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A Farmhouse Beauty

TRADITION AND LUXURY COME TOGETHER IN AMAGANSETT



Architecture by Alan Wanzenberg, AIA
Interior Design by Jed Johnson Associates
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Architect Alan Wanzenberg collaborated with designers Arthur Dunnam, Christine Cain and Jaime Rojo, of Jed Johnson Associates, on a house for a couple in Amagansett, New York. ABOVE: The living room. Burden & Izett Windsor chair. Clarence House large pillow fabric.



How unfair that the phrase “God is in the details” has become the sole property of the modernists. Anybody with an eye for the finer points of design can see there is no getting closer to heaven than this very subtle new house.

“I thought all the great things had been built. I had no idea what could be built today,” says one of the owners, an investment manager whose own eyes were opened by the experience of building his first house. Fireplaces shimmering like the latest Badgley Mischka collection, antique cutwork sewn onto silk lampshades, hammered-nickel hinges that were the work of a jeweler-turned-metalsmith—there are only so

LEFT: The center courtyard leading to the entrance “is sheltered from the destructive winds out of the north,” says Wanzenberg. BELOW LEFT: Fitz Hugh Lane’s *The Matilda Under Sail*, 1851, hangs above the fireplace in the entrance hall. The bronzes are by Diego Giacometti. Beauvais rug.

BELOW: “The dining room is intimate for a house of this scale,” says Dunnam, who based the design on the antique Ferahan rug, from Darius. A French chandelier illuminates the circa 1835 table. The circa 1850 chairs were designed by architect A. W. N. Pugin.



many drawing boards details like these could possibly have come from. New York-based architect Alan Wanzenberg designed the house as well as "anything permanently affixed to it," he says, while principal designers Arthur Dunnam and Christine Cain and associate designer Jaime Rojo, of Jed Johnson Associates, furnished and decorated its romantic interiors. Edwina von Gal, the Georgia O'Keeffe of landscape design, brought her own unmistakable cool elegance and discipline to the substantial gardens.

An important old house once stood here, on five acres high atop a wind-swept bluff in Amagansett, New York, but it was lost to a fire many years ago. Despite its location, the spot could not

be more quintessentially New England. "There's an astringency to the site," says Wanzenberg. "To be here, the house had to look tough. Yet isn't it nice?"

A straightforward farmhouse, it looks as if it has been here forever. The core is home to a Manhattan couple, with two wings for their many guests. Never does it feel like a six-bedroom house with 8,000 square feet; the scale is much more personal. "That's typical of my work—the architecture never looks quite the scale it actually is," says Wanzenberg. "I prefer very few hallways and walking through rooms to get to other rooms. This house was designed so the owners could be there by themselves and not walk past empty bedrooms."

Not quite American, not quite English and not quite of any one century, this is very much a collector's house, built object by object: One day a pair of leaded-glass windows by Frank Lloyd Wright would arrive. The next day, Hudson River School paintings would appear. The next day, an astounding Art Nouveau piano from England. "The owners like all kinds of beautiful things with a lot of visual interest," says Dunnam. "We didn't want a specific historical period. We wanted them to feel they could gravitate toward whatever appealed to them."

The couple's many moods and interests have all been accommodated in spaces that are comfortable in every season. Sitting in the living room is



like traveling back to the late 19th century, to some great peacock-feathered gathering of intellectuals in Holland Park, London. The game room, with its Mackintosh-inspired fireplace, suggests some forward-thinking Glasgow salon in the early 1900s. The master bedroom flirts with the contemporary, while the library, paneled in pecky cypress, has the stature of Delano & Aldrich.

The more you look, the more you see. The designers worked like couturiers, and as with a serious dress, there's a whole other level of pleasure had by those who take the time to examine the stitches and turn out the lining. Every tile was fired for the house. Every one of the four staircases has a different intricate balustrade. Most fabrics were custom-colored, rugs woven, hardware cast. The block feet of an armchair have the slightest flare added, to echo the shape of an Art Nouveau-style mantel—for the rare soul observant enough to notice. And the simple act of climbing the main stairs isn't simple at all: The runner is gun-tufted wool, with a double border of color and nailhead trim, and on each landing there is a handwoven wool rug exploding with color. "There's a great deal going on, but in a very quiet way," Dunnam says. "There's never a place where there isn't something interesting to look at."

Where furniture is new, age was suggested, as with the antique Chinese bamboo mats laid into the bedside ta-



ABOVE: "It functions both as a library and as a sitting room for the master bedroom upstairs," the architect says of the library. *The Bark Panama*, 1851, center, is by James Guy Evans and Edward Arnold. Marvin Alexander chandelier. Schumacher armchair and ottoman fabric.



"We told everybody on the design team, 'First let your minds roam. We'll worry about constraints later,' says the husband. LEFT: A Laura Fisher antique quilt is on the bed in a guest room. An 18th-century chair, from Burden & Izett, is paired with a mid-19th-century American desk.

"The needlepoint rug was the key to our design," Cain says of the master bedroom. "The space is very serene." Clarence House bedcovering and sham fabric. Yew Tree House Antiques desk chair and Portuguese mirror. George Subkoff armchair, foreground. FJ Hakimian rug.



Landscape designer Edwina von Gal planted an herb garden along the fieldstone wall of the terrace, which is off the kitchen, left.



ABOVE: "The guesthouse is attached to the main house by a breezeway, giving it the appearance of being freestanding," notes the architect.

bles of the master bedroom. Painted effects appear in the most unlikely places: A fan design in faux marquetry was added to the frames of a superb pair of American portraits; and a vine of vaguely Craftsman flowers trails down the four posts of the bed in the master bedroom. Sometimes even the details are detailed: The shades of a scone in the entrance hall were stenciled with colored disks that echo the pearly tiles of the hearth. The husband is the first to say, "There's a complexity in the design of this house that most people never see."

All of these small dramas unfold against a vibrant architectural setting. "Everything is a little asymmetrical when you dissect it," explains Wanzenberg. The entrance hall is really quite unconventional; you're greeted not by the usual big console but by a corner fireplace blazing away. Although the architecture is very much on the

square, the master bedroom is barrel-vaulted and lined with butternut, with just a little white pigment rubbed in, as if the sea had washed over it for years and left a layer of salt. And the scale of the library comes as a complete surprise—"I always include one tour de force space," says Wanzenberg—and its blue upholstery fabric emphasizes the water view. If it all holds together seamlessly, it is because, Cain says, "our firm has a real understanding of architecture and how to integrate it with interior design. Our interiors are very resolved."

Right down to the couple's two cats, though nobody here is taking credit for them. The lithe Siamese beauties lend just the right note of late-Victorian exoticism. They have coats softer than cashmere, in colors that defy description, and eyes bluer than summer's loveliest hydrangea. Sometimes God really is in the details. □