

# BEST | IN | SHOW



The family room features a purple settee designed by Suzy Azadi that's perfect for relaxing. The embossed fabric at the windows is by Pierre Frey.



A renovation to create a showcase for the homeowners' contemporary art treasures turns a lakefront Fairfield County house into the true star of their collection.

Text by Megan Fulweiler  
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Architecture: David E. Austin,  
Austin Patterson Disston Architects  
Interior design: Suzy Azadi,  
Azadi Design  
Builder: Bill Marshall,  
Artisans Home Builders  
Landscape architecture:  
Stephen Stimson Associates,  
Landscape Architects







**TOP:** An infinite edge helps merge the pool with the landscape. **BOTTOM:** New windows along the home's lakefront side ensure unhindered views from all the main living spaces. **FACING PAGE:** An artful bronze-base table and a Baccarat chandelier lend drama to the breakfast area, where clerestory windows pull in additional light.

**A**rt collectors have a different criterion for perfection in a home. Whether they are looking to build or renovate, the ideal abode means a setting that also benefits their treasures. They consider a building's proportions and the amount of available light before they even take a peek at the kitchen or count the closets. Of course, a modern art collection doesn't necessarily dictate a contemporary home. Yet there's no denying that when the owners' aesthetic is evident in both the style of their house and the art they collect, a sensory-pleasing equilibrium is born.

It's difficult to imagine a more suitable showcase for these sophisticated, well-traveled owners than this Fairfield County home. From the lofty ceilings to the open, well-organized floor plan, architecture and art complement one another. It wasn't always this way. Built back in the "Mad Men" era, the circa-1960s house sported a number of attributes. Era-appropriate exposed timbers lent character, and lake views provided unending charm. But to forge a more livable dwelling as well as a proper backdrop for a collection that includes a number of large sculptures, the owners had to pry apart the vintage rooms and bump-up









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the square footage.

"It wasn't exactly a complete gut. Basically, we took the building's symmetrical form and added two wings. Roughly speaking, we doubled its size. Unlike in the old days, the house flows," explains architect David Austin of Austin Patterson Disston Architects in Southport. Austin, along with project architect Marti Cowan, led the renovation. Maintaining a number of elements including

the heavy timbers, the skillful architects created a cleaner, more modern home that, at the same time, adheres to the vocabulary of the original structure.

That might sound simple enough in theory, but today's house delivers a number of ambitious surprises. The new wing that contains the kitchen and family room, for instance, also holds a generous gallery and guest quarters below. The architects cleverly tucked the perfectly scaled, two-story addition

into the hill, maximizing the sloping site. Steel stairs framed with glass begin their descent in the kitchen where a bank of Allmilmo cabinetry assures everything from cookware to canned goods a stylish niche.

On summer mornings, guests open their door and walk directly to the pool for a dip or plant themselves on the terrace in fashionable Dedon chairs. There's even a supremely functional kitchenette (more Allmilmo cabinetry) hidden here to serve overnighters as well as pool-goers and spa-revelers.

"The pool includes a spa within the rectangular water surface, a perimeter gutter system so that the water elevation is at the same elevation as the stone terrace, and an infinite edge at the far end toward the lake," explains landscape architect Richard Johnson, who was a principal with Falmouth and Cambridge, Massachusetts-based Stephen Stimson Associates, Landscape Architects at the time and has since formed his own eponymous Falmouth firm.

Another masterful pool sits in the wing on the opposite side of the house where the master suite and children's rooms are situated. Macassar doors in the master bedroom open to reveal—talk about a







A striking glass screen defines the kitchen. FACING PAGE, TOP: An art gallery and guest quarters occupy the lower walk-out level. FACING PAGE, BOTTOM: The inner courtyard with a reflecting pool and an adjacent gallery displaying paintings by Pedro Calapez is situated in the opposite wing.





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restorative space—an inner courtyard with a shallow reflecting pool. Generous clumps of bamboo waving at the water's edge introduce a dash of green and fashion a connection to the outdoors.

Anyone who has seen the posh family room with its upholstered furnishings by Holly Hunt, a handsome low-slung coffee table by Moura Starr and velvet-embossed window sheers won't be surprised that the owners' private sanctuary also sports its own share of sumptuous touches. "My clients didn't want organic," says designer Suzy Azadi. "They wanted chic."

The palette, which relies heavily on purple, adds a level of bold richness. But toss in a Duxiana bed and a Holly Hunt lacquered night table and it's more than obvious this is no ordinary refuge. A pair of wall-



mounted, polished metal birds keeps watch over the owners while they rest.

The adjacent master bath is another study in luxe. Azadi designed the streamlined his-and-hers marble and wood vanity. "I love this bath. It's simple and elegant," she says. A spacious glass-tiled shower and beautiful lake views unfolding alongside the tub provide the owners good reasons to unwind and savor their surroundings.

Make no mistake, though, as dazzling and polished as this home looks it's also—thanks to the astute architects—functional. Just because the breakfast area in the family room includes a circular table by artist-designer Hervé Van der Straeten (who first gained attention for his jewelry designs) and a stunning multi-armed noir chandelier by Baccarat doesn't mean it's any less versatile. It's just that the owners, who collaborated closely with the designer and architects on all aspects of the project, don't settle for mundane. The gleaming stone floors that run throughout the living spaces reflect a montage of furnishings and fabrics as carefully chosen as their art.

Even the landscape is fine-tuned to the nth degree. Stephen Stimson Associates fashioned marvelous stone retaining walls to forge a flat area for the pool and devised stellar plantings that, as Johnson tells it, "are in accordance with the minimalist aesthetic of the house." A screen made up primarily of American holly ensures privacy along the property line. And there are also major plantings of Heritage birch—prized for its peeling bark—and autumn flowering cherries that produce delicate pale-pink blossoms twice a year. All this is in addition to a verdant lawn that tips ever so gently toward the water.

Steel railings on the deck ensure that views from inside the home's generous supply of windows are unhindered. Still, to understand that the house itself is now a work of art, visitors are best directed to go down to the lake and look back. From that vantage point, there's no mistaking it. •

**RESOURCES** For more information about this home, see page 130.

**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:** The luxurious master bedroom has views of the lake and the inner courtyard. White marble and linens foster a sense of airiness and light in the master bath, which puts the focus on the surroundings, too, with its generous window. Guest quarters have a view through glass doors to the stone terrace and pool.