September 2010

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clean sweep

A HAMPTONS SPEC HOUSE GAINS **PRETTY NEW PROFILES**

BY AMY ELBERT
PHOTOGRAPHY BY TRIA GIOVAN
PRODUCED BY BONNIE MAHARAM

As a mother of four (three teenagers and one soon-to-be teen), Nina Richter knows how to coax results from stubborn situations. When she and her husband, Greg, bought an ungainly vacation home in Bridgehampton, New York, she never doubted its hidden beauty. She just needed a designer and an architect who shared her vision and determination.

The 1980s spec house is a two-hour drive from the Richters' primary residence in Bronxville, New York. Sitting on a 3-acre lot next to an agricultural preserve, the house offers far-flung views of farmland. "The location was terrific," Nina says, adding that the house is equidistant from the beach and the town of Bridgehampton. "But it was dark and barnlike, and I wanted a house with prettier curb appeal."

It wasn't only the exterior that was lacking. There was no mudroom, and the laundry area was stuck in a closet near the kitchen—serious shortcomings in a summer home where beach outings and frequent guests produce mountains of shoes, sports gear, and dirty laundry. The dining-living room and kitchen shared a cavernous space, dominated by a stone fireplace and vaulted ceilings with dark, weathered trusses. Windows were odd sizes, awkwardly positioned, and trimmed with barn board.

"The house had no architectural charm whatsoever," notes Ken Gemes, the Bronxville designer who was one of the first to come to the Richters' rescue. Gemes made some temporary fixes, including painting walls, trim, and trusses, and partitioning off a second-floor room that overlooked the dining-living-room area. "We minimized what negatives we could, knowing the Richters would eventually get an architect to do a full-blown renovation," Gemes says.

That began in 2006 when Nina contacted Stuart Disston, an architect with offices in Connecticut and Quogue, New York. "I felt the layout of the house was conducive to a renovation," Nina says. "There was an attached garage near the kitchen and I figured it would be easy to transform that space into a mudroom, laundry room, and side entry."

Disston agreed, and reconfigured the garage space to give the family its much-needed mudroom, a more efficient kitchen, a large laundry area, a powder room, an outdoor shower, and

Right: An antique mahogany table, teak stools, and a thick sisal rug from Merida Meridian bring visual weight to the large open foyer. Stairs were widened and flared at the base, and walls were paneled and painted Benjamin Moore Linen Sand. **Top left:** French doors with transoms open the living room to a back porch. **Left:** Nina Richter and daughters Gretchen, 14, and Sabina, 11, with dogs Otto and Olive, sit on the porch off the living room. **Preceding pages:** The stone fireplace surround was replaced with wood panels and trim for a refined style. A room overlooking the living area was enclosed and a walkway to a second-level balcony was added above the fireplace. O. Henry House sofas and chairs are grouped around a Ralph Lauren cocktail table.

a side entry. To replace the garage, a new detached three-car garage was built with attic space large enough for birthday-party sleepovers and teen get-togethers. "We have air hockey, Ping-Pong, and all that," Nina says. "I wanted a place where the kids would want to hang out with their friends."

The kitchen, also redone to encourage casual gatherings, is anchored by a large mahogany-topped island where family and friends congregate. Perimeter countertops are easy-care black granite that won't show spills or stains. Simple cabinets and a boxed beam-and-beadboard ceiling give the room a relaxed, beach-house feel, Gemes adds.

Walls were built to separate the kitchen and the dining-living room. "We needed some distinction between the dining area and kitchen," Gemes explains. The wide doorway still allows for comfortable interaction between the rooms.

Disston paneled walls in the dining-living room and foyer, adding character and diminishing the looming scale of the spaces. "The paneling adds texture, light, and shadow, and gives you a sense of a room within a room," Disston says.

The architect also designed an elegant paneled fireplace surround with a limestone hearth, replacing the too-rustic rock. He widened and curved the stairs to create an elegant staircase in keeping with the scale of the foyer. Gemes went with hefty furnishings as well, including an antique pedestal table. "We used dark wood for impact and to punctuate the space," he says.

Right: A boxed beam ceiling with beadboard insets and simple cabinets with chrome hardware give the kitchen a vintage feel. A Roman shade in Bijou Stripe from China Seas adds a pop of warm color, and caned-back bar stools from Thomas Pheasant for McGuire offer comfortable seating at the island. **Top left:** An old harvest table in the dining area is surrounded by teak-and-cane chairs from Robert Lighton's British Khaki Collection and lighted by Lumiere sconces.

Above: Architect Stuart Disston extended and flared the roof lines to create gambrels. New windows, white porch posts, and red cedar shingles boost curb appeal. **Right:** A covered back porch, sunroom addition, and new balcony above the porch open the interiors to the yard and sunset views.

"The whole idea was to capitalize on a British Colonial feeling, with the dark furniture and dark floors and using a lot of textures such as grass cloth and caning," Gemes says.

To give the house the pretty profile Nina wanted, Disston reshaped the ungainly structure by extending roof lines to create two graceful gambrels. "It appeared to me like a half-finished gambrel house, so we finished it," says Disston, who was assisted in the project by architectural associate Josh Rosensweig. "We extended the eave lines down and out, bringing them to the porches that wrap about the house," Disston adds. "That brought the scale of the house down and introduced nicer, softer lines."

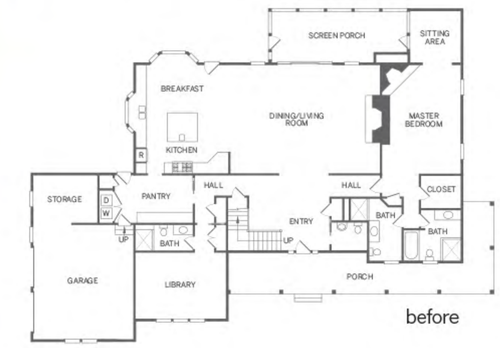
The back exterior was balanced with the addition of a second chimney, matching an existing one. The new chimney serves both a fireplace in the sunroom and a grill on the porch. A west-facing covered porch with a balcony above (one of Nina's favorite spots) is tucked between the chimneys; both outdoor spaces take advantage of sunset and farmland views.

The transformation exemplifies the proverbial silk purse made from a sow's ear, Disston adds, "and introduces the spirit of a traditional, breezy summerhouse in Bridgehampton."

The architects and designer definitely brought out the house's best features, Nina agrees, making it functional, comfortable, and "a prettier version of itself."

Architect: Stuart Disston, AIA, Josh Rosensweig **Interior designer:** Ken Gemes

For more information, see sources on page 154



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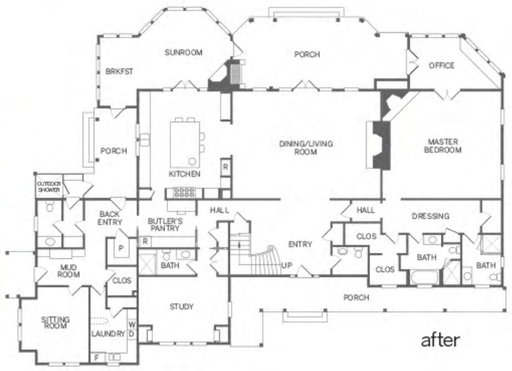

after

FLOOR PLANS: CARSON ODE

A charming guest room was created when an open space overlooking the living area was enclosed. Designer Ken Gemes chose a sea-foam palette, including draperies made with a hand-blocked fabric from TylerGraphic. **Opposite top:** A chair and ottoman (by the bed) are covered in an aqua linen from Lee Jofa trimmed with ivory piping. "We kept fabric light and, in many cases, the colors of water," Gemes says. **Opposite bottom:** An attached garage was reconfigured, making space for an inviting TV/sitting room.