

To The MANOR Elected

How do you make the 54-room Government House a home? First Lady Kendel Ehrlich got rid of the purple meditation room, added play dates for Drew—and let Bob keep his beloved green leather couch.

BY JANE MARION

Photography by David Colwell





As delegates, dignitaries,
and senators stream
inside Annapolis's
Government House,

4-year-old first *fil*s Drew
Ehrlich stands shoeless in
the center of the stately
foyer. Dressed in a bright
red turtleneck and a
pair of chinos, he

hands out the official welcome brochure to his home—the home of Maryland governors and their families for 134 years. After the cold clarity of the January night, the warmth of the residence is even more striking—the crimson-colored walls, the oversized oriental rugs that blanket the red oak parquet floors, the majestic 49-step red oak staircase, and the dazzling smile of Drew that seems to outshine even the 1,440 watts of light cast by the foyer's magnificent Waterford chandelier. ¶ First Lady Kendel Ehrlich, seven months pregnant at the time, stands proudly at Drew's side, and mother and son welcome visitors to an art show honoring the work of seven Maryland sculptors. It is the first function since the opening of the General Assembly, and the house is on display. Ehrlich is beaming. "I didn't want this house to be too formal," she says. "I wanted the house to be family-friendly and a place of comfort—not only for our family but for the people who work here as well."

Despite her new title and state-function duties, Ehrlich hasn't changed much since she was co-captain of the Dulaney High School lacrosse team. She is down-to-earth, disarming, and without pretense. Last Halloween, she set a precedent by opening the gates of Government House to trick-or-treaters and gave out goody bags filled with stencils, Tootsie Rolls, and lollipops.

Although the former prosecutor and public defender seems tailor-made for the role of state hostess, she's still adjusting to life as a public figure. "The funniest thing is when you're with a friend you've grown up with," says Ehrlich, "and someone stops and asks for your autograph and then your friend turns to you and says, 'Why are they asking you?'"

And then there was last year's conference on domestic violence, when Ehrlich caused a national stir with her off-the-cuff comment that "if I had an opportunity to shoot Britney Spears, I think I would." The notoriety has only increased her profile. When the news of her comments broke, even Tom Brokaw was talking about Kendel Ehrlich on the nightly news. "Everyone knows First Lady Kendel Ehrlich now because of Britney," says Governor Robert L. Ehrlich Jr. with a laugh. "That night, I tried to be a supportive husband, and told her, 'No one will pay any attention to this,' but the next day when we woke up, we heard [Kendel's voice on the radio]. And you know it's going to be a bad day when you wake up to the sound of your own voice."

But the Britney brouhaha, babies, and the blizzard of February 2003—which delayed the First Family's move by three days—were only some of the hurdles facing the first Republicans to live in the mansion since 1966. The First Lady and the Governor had a challenge when they moved to the mansion with nothing more than a leather sofa, their four-poster bed, a box of Brio trains, and a crib. Although many teenagers grew up in Government House, there hadn't been a preschooler in the house since Governor Herbert R. O'Conor's son, Robert John, roamed the halls in 1939.

"Moving to [Government House] was very weird at first," says Governor Ehrlich. "I didn't like it for the first six months. I was raised in a rowhouse in Arbutus and

Previous pages: A then-expecting Kendel Ehrlich in the mansion's foyer in January; Charles Willson Peale's portrait of George Washington.



"My input on the house was zero, *nada*," jokes Governor Ehrlich. "My only request was the green sofa." A painting by the Governor's aunt hangs above it.

went from that to a small apartment and from that to a small condo and from that to a small townhouse. I missed my basement. I missed my neighborhood."

When the Ehrlichs moved in, the private quarters of the house were drab, dour, and dated. "The private areas of the house didn't look wonderfully cared for," says Diane Weiss, an interior designer for Baltimore's Louis Mazor, Inc. who was hired to help design and decorate Government House. "It didn't sparkle. We wanted it to be alive. One of the wonderful things about the Governor and his wife is that they have such an open door policy for state and legislative functions, and we wanted the family quarters to feel that way, too."

Decorating the private areas of the 54-room residence (which includes public and private quarters, as well as administrative areas) was a challenge for Ehrlich: She had never had a home professionally decorated and had to work within the constraints of

"I DIDN'T LIKE IT for the first six months. I was RAISED IN A ROW HOUSE in Arbutus." —Gov. Ehrlich

a tight budget while remaining true to the history of the house. (Many pieces were donated, sold at cost, loaned from The Maryland Historical Society, or drawn from an enormous state-owned reserve of furniture from past administrations.)

Working with Weiss, as well as with Annapolis-based Sandy Brock of Sandra Mitchell Designs and veteran Government House residence manager Sandra Rose, the First Lady got a fast lesson in home design. "What was really fun and exciting about this was to see someone who has as much grace

and style as Kendel really come into her own," says Sandy Brock. "She had never done a house before. To help her discover her own style was our job. We would look at a room and say, 'What do you think you and the Governor and Drew will do in this room?' And she began to think about the space."

The designers discovered that the First Lady's taste runs toward chenilles, rich silks, warm butter colors, and burnt oranges. "The governor had a *little* bit of input," laughs Weiss. "He wanted dark colors in the bedroom and in their private





Guests are welcomed to the house by portraits of Maryland's first ladies. *From bottom to top:* Avalynne Gibson Tawes, Isabel Judefind Agnew, Honolulu Manzer McKeldin, and Dorothy Byron Lane (*opposite*); a mural of George Washington by Baltimore artist Joseph Sheppard in the Federal reception room (*left*); the Ehrlich's private dining room is illuminated by one of the mansion's many Waterford crystal chandeliers (*right*).

bathroom the walls are a corally, deep spice color lightened up with beautiful beiges. The master bath is chocolate brown with travertine marble." Despite both designers' playful, but strong, suggestion that the First Family replace a beloved green leather sofa, the Governor laid down the law. "There was a reception last fall for Maryland Day," recalls Brock, "and Governor Ehrlich announced, 'No matter what Sandy Brock says, I'm keeping the sofa!'" Retorts Governor Ehrlich, "My input on the house was zero, *nada*. My only request was the green sofa. The sofa is my connection to my past." It currently resides in the family's less-formal family room.

The First Lady's dressing room is Stroheim & Romann blue and white toile, and Drew's room—purchased mostly from Pottery Barn and the Company Store—has the requisite Bob the Builder sheets and a patriotic red, white, and blue color

scheme. The Glendenings' legendary one-time purple meditation room has been replaced by a genteel Designer's Guild, animal-themed baby nursery. A nanny's room is adorned in Clarence House black chintz with a floral design.

Much of the new furniture that was purchased is Maryland-made and is predominantly from Millersville's Niermann Weeks and Hagerstown's Beachley (Niermann Weeks also donated many pieces). In addition, much of the state-owned furniture, dating back to the 1700s, was brought out of state archives. "Ninety percent of the furniture was in storage," says Weiss. "It was fabulous to go through it. We used lots of accessories and dressers and armoires and a pair of magnificent mahogany highboys from the late 1800s."

To embrace Maryland's history and heritage as a British colony, the designers focused on fabrics made in Britain such as

Brunswick & Fils, Nina Campbell, Cowan & Tout, Osborne & Little, and Colefax & Fowler.

On a blustery day in mid-January, as Drew played air hockey with his babysitter in the basement playroom and later joined state troopers, a chef, and various staff members for a midday meal, Kendel (in a friend's borrowed maternity dress) sat down with *Baltimore* magazine to discuss her new role at 110 State Circle.

Baltimore magazine: What was your first night of staying in Government House like?

Kendel Ehrlich: We stayed here before the inauguration. What was very funny was our first dinner in the private dining room. [The First Family elects to eat many of their meals in the main kitchen.] It didn't look like it does now—it was really formal with white wallpaper and wingback chairs. It was an effort to get the Governor to feel comfortable here.

“In fairness, the home has NOT HAD A TODDLER in it since 1939. It just didn’t seem CHILD-WARM.”

The three of us were sitting at the table. The staff came up, and they said, “What do you want for dinner?” And we said, “Well, what do you have?” We were looking for a menu or something—it was just very strange. The chef who has been here for many years said, “Well, everyone really seems to like the crab cakes.” So we said, “That sounds good to us. Let’s have the crab cakes.” Bob and I looked at each other like, “What are we doing here? This seems so unreal.”

Baltimore: Can you recall the first time you were ever inside Government House?

Ehrlich: When I was dating Bob, we came in briefly for a holiday party for Governor [William Donald] Schaefer. I didn’t have a strong memory of it other than the staircase. The next time was November of 2002 after Bob was elected. We got a call from [Governor Parris Glendening’s wife] Jennifer Crawford to see if Bob and I would like to come see the house so that we could make arrangements in our minds and prepare for the move.

Baltimore: And what did you think?

Ehrlich: I thought that much of my fur-

niture wouldn’t fit. My furniture would have been lost in most of the rooms. We took almost nothing with us except for Bob’s favorite green leather couch. The poor guy had so little say in the decorations, but he wanted to keep the couch.

Baltimore: You moved from a three-bedroom townhouse in Mays Chapel. How did you feel about the prospect of moving to a 54-room house?

Ehrlich: I was in awe, [and] I was overwhelmed. It needed a lot of paint and love in that direction. Structurally, the home is beautiful, and it has been well maintained over a long period of time. When you look at this book I have of the different governors’ mansions throughout the country, you realize that this home is really very special. It has a lot of livable space. From the outside, it’s a big home, but from the outside it’s hard to tell how much of it is formal and how much of it is private area.

The back staircase hadn’t been touched

“Everyone asks me, ‘Has he slid down the banister yet?’” says Kendel of first son Drew, who loves the basement playroom’s air hockey table.





"I always did like a big house on the hill," says the First Lady, "but I certainly never envisioned living here!" Above, the family's less-formal living room.

for years. The area where the troopers are and where many people enter the mansion hadn't been looked at in years. That area receives a lot of people. Downstairs there's an industrial-sized refrigerator, but I put a regular sized refrigerator in the butler's pantry. I wanted a place where Drew could go get his own soda or ice pops in the summertime. The last thing I want is a child who is ringing a bell!

Baltimore: Did you give much thought about what it would be like to live here before you moved in?

Ehrlich: We did not know how the house operated at all. We did not think a day past the election. We do so much entertaining, and that's the way this house should be shared. We are caretakers of this home, and I think we are bringing a sense of family and comfort to the house, but the flip side of that is I do not have to cook; I do not have to get to Wal-Mart. I don't have to worry about the laundry and other things of that nature. It frees up your time, and you don't realize how much of you time gets used up with those things, particularly preparing meals.

Baltimore: What did the house look like before you moved in?

Ehrlich: It was a little duller than I would have liked, and it looked dated. It looked like what I would describe as "a grandmother's home." In defense, I don't think the others paid that much attention to it. It just wasn't important to them. We recently had dinner with Governor [Marvin] Mandel and Governor Schaefer, and they both said they've never seen the house look better, which made me feel good since they both lived here. I thought that was a wonderful compliment. Frances Glendening did many of the public rooms. I like a lot of what she has done. One of the public rooms we will focus on is the Victorian Room. It hasn't been touched in a long time. The banister on the main staircase also needs to be brought up to code.

Baltimore: The house was completed in 1870 and has had governors and their families living here for 134 years. What do you want *your* imprint to be?

Ehrlich: In fairness, the home has not had a toddler in it since 1939. It just didn't seem child-warm. My townhouse was nothing but toys, and was the other extreme. Most of my thinking was along the lines of "How can I make this family-

Government House TRIVIA

What the Ehrlichs watch: ESPN, TNT

Food staples: Crab soup, chicken nuggets, bottles of Starbucks frappuccino, energy bars

The First Lady's favorite object: Waterford chandelier in private dining room

The Governor's favorite room: His historic office

Number of fireplaces: 13

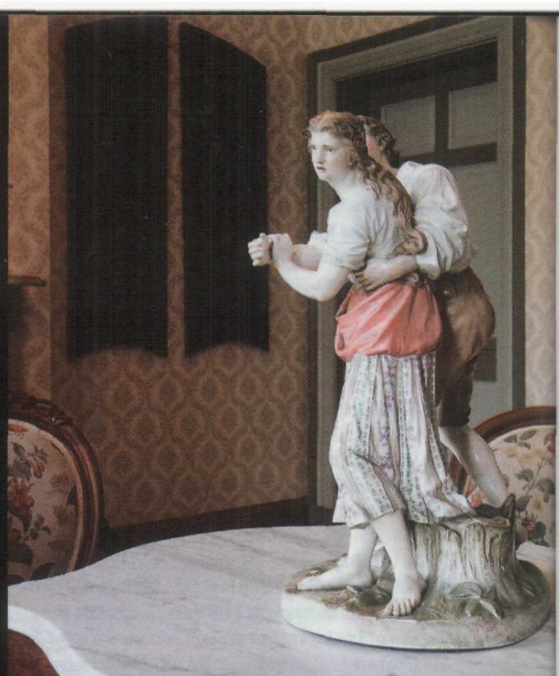
Number of bathrooms in private quarters: 9

Oldest object: Portrait of John Hart, which dates back to 1732 and is valued at \$70,000

Most valuable object: A painting of George Washington by Charles Willson Peale, valued at \$500,000. The painting includes two small cartoons which scholars believe were made by Peale's children.

friendly and warm for a child?" I wanted to make this livable for a family.

Baltimore: We have heard that the spirit of the home has changed since you and your family have taken occupancy. What do you think is CONTINUED ON PAGE 128



The parlor is filled with 19th century antiques; a Meissan porcelain sculpture and the mansion's original carved relief walnut doors decorate the library.

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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 101 meant by that?

Ehrlich: The feeling of the house is very different now. We are child-driven, and I think we have a more interesting interaction with the staff. Drew is particularly fond of the chefs, and they will play with him and the troopers are excellent with him—that's not part of their job description. We are more like big family. Drew cuts the tension. There's nothing better than seeing the Governor in a room talking to a group of people, and Drew will come flying through with a friend going downstairs to shoot some pool or making some comment to his dad. I think that has been really wonderful . . . The only downside is that it's not a neighborhood, and I grew up in a real neighborhood. That's the only downside of living here—you need to import kids.

Baltimore: With all the historic objects and state-owned artwork and furniture in the house, were you nervous that Drew was going to touch something he shouldn't?

Ehrlich: No, because Drew is not the kind of a kid who touches everything. Drew immediately stayed out of the public rooms. He is still at the age where he wants to be wherever we are. He is also a very adaptable child. Hopefully, I'm not pushing my luck with the next one [Joshua, born March 6]. For the most part, Drew stays where we are and where his

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WE WON'T live here anymore.
You need to prepare yourself
and **REMEMBER** that."

things are. Everyone asks me, "Has he slid down the banister yet?" I'm hoping that when the time comes, I'll have enough control over my child for that not to happen, but you never know.

Baltimore: Does Drew have many play dates here?

Ehrlich: Yes, Drew has play dates here, although not as many as I'd like. The house is isolated. It has a very nice yard and a private area outside which is kind of a basketball court at this time, but we're not in a neighborhood. . . .

Baltimore: How would you describe your aesthetic and sense of style?

Ehrlich: I'm a color person, but I never had time in our life before to do what I wanted to do even in our townhouse. I now had the opportunity to use color—the large ceilings in this home really lend themselves to color. I'm a real red and yellow person, and I also love the sage green of this sitting room. It's almost neutral, and you can do so much with it. This kind of color was not in the house before. This room was really transformed. I respond to color and comfort.

I picked out most of the fabrics [about

50 different kinds] that were used in this house in one six-hour period. I really did have a good idea regarding colors and what I wanted to do.

Baltimore: Why did you pick Sandy Brock and Diane Weiss to help you transform Government House?

Ehrlich: What appealed to me about using Sandy Brock is that her homes manage to be beautiful, but they are also comfortable and usable. You don't walk in and feel like you are afraid to sit down. I had also seen a couple of rooms Diane Weiss had done and loved her work.

Baltimore: What's your favorite room?

Ehrlich: The private family sitting room is my favorite room. It's warm and open. We use this room a lot at night, and Bob sometimes does work in here.

Baltimore: You have two private family rooms. The sage green room is more formal. Tell me about your less formal family room.

Ehrlich: Well, this room was very formal. We added plantation shutters and Bob's green leather couch and Princeton pillows. The painting over the couch was done by Bob's aunt, Bette Leggett.

Again, this is a room that Drew and I can utilize a lot.

Baltimore: Tell us about the magnificent rug in the drawing room.

Ehrlich: The rug was purchased through Jon Levinson at Alex Cooper Auctioneers under the Schaefer administration from an estate in Colorado. I've heard the rug was so heavy [the 22-by-31-foot antique Persian weighs 670 pounds, according to Levinson] that it couldn't be flown on an airplane because it could roll in flight and be dangerous. Instead, they had to drive the rug here from Colorado!

Baltimore: How do you define the word "home"?

Ehrlich: Warm, comfortable, inviting, friendly.

Baltimore: Is that how you would describe yourself?

Ehrlich: Yes, I think so. I try to be all those things.

Baltimore: Is it strange to live in a place that is open to the public for tours?

Ehrlich: It is very strange to have executive protection, and it can be very strange to have so many people in your house. We've had some very large parties, with hundreds of people in the house.

Sometimes Drew will say, "Are we going to have a lot of people coming over tonight?" His main concern is whether or not he will be able to hear his cartoons.

Baltimore: Have you ever accidentally walked down the stairs in your bathrobe while a tour was going on?

Ehrlich: I haven't, but Drew walked out unclothed one day and might have flashed a tour group coming through.

Baltimore: How will things change with baby number two?

Ehrlich: It will be interesting to have a second child totally raised in this house. Drew had a different type of exposure of seeing me drive and do things that the next one won't. Drew was with me at the grocery store like every other child who goes with his mom, but things will be a little different for this kid. I almost feel an obligation to take [Joshua] to the grocery store.

Raising children here just makes my job a little bit harder to teach the values that keep me grounded in this job. That is really important. There will come a day when we won't live here anymore. You need to prepare yourself and remember that. Sometimes people don't, and the

transition back to real life is harder.

Baltimore: What has surprised you the most about the job?

Ehrlich: For my role, I think it was the emphasis on the home and the house. I am a people person. I enjoy getting out speaking—even when it gets me in trouble. But I also feel privileged to be in one of the homes in the country that is one of the more spectacular homes. I did not realize I would be spending as much time with the house as I have. We've gotten to a threshold with it. I'm hoping that other folks in The Foundation for the Preservation of Government House will be able to take over a little bit more.

For Bob, the biggest surprise has been the press. In Congress, you don't get that much coverage. As governor, everything you say and do is newsworthy, and I guess I learned that lesson, too.

Baltimore: Do you think that the idea of a First Lady is an antiquated one?

Ehrlich: I have become a real believer in this role. People like tradition, and that's all part of it. I got so many compliments about the way I dressed in Maryland colors for the Preakness. People love for you to do that. The preservation of history in combination

with tradition is a part of it. I am 42, and a lawyer who would have defined herself as a professional person for a very long period of time. But I think in this day and age you need to recognize the balance of tradition with a more modern role. I'm using the term 'the role' because that's what it is—there is a role to it. Some days you might get up and not feel like doing certain things but the expectations of being in this position are justified in many ways and you have to accept that when you put yourself on the line to achieve something like this.

Baltimore: Are there any past first ladies who have inspired you?

Ehrlich: It's hard to do the role outside of your personality and circumstance. Laura Bush is traditional. She really travels with her husband everywhere, and Hillary Clinton is in the Senate now. My personality is to be out. I like to be out. A lot of first ladies have chosen not to be that way. It just depends on where you are in your life at the time you are doing this. Bob and I do a lot of the politics together.

Baltimore: What books are on your night table right now?

Ehrlich: Bob always reads biographies and I get a lot of books from him. Right now, I have Dr. [Ben] Carson's book [*Think Big*] on my night table.

Baltimore: What has been your greatest pleasure as First Lady?

Ehrlich: My husband kids me: "Well, who wouldn't want to be First Lady? You don't have to deal with the legislature. You don't have all the issues." I always joke that I'm for everything good and nothing bad. Probably the biggest thing you can do is to be a role model, particularly for young women.

Baltimore: What do you want your legacy to be in this house?

Ehrlich: I want the legacy to be family and comfort. I also want to update the home for the comfort of the people who work in this home and who are here every day. Hopefully, I've tried to do things in a way that will stick around for a while after our administration.

Baltimore: When you were a little girl, did you ever dream about what you wanted to live in when you grew up?

Ehrlich: I always did like a big house on the hill, but I certainly never envisioned living here! **B**

Contributing writer Jane Marion wrote about Mt. Washington's Dixon House in June.