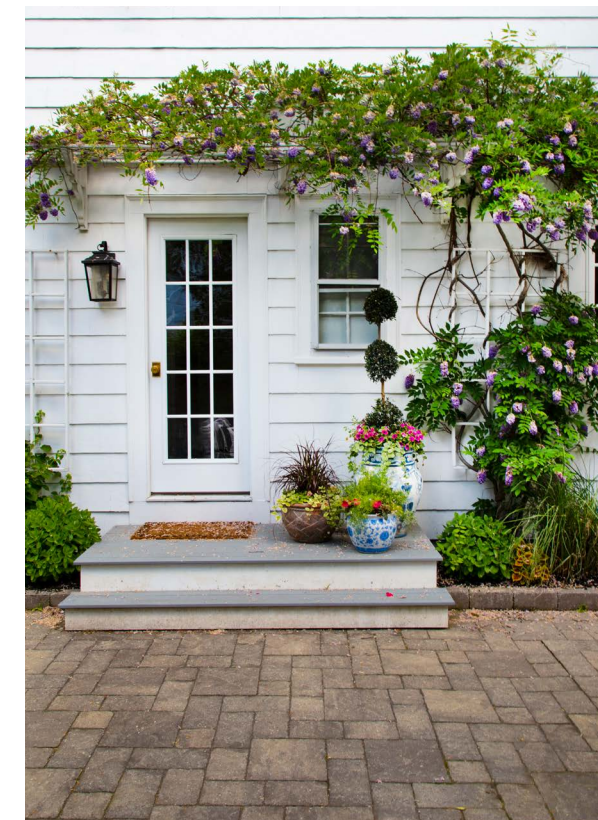
ERIN GATES | Since I'm a designer, this home has been my laboratory since we bought it six years ago. It started as an untouched 1941 relic I didn't even want to buy and has turned into such a special little home over the years. I worked with my father's architectural firm to do three renovations on it (two of which were additions), and now it finally feels "done." It's a great mix of livable and luxurious, which is sort of my thing. I believe we can all have nice things AND kids and pets and not have to sacrifice our style because of a growing, active family. Our home is lots of neutrals with pops of color (mostly blue), a mix of antiques and custom-made pieces (and some great discount store finds too!).

MINI | Do you have a favorite room in your home?

ERIN GATES | I LOVE my master bedroom. We did it as part of the biggest project we took on with this house and it was worth every penny! My clients often leave their master bedrooms until very last because they aren't public facing spaces, but as a busy working mom, I felt I really needed a pretty and thoughtfully designed place to recharge my batteries after a long day, and this room is JUST that. Our environment is very impactful on our sense of wellbeing and having a lovely bedroom to help me relax and get good rest really helps me be the best mother and boss I can be.

MINI | Tell us about your son's room. What inspired you in creating his space?

ERIN GATES | I'm actually in the process of dis-





mantling his nursery and creating a “big boy” room for him now that he is 3.5! It’s so bittersweet to get rid of the glider and crib and see him move on in life, but it’s also so exciting and wonderful. His nursery was a super serene space that I wanted to feel completely soothing for both of us. The mural on the wall is a custom piece by Susan Harter Muralpapers and was the jumping off point to the room, which is a palette of pale blues, greys, and linen tones. It was a mix of sweet and masculine, just like little boys are!

MINI | Let’s talk motherhood! What has surprised you most about motherhood thus far?

ERIN GATES | I am a naturally anxious person. I’ve struggled with it my whole life, and I was worried that I would get MORE anxious becoming a mother, when in fact it made me LESS so about the stuff of daily life. All of a sudden, nothing mattered except my son’s health and happiness. It put such an important frame of reference on everything I did and experienced and really helped me feel grateful for everything I have.

MINI | What is your greatest parenting worry or fear?

ERIN GATES | Health. I can think of nothing scarier than your child being ill in a serious capacity. It chills me to the bone. And while

I am less anxious about most things now, any issues with his health is the one thing that can really send me reeling.

MINI | What is most important to you in raising your son?

ERIN GATES | That he grows up to be a happy, healthy, kind, and loving soul and that he knows that no matter what, his Dad and I will always be there for him and love him unconditionally. I want him to be his own person and know that as parents, we are not entangling our self-worth with his achievements and failures. He is free to find his own passions and life path.

MINI | What is your greatest joy of motherhood?

ERIN GATES | There are SO many! Getting to re-experience childhood through his eyes is pretty amazing. Watching him learn a new skill is thrilling beyond words. Hearing him tell me he loves me. The best thing might be his really high-pitched belly laugh when he’s REALLY tickled about something. Nothing beats that sound.

MINI | What have you found to be the hardest aspect of motherhood thus far?

ERIN GATES | The guilt of being a full-time working mom. I have always known about myself that I am best when I am working and never entertained stopping work when I was pregnant with Henry,



but as he gets older and gets sad when I leave in the morning, it gets harder and harder. Knowing I’m missing so many small moments in his life hurts, but I know deep down that I, personally, am a much better mother to him because I work. Not everyone is this way, but I am. I hope that he grows up to really respect women and love that he has a strong, working mama.

MINI | What helps you to juggle motherhood and career?

ERIN GATES | I try really hard to commit to a pretty strict schedule. I am home by 5 or 6 at the latest

FAST FACTS

IF THERE WERE MORE HOURS IN THE DAY, I WOULD

Spend more time with Henry.

IDEAL DATE NIGHT

Seeing a funny movie at the local theater that serves wine and dinner in reclining seats.

FAVORITE KIDS BOOK

All the World.

ALWAYS IN MY FRIDGE

Sparkling water.

ON MY NIGHTSTAND

My Kindle. I read every night before bed.

MY COFFEE ORDER

Medium dark roast with half and half and two sugars.

FAVORITE LOCAL RESTAURANT

Nothing quite beats the steak, mashed potatoes, and lime basil gimlet at Mistral.

FAVORITE KIDS MOVIE

Moana.

CAN'T STOP LISTENING TO

Murder-y podcasts!

FAVORITE LOCAL SHOP

M. Flynn Jewelry. I did a fine jewelry collection with them and their shop is DARLING.

BEFORE KIDS, I NEVER THOUGHT I WOULD

Give up anything and everything for someone else.



every night to spend a good few hours with him before he has to go to bed. We also have an incredibly loving and caring nanny, Danege, who is such a wonderful influence on Henry and our whole family, really. They adore each other and knowing that he is in such good care allows me to focus on work when I'm there so that I can get home as soon as possible to him. It also helps that I am my own boss, so taking off time to go to a school play or a parent's activity is totally in my control, and I set up my office three blocks from my house, so my commute is a five minute walk. I know I am lucky to have those benefits AND love what I do. I'm super grateful.

MINI | Tell us how you decided on your son's name.

ERIN GATES | We knew before we were even pregnant his name would be Henry. It was just one of those things we always talked

about when going through infertility and decided on really early on in the process. In fact, I remember we had to cancel one cycle of IVF before I got pregnant with Henry because of a poor reaction to some medications, and I was distraught and sobbing in the doctor's office and Andrew held me and said, "this is all for Henry. It's all to get Henry"... and it was! If we didn't get pregnant with the exact egg we did, our child would be different than he is, and I would not have wanted that. So he was Henry before he was even "Henry!"

MINI | Can you share your journey to baby with us?

ERIN GATES | It was a very difficult one. We had tried to get pregnant for a couple years in my early 30's and had no luck. I was diagnosed with "unexplained infertility" and after two IUI's and two rounds of IVF, we finally had our Henry. All in, it took about three years to have him. I was 36 when he was born and considered a "geriatric pregnancy" (I hate that term!). I was quite sick until I was 24-26 weeks pregnant and really thought I'd never want to do it again. But we've been trying to have another child, with no luck, for the last two years. I've had five miscarriages and it's been really sad and difficult. Secondary infertility is almost hard-



Planning plenty of attractive and well thought out storage and using incredibly durable materials and furniture construction are my top two. I like to be able to give people an easy way to conceal the clutter of family life in a quick 15-minute tidy up— built ins, cabinetry, shelving, baskets and bins, whatever works for the space and budget. And when choosing materials, you need to be careful about cleanability, durability and buying pieces that are well made enough to withstand heavy use and abuse!

MINI | What do you think is the biggest misconception parents have when designing kids rooms?

ERIN GATES | There are many, but the one I am most vigilant about proving wrong is that whole “you can’t have nice things and kids at the same time” thing. Not true. You can use your home as a teachable moment in which your kids learn that they need to respect their surroundings and possessions. Also, better made furniture is going to last SO much longer and look so much better over time, especially when done in strong, durable, but pretty, materials. Cheap furniture will look cheap quickly when getting daily use and you’ll end up spending more money replacing it over and over than buying really well once.

er than initial infertility because you now KNOW what it’s like to have a child and be a mother and what you’re missing in a second. I also desperately want Henry to have a sibling, so I will keep trying until I am completely exhausted and can’t do it anymore.

MINI | Let’s talk about your new book, *Elements of Family Style*! What is most important when designing a space for a family?

ERIN GATES | There are a few things that are of utmost focus when designing a home with kids in it.

MINI | If you could give your son one piece of advice, what would it be?

ERIN GATES | Don’t be afraid to fail. Sometimes the most important lessons in life are best learned when you haven’t succeeded.

MINI | Favorite places to visit in Boston with kids— GO!

ERIN GATES | The Museum of Science, Children’s Museum, the Seaport, Franklin Park Zoo, Discovery Museum in Acton and Shelburne Farm in the fall to pick apples and play on the tractor playground!



