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FAMILY ROOM

An ambitious building project turns out to be the perfect combination of style, grace and comfort for a newly blended Greenwich family—and all it took was a year and 200 workers

by SUZANNE GANNON photographs by JOHN GRUEN

Tracy and Alisa Bahl celebrate their blended family with a wall of portraits in the breakfast area. The sleek black frames lend a linear look that echoes the binding of the carpet and the metal-framed and ebony-stained-wood Anziano chairs by Donghia.

The Georgian-inspired architecture features elaborate chimneys, copper flashing and detailed cornices and is clad in hand-chiseled Connecticut fieldstone.



JUST AROUND THE TIME THE CONTRACTOR was breaking ground on this twenty-first-century Georgian in the midcountry section of Greenwich, the couple that would eventually occupy it began dating.

It was 2007, and though they'd known each other for many years as a result of working in different departments of the same healthcare company—she as a clinical psychologist and he as a private-equity-advisor-turned-executive-chairman—they hadn't yet made the connection. She was living in Miami and he in Greenwich, and both of them traveled a considerable amount, which meant that much of the time they would spend together would be on the road.

Back in Greenwich, architect Jim Schettino of James Schettino Architects in New Canaan, had begun preparing sketches for the property's owner, who had an ambitious program in mind: a three-car garage and five bedrooms and baths, plus a finished attic and basement, a library, a covered porch and an outside fireplace. Little did he know that layout would eventually become the dream house for a modern-day blended family: Tracy and Alisa Bahl and their three sons.

Schettino's principal challenge was that a full 50 percent of the wet and wooded two acres was officially classified as wetland. "Given the zoning setbacks and the drainage requirements, we were left with about a quarter of an acre on which we had to cram everything



A spacious foyer is centered by an ebonized table with a turned base from Dos Gallos Furniture and mounted with a sculpture reminiscent of Sputnik

A subdued color palette and contemporary furnishings convey an air of relaxed intimacy and privacy in the master suite. The bench and chair at the foot of the bed provide an alternative setting for night-time or morning reading.



“It’s all about the family. And when I look at the way we live, I think the house reflects that.”

—Alisa Bahl

The Bahls curl up in a family room accented with an over-sized clock and an armillary sphere.

in," says Schettino. "It was a very restrictive site."

"So we really tried to maximize the floor area ratio," he says. "We backed up all the fireboxes because we weren't permitted to bump out the footprint to accommodate them. So it's a very compact layout." Indeed he traded sprawl for details, evoking the Georgian silhouette with fancy chimneys, a slate roof, shiny copper flashing and gutters, elaborately detailed cornices and a classical triangular pediment in the front.

Chief among the home's eye-catching characteristics is the three-dimensional facing of the exterior stonework, a "pillowed" effect achieved through chiseling each piece of Connecticut fieldstone by hand and then fitting the pieces together with extremely tight joints and little or no visible mortar.

"The wetland was the driver of the shape and design of the house," says builder Lee Schettino, son

of Jim, whose New Canaan-based firm, Lee Schettino Construction, submitted the winning bid to build the house. The job would require more than 200 workers from forty-eight different trades over the course of about a year.

The long driveway, for example, which includes a bridge over a waterway, had to be paved in special octagon-shaped pervious pavers with grass in-between to absorb rainwater and prevent runoff. And because of the site's inherent dampness, Schettino installed a state-of-the-art, "living filter" septic system, a biodegradable arrangement of smaller-than-usual retention galleries that offered the capacity of larger ones.

FROM HOUSE TO HOME

Structurally, the house was just about finished when Tracy Bahl bought it in the spring of 2009. "From



The spacious dining room strikes a note of chic with modern Bergere-like chairs and a mirrored console table from Julian Chichester. Against walls covered in grass cloth by Donghia are works by Philip Taaffe and Jackson Pollock.

a design and layout perspective, it had everything I wanted, without echoing when you walked through it," says Bahl. "It really reminds me of a townhouse."

To help Tracy decorate the interiors of the 9,000-square-foot space, which he would occupy as a bachelor before being joined by his soon-to-be wife, he called on Susan Bednar Long and Christina Sullivan Roughan of Tocar Interior Design. (The two, who had helped him design a previous house, have since split to form their own firms, S. B. Long Interiors and Roughan Interior Design.)

"This interior was as inspirational as it was an open canvas that shouted out for tailored, crisp, well-designed rooms," says Christina.

Susan and Christina both spent many years designing store interiors for Ralph Lauren, which may have had an influence on the tailored look for which they're

both known. "I liked Sue's style and it matched my strike zone," says Bahl. "It was elegant and contemporary without being cold." In addition to a bold yet understated look, another asset that Susan brought to the equation, according to Bahl, was a vast network of vendor relationships. "Speed was important," he says. "She knew how to get it done, and quickly. I was amazed at what we were able to do in the time we had. We needed to be able to sleep in beds, sit on couches, and eat on tables."

The bulk of the furnishings were amassed in a warehouse, and then relocated to the house in a series of three installations. "Ten percent was done on the day I moved in," says Bahl. "Then afterward we made multiple trips to Bed, Bath and Way Beyond," with the final installation being completed by the end of the year.

One of the few requirements was that the space

This second floor guest room is more Miami than Greenwich. A canopy bed lends the space its feminine look. Other touches include tiny nail-head-studded tables, a diminutive settee, and smoke resin lamps that mimic coral.



The formal living room is anything but. Floor-to-ceiling draperies in wool sateen by Coraggio Fabrics emphasize the scale of the room. Furnishings include a leather chair with nailheads from Oly Studio, a vintage lamp by Tommi Parzinger, a Roman Thomas slipper chair covered in blue silk mohair, and a faux-parchment coffee table from Hickory White.



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had to accommodate six people routinely, including the live-in nanny.

Following a discovery period featuring an extensive questionnaire that endeavored to extract the details of how the family lived its life, Susan and Christina would plow through a stack of design magazines asking their client for reactions.

One theme that emerged during that process, according to Alisa, is that they both liked the play of dark and light in a single room, a dynamic that is abundantly on display throughout the house, in upholstery and carpets, black and white photography and ebonized furniture.

"There was never a conflict," says Alisa, who points out that though they experienced very different childhoods—she grew up on St. Croix and later Miami; Tracy in Minnesota—they "are very aligned" in how they want to live.

The alignment begins with a dramatic front entry featuring a sweeping staircase. In the center of the space is a round ebonized pedestal table on top of which sits a Sputnik-like steel sculpture that is similar to the starburst sculpture that sits in the lobby of the hotel on Anguilla where they were married this past November.

"The connection was a real omen," says Alisa, who explains that their discovery, while visiting the hotel the first time, of a sculpture so similar to one they already owned at home, solidified that their wedding was indeed destined to take place at the hotel.

The sculpture is but one piece of a growing collection of art that includes a Robert Rauschenberg, a Jackson Pollock, a David Salle, a Chip Hooper and a Ross Bleckner, among other notable works, which Tracy was intent on incorporating into the space in a way that it was not "in your face."

He explains, "I wanted the art to occur to you, as in 'Oh, there's a Pollock,' rather than 'Here's my Pollock.'"

So it was a no-brainer that the spacious second-floor landing would be designated as an upstairs gallery where the pièce de résistance is a sculpture Bahl gave to Alisa as a Christmas gift. It is a three-dimensional

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Pollock.'"

—Tracy Bahl

silvery gray dress made of metal mesh, which appears to be floating in midair, and detailed with rosebuds.

Sculpted by Brazilian artist Adriana Carvalho who lives in Miami, the piece is inscribed with this poem: "Oh beautiful flower, fill my soul with your essence and be my life." (Alisa owns another one, which she keeps at her house in Miami.) "There's a little bit of whimsy and some fun surprises," says Bahl.

His favorite room may very well be his centrally located office, an enclave of dark wood. Wedged into the heart of the house from which he can observe any mischief that might be afoot around him, its single-most cherished feature is the built-in ventilation system that allows him to smoke his cigars without compromising the air quality in the rest of the house. Observing him as he puffs on his Montecristo No. 2s is a pair of cows, each sporting a festive hat, by photographer Jean-Baptiste Modino.

AT THE HEART OF IT

For her part, Alisa says she loves the kitchen where the three boys have breakfast on Sunday mornings when Tracy makes his specialty French toast and eggs. »

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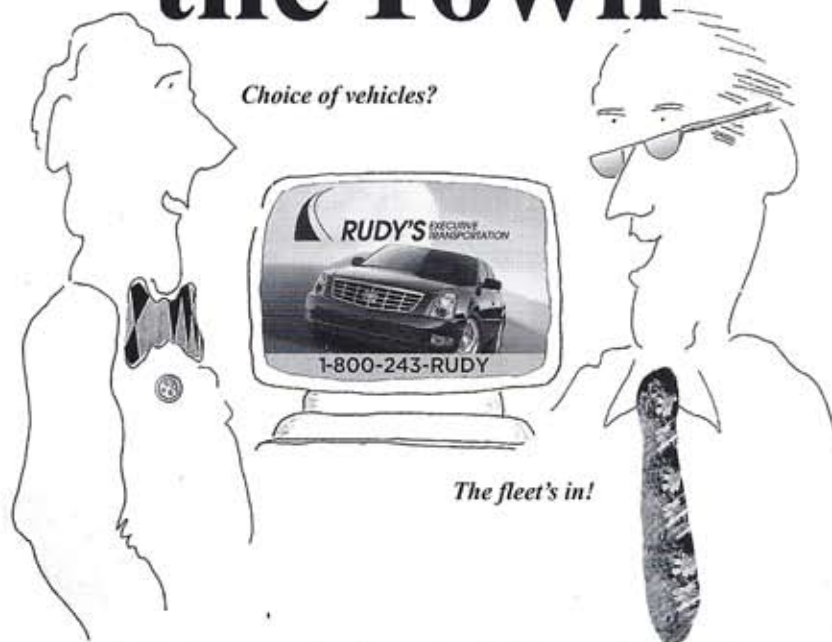
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"Both of us love to entertain," she says. "So we wanted a big kitchen with a center island where everyone could sit around." Among the specialties of the house are green plantains with grilled shrimp, lots of fish and a churrasco steak with chimichurri sauce.

About that kitchen. Christopher Peacock, the founder of Norwalk-based Christopher Peacock Cabinetry, which has grown since 1992 to include showrooms in Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Boston in addition to Greenwich, recalls that the property owner was looking for something that was "very classic" and "very indicative of its surroundings."

"The owner and the architect came to me with a very strong idea of what they wanted to do with the space," says Peacock. "So it didn't need a lot of design to make it functional."

The result was a simple and classic white kitchen that Peacock says is "very edited" and consistent with his philosophy, which is that cabinetry should not be the decoration of a room. "It should be easy on the eye, and it should allow the beauty of the room to shine through."

A wood floor, and latches and pulls in polished nickel—the traditional hardware Peacock now makes for his own projects—add warmth to the space. The nickel picks up the light, which is further reflected by the banding across the paper shades on the light fixtures.

An additional accent is afforded by a judicious use of glass-fronted cabinets, which Peacock says serve as negative elements to play off the positive elements. "You need a juxtaposition of open versus closed space," he explains. "The two things that go through my head are the practicality of good storage and the proximity of items to where they are most needed."

Peacock specified Calacatta marble for the countertops because he finds the pale taupe and golden honey tones that run through it to be warmer than the blue and gray veining typical of Carrera. "So it's tone on tone," he says. "The marble



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picks up on the walls, which pick up the nickel."

And what about those large glass jars filled with candy? "Each child has his own, and then Tracy and I have one," says Alisa. "It tends to be the center of the action when friends are over. It's all about the family. And when I look at the way we live," she says, "I think the house reflects that."

"We're very spoiled. We're so grateful because we've had such luck in this blended family. Despite having their own bedrooms, the boys often wind up having sleepovers together in one of their rooms."

PRIVATE VS. PUBLIC

While the downstairs remains a very public space, the upstairs is a private domain for family and their guests, who can relax like royalty in a dreamy canopy bed in the South Beach-inspired guest bedroom. "We wanted to do a room that was a bit edgy and that expressed some femininity," says Susan. "It doesn't really look like a room you'd find in Connecticut."

Buried down below the main level is what can only be described as a massive man cave, which includes a roomy wine cellar featuring prized Bordeaux, California Cabs and Pinots as well as some Zinfandels and Syrahs. The media room, where Tracy, a budding independent film producer, displays an outtake from photographer Slim Aarons's famous series, "Four Kings of Hollywood."

What's next for the designing couple? The demolition of Alisa's 1940s Mediterranean home in Miami, which they will then rebuild and decorate in the aesthetic of London's SoHo House. "We'll use the inspiration from our travels, the décor that we love, to make it into our getaway home," explains Alisa.

That would be the getaway home where they sit on the dock watching the sunset, while he savors a martini garnished with blue cheese-stuffed olives, and she sips a Kir Royale accented with a double twist.

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