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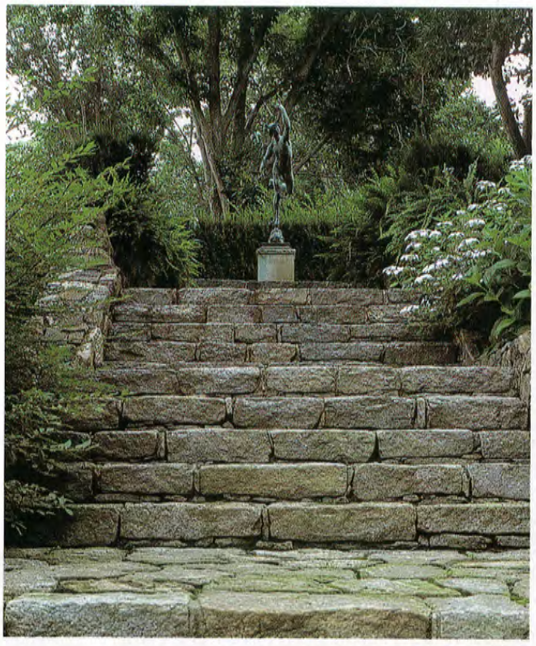
Fixed on Georgian

A dynamic renovation of a Greenwich home reminds us that the longest journey begins with a first step

IT STARTED SMALL, AS THESE THINGS often do. Bit by bit, the floor plan, the gardens and the potential of one backcountry house multiplied. A sort of Georgian-style home in need of attention now boasts mosaics and murals, vineyards and fountains, an Italian-style grotto and a boatload of fine art and antiques as embellishments for the now meticulous period architecture. ■ "It began with a simple parterre," recalls the homeowner, a former CEO retired from the telecommunications industry. A parterre provides architecture and structure for the greenery of a garden, a transitional element connecting home and landscape. But simple can be deceiving, as this parterre is surveyed with lasers before pruning. Fussy? Perhaps.

BY SOPHIE DONELSON | PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANASTASSIOS MENTIS



Gatekeeper | *Designed by landscape architect Charles Stick, the garden gate with an iron cannonball closure* (LEFT) *leads to an herb garden.* **Center Stage** | *A statue of Mercury* (BELOW), *a copy of a Renaissance sculpture and purchased at Sotheby's in London, stands at the top of stairs in the garden.* **Golden Arch** | *A kitchen, one of two, was added to the original structure. High, yellow arches* (OPPOSITE) *mark the original exterior wall. Simple Swedish chairs, an antique French table, a La Cornue stove and faux plaster walls keep the space casual, yet polished. See Resources.*

But the formality of Georgian architectre dictates manicured grounds, especially when it includes nine acres of gardens, from herb to rose, and a grotto brimming with hydrangea.

Ten years ago, there wasn't much to brag about. The house, whose weathervanes declare 1941 and 1942 as its building dates, was lopsided. Only one wing crept out from an otherwise symmetrical façade—a no-no in the Georgian canon where balance reigns. "It was crying out for symmetry," says Charles Hilton, the Greenwich-based architect and Georgian scholar who righted the house with a 3,500-square-foot wing. He took great care not to lose the character of the period. In fact, the entire home is a product of mutual admiration from everyone involved for the structure's integrity.

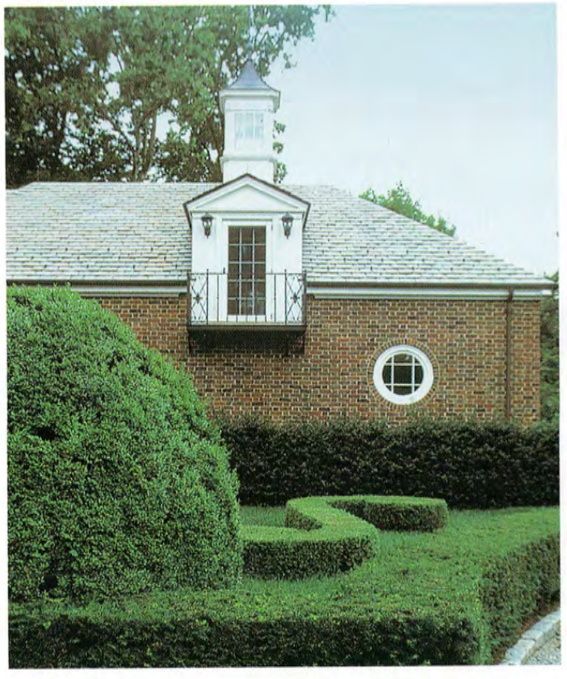
This is also a story of long-term relationships. The homeowner has worked with Isabelle Vanneck and Jane Gleason of Davenport & Co. on three offices and a previous home over a nine-year relationship. And, Hilton has been involved with them for 10 years, working on their Manhattan apartment. Landscape architect Charles Stick is practically a full-time employee, at the house sometimes daily.

It's only fitting, says Vanneck. "The house was built around 1940 when all the best carpenters, best architects, the best everyone was available. It was built after the Depression when more craftsmen came north, and everyone was looking for jobs. They did exquisite work."

Hilton tried to tread lightly when adding modern amenities, including two kitchens, which are a necessity for the homeowner's wife. She's a professional chef who worked with food legend Alice Waters for nearly a decade and now shuttles between the herb, vegetable and organic gardens on the property and the kitchens with their estimated 14 cooling appliances—refrigerators, freezers and wine coolers.

An inviting, casual kitchen occupies the first floor, but the second kitchen, in the basement, is a professional-grade lab. Thankfully for the chef, there's no lack of dining areas either, from outdoor spaces to a formal dining room replete with rich woods, fabrics and crystal chandeliers. Here a cross-strie pattern

Accents | *Bold accessories like an antique black lacquer pencil box, papier-mâché canister and Venetian mirror stand out against painted walls in a pale aqua strie.* (PREVIOUS SPREAD LEFT). **Simple Chic** | *Stately antique French walnut armchairs* (PREVIOUS SPREAD RIGHT) *are upholstered in fabric from Clarence House.* **Show Off** | *Hand painted cross-strie patterned walls* (OPPOSITE) *in the dining room highlight a collection of 1930's English Mason ironstone tranferware.* **Tasting Room** | *Antique English Queen Anne chairs from Sotheby's and table* (RIGHT) *from Circa Antiques in Westport top a Persian rug in the formal dining room. The Sheffield silver candleholders are circa 1830.* **Drive Through** | *A cast-iron fountain from Barbara Israel Garden Antiques* (BELOW) *stands in the circular driveway of the Georgian house.* **Clean Cut** | *With or without flowers, a well-manicured parterre* (BOTTOM) *looks good because its clean lines and geometrical structures provide a strong foundation. See Resources.*



[decorative painting]

Decorative art finishes for walls date back to the Greeks and Romans. In this country, wealthy Colonials often hired artists from Italy and France to cover walls with a variety of finishes, says Torie Burke, a decorative artist at Stuart-Creal Studio in Ridgefield. The work of Rufus Porter, a Connecticut muralist, graced many homes in the early 1800's. The craft revival of the 1970's renewed interest in decorative painting, according to Virginia Teichner, a muralist who teaches at the Brookfield Crafts Center. Dragging, ragging, stippling and glazing all use glazes that are applied over a contrasting colored, opaque ground coat and then distressed while wet to produce patterns and subtle gradations of colors. Strie creates the look of raw silk; cross-hatching gives the illusion of a subtle plaid. Both provide drama and style in an ancient artform.

LE POTAGER

was hand-painted on the walls to complement a hefty collection of 1930's English Mason ironstone transferware purchased at Sotheby's in New York.

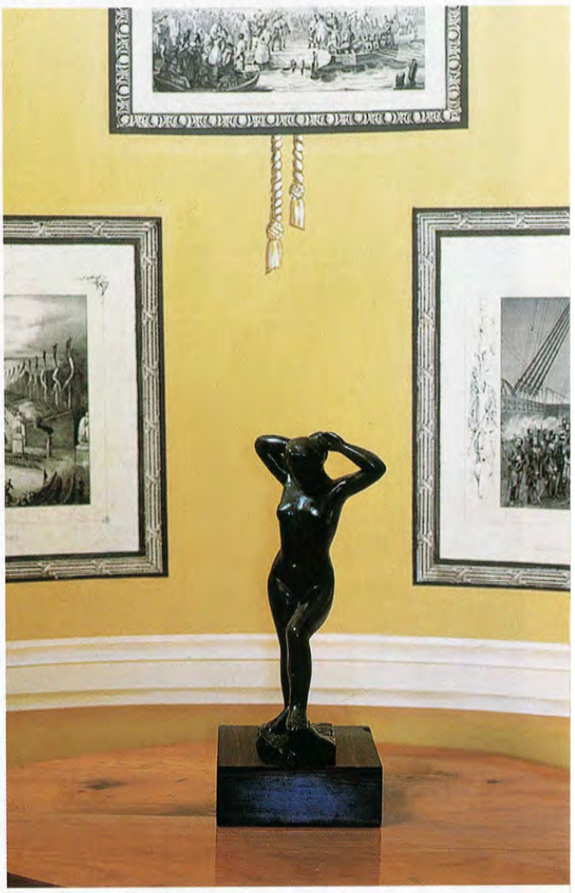
The sitting room, where Vanneck assembled a collection of onyx-colored accessories, offers a nod to Tiffany with blue walls. "The hardest thing about this house was finishing it," Vanneck explains. "Accessories were so important."

According to Vanneck, the homeowner has "a natural appetite" for antiques. Alongside Queen Anne chairs and Sheffield candleholders is an extensive collection of fine art—a Bonnard here, a Matisse there. "Maybe it's a blessing that I don't have much wall space," the homeowner adds.

The most peculiar decoration is in an old-fashioned telephone room, a small space with a high, rounded plaster ceiling constructed to amplify sound. On the yellow walls hang early-1800's engravings commissioned by Napoleon III in honor of his uncle Bonaparte. Instead of traditional framing, though, a decorative painter added faux elements like tassels and chains that "hang" from the prints.

Art in the sunroom, a *orangerie*-style room with a limestone floor, mosaic tile border and walls faux-painted to imply age, blurs the boundaries between inside and outdoors. Having recently acquired an additional adjacent acre, they have plans for a Machu Picchu-style stone staircase and pond. A carved limestone sculpture of Atlas is already on its way.

"These clients have such wonderful interests, and they spend a lot of time traveling together," says Stick, the Virginia-based mastermind of the gardens. "Few people who have the resources travel and include their discoveries into their lives the way this family does. It used to be that you took the grand tour before you built the grand house." But this grand house has evolved with their travels and a growing respect for details. In the beginning, don't forget, there was just the houe in dire need of attention and a new parterre.



Sun In | *The limestone floor and vaulted ceiling hung with an antique crystal chandelier* (OPPOSITE) *provide a backdrop for the Pierce Martin wicker furniture covered in fabric from Travers.* **Hue Minded** | *A Louis Solomon faux-bamboo bed* (LEFT) *and linens trimmed with green and brown embroidery from Julia's in Greenwich echo the colors found in the Boussac Fadini paper covering the guest bedroom walls.* **Trompe L'oeil** | *In the telephone room, traditional framing is eschewed in favor of painted faux frames for the black and white engravings* (ABOVE). *See Resources.*