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Honoring The Past Interior designer Ken Gemes was entrusted with reworking the interiors of this Southport Greek Revival house built in 1837. See Resources.

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SPIRIT OF THE SOUND

A GREEK REVIVAL HOME HARKENS TO ITS PAST
BUT LIVES IN THE PRESENT

BY DAVID MASELLO | PHOTOGRAPHY BY TRIA GIOVAN



Welcome Center (THIS PAGE) In the foyer, a custom Hickory Chair settee upholstered in contrasting Lee Jofa velvets is complemented by walls painted in Benjamin Moore's Decorator's White. The pendant is from Circa Lighting; and the black and cream cowhide rug is from Madison Inc. **Party Central** (OPPOSITE PAGE) The adjacent pool house has an overflow space for entertaining plus expansive views of the pool below. See *Resources*.



***WHEN SEA CAPTAIN EDWIN SHERWOOD** commissioned his three-story Greek Revival house on a main street of Southport in 1837, he certainly had no visions of abstract art hanging on its walls or furnishing rooms with bed-sized ottomans and Roman shades printed with edgy scenes of cityscapes. And, yet, were he to walk inside again after Ken Gemes' ingenious interior redesign, Sherwood would likely feel at home.*

"This is one of the most charming houses in town, and the couple who bought it and had me design their interiors were very much taken with the original construction and proportions," says Gemes, who heads his namesake interior design firm in Bronxville, NY. "The fact that many period details remained, or had been re-established by previous owners, appealed to them."

But Captain Sherwood would likely have been as unhappy as the new owners were with the interiors they encountered prior to moving in. "While the former owners had done a good job of renovating the house," explains Gemes, "they'd given the rooms a very LA-edgy, modern slickness. Some rooms were painted solid black, with shutters over the windows for guaranteed dark-

ness." Other rooms sported a shade of storm-gray, lightened only by flashing neon artworks.

Gemes and his clients, a couple with two grown children, decided to lighten and brighten all the rooms. The several-months-long project proved so successful that the house figured into last year's annual Near & Fair Aid house tour, a nonprofit dedicated to eliminating the causes and effects of poverty in Fairfield County.

In an acknowledgment of both the house's past and its need to be anchored in the present, Gemes preserved the architecture of the main staircase and its banisters, but invigorated the entry with a black, white and soft-gray scheme. Then, he filled a niche with a custom piece that references a modern wingback chair and a lounge settee.



Long Division Gemes deftly divided the rectangular living room (THIS PHOTO) into two separate seating areas. Garden stools from Mecox Garden flank an O'Henry House sofa through John Rosselli & Associates, which is upholstered in a Thibault fabric. The coffee table is through Highland House, and the rugs are through Merida. Custom draperies are crafted from a Romo fabric. At one end of the room (OPPOSITE PAGE), an abstract painting by Katy Ferrarone from Southport Galleries hangs above a gold-legged cabinet from Made Goods; Hickory Chair armchairs wear a Zimmer + Rohde fabric. See *Resources*.



One of the design challenges was the artwork. While the owners came to their new home with considerable art holdings, some, frankly, had become dated. What had been cutting-edge decades earlier, was now less than sharp. But in a series of expeditions to Southport Galleries, the owners and Gemes found works that were not only engaging, but also complementary to the furnishings. For instance, the soft blues, greens and yellows in a semiabstract canvas perfectly referenced all of the colors Gemes had introduced in the living room. Black-and-white cutouts echo dining room hues.

Another issue was the scale of the living room, a space that measures 15 feet wide but 32 feet long. What had once been a separate parlor and sitting room had long ago become one room. “To break up the long space, I created two seating areas, using sofas back to back,” says Gemes. “In a narrow space, furniture shouldn’t be too dark or heavy, and I knew that it needed to be positioned well into the room.”

Island Life (THIS PAGE) Bar stools through Century Furniture wearing a Donghia fabric provide seating at the stainless-steel topped island. See Resources.



Gathering Place (THIS PHOTO) Roman shades in a Zimmer + Rohde fabric complement the Old World Weavers fabric on the banquette cushions. The kitchen table is from RH; the chandelier is from Solaria. Jamie Young white vases fill a corner cabinet. See Resources.





Dining Delight (OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP) A McLain Wiesand Furniture chandelier from John Rosselli & Associates is suspended above a custom dining table. Dining chairs through Hickory Chair sport a Pollack fabric. A work on canvas by Carol Benson-Cobb adorns a wall next to the fireplace. **Soothing Space** (OPPOSITE PAGE, BOTTOM) In the library, striped table lamps from the Accessory Store top Robert Lighton side tables alongside a Hickory Chair sofa. A trio of black and white artwork pieces are by Nikki Nye and Amy Flurry through Zoe Bios Creative. See *Resources*.

Bedroom Bliss (THIS PHOTO) In the master bedroom, a Jamie Young lamp tops a Hickory Chair side table alongside a bed with a headboard upholstered in a Lee Jofa velvet. At the foot of the bed, a vintage bench sports a Quadrille fabric, which is repeated on a lumbar pillow atop a club chair wearing Holly Hunt. See *Resources*.



Because the ceilings throughout the house are low, typical of the era in which it was constructed, Gemes stayed with light wall colors to visually add height. In the master bedroom, for instance, he chose three grades of the same hue, an effect that, he says, “leads the eye upward.” While subtle shades of blues, whites and grays are predominant throughout the house, monotony is kept at sea. “In every project I do, but especially here, I’m big on each room having a different personality and feel, but also having a consistency in color from room to room,” says Gemes. “I want a person to know they are in a different room, with its own character, but I never want anyone to feel they’re suddenly occupying a space foreign from the one next to it or rooms away.”

Gemes and his clients worked quickly to complete their design voyage. The home is now welcoming to guests and family alike, and even Captain Sherwood should he wish to appear. 🌟