



Main picture: while in winter this barn serves as a greenhouse, in summer up to 40 guests gather for meals around picnic tables. Opposite, top: wisteria covers the front porch pergola. Bottom: a native wild cherry tree partially obscures the back of the house



Wintour Retreat

When US Vogue editor Anna Wintour bought a second Long Island property neighbouring her first, she knew it had its drawbacks. But a campaign of landscaping and redesign has left an idyllic refuge where loved ones can get away from it all, as she explains to Sally Singer. Photography: Eric Bortan





In the dining room, zinc lanterns by Hector Finch overlook a blue and white pot (with handles by Peter Schlegel). The "Gilded" woodcarved is by Sherm Ahua. Beyond can be seen the television room, where George Smith upholsters Roma large



It was perhaps eight years ago that a neighbor's change of fortune resulted in my good luck. The property that adjoins my 1820 Long Island summer house (No. March 2006) came up for sale when its owner left in a hurry. It had an 18th-century farmhouse, with loads of additions and 12 poky bedrooms. It had a perplexing reception room with difficult, though grand, proportions. It had lanes that tumbled down towards a beautiful-to-the-eye, toxic-to-everything-else river. It had nearly 25 acres of difficult trees in deer-infested woods. It was, as we say at Vogue, challenging.

But I have a challenge, as do my friends and collaborators: the landscape designer Miranda Brooks, the master builder John Follini and the plant nursery John Britel (we call them Les Deux Jans), the interiors wizard Jesse Carrier and my housekeeper, Jean Castle, who has made Long Island my retreat for more than 20 years. The dozen bedrooms became four. The kitchen and dining rooms morphed into an open-plan arrangement, then back to something more traditional - I learned that I like a wall between the backstage and the show of a dinner. A garage became a ping-pong room. Clever piecing transformed the living room into an intimate, livable space. The barn that lies to one side of the house was turned into a book-lined apartment for

Charlie, my studious son, with a firm garden to thwart the deer. Behind the house, John (Follini) built an over-porch, and Miranda planted a graphic box garden to combat the harsh midday light. The crew dreamt up all sorts of surprises for me. There was once an enormous wooden water wheel in the driveway; to this day, I am not sure what it was doing there.

The "new house" (as we have dubbed it) is today as magical for me as its elder partner, located a five-minute walk through the woods on not-too-manicured footpaths (at night, carry a torch!). It is for me a true summer house, where the goal is always to be outside or at least looking out on something wild and lovely. Two years ago, John built a tree house in the nearby woods with a thatched tiled roof and a staircase cunningly fashioned from diagonally sliced logs. From my office window I pick up the scent of lavender and fresh grass.

And the new house is also where the immediate family go to give our guests some time off from their hosts. If your retreat within a retreat. From Memorial Day onwards through the summer, the entire compound - two houses and many farms - is filled with family and friends. We can actually sleep 40 people. My daughter, Bee, is in charge of assigning bedrooms, and heaven forbid you treat her poorly, or you'll find yourself sleep-



Top: The far corners of the sitting room are occupied by antique iron bookshelves, while the top and Edwardian armchairs, covered in cotton sacklin. The striped rug is by William & S. Greenham. Opposite the Swedish coat of arms adorns a wallbound cushion in the library



Left: in the living room, a pair of antique ironwork mirrors from Linda & Howard Stern hangs above a custom-wing backed sofa by Carner & Co upholstered in "Kaltzug", a Schumacher fabric. Above: an English pine display cabinet stands in front of a hand-painted grass cloth wall treatment by Ciciana. Below: a Bracquett fabric - "Les Colonies" - covers an antique French folding chair in the library





Top: the back garden is planted with decorative grasses, perovskia and lavender. Above left: in the library barn, a Steven Klein photograph is flanked by table lamps fashioned from 19th century Spanish candle stands. Above right: a John Follis designed oak wood gate



Top: in the kitchen, custom cabinets have been decoratively painted by Philip Bland. Above left: party chairs are stored on Shaker style pegs in the ping pong room. Above right: the billiard room is decorated with Scandinavian art prints from Heidi Horn & Judd of Hudson, New York



ing in a closet. In the evenings we ring a cowbell for dinner, and everyone eats outside on candlelit tables in the courtyard of the old house. In the last two weeks of August, we have a summer tournament with an annual theme and wonderfully old-fashioned activities. There are softball games and soccer matches on riverfront greens, a tennis tournament, an art fair with a charity auction, a dramatic performance by the children, and a massive barbecue for all involved. (My friends and neighbours Hugo Guinness and Elliott Puckette are particularly generous when it comes to the auction: you can find a selection of the pieces they have donated over the years on the walls of the new house.) The children end their summer by making a film that satirises all of us older folk.

I want this to be a place where joyous memories are created for my children and other loved ones. One stepson's engagement party was held on its lawn. Another stepson's marriage party took to a close ahead of an encroaching storm only for the marquee to collapse at the end from the weight of the water. On Bee's 21st birthday party, it was raining heavily everywhere in Long Island except in our small town, and we had 150 people coming for a seated dinner on the dock. Without discussion, John hacked off all the wineries to put up a

canvas roof; then, of course, it didn't rain. When I delicately expressed distress over the barren vines, he just said they would grow back stronger. And they did.

My stepdaughter's wedding was held in a circle in the woods behind the new house, which one arrives at after walking through a square of lindens, an orchard and a path of white peonies, sweet bay magnolias and viburnums. Miranda designed this circle, which is hedged in lilies and flowers in June, as a place to lie down and watch the moon. Originally I thought she was mad; now we can't imagine life without it. This summer Miranda's own wedding, a sort of wild Gypsy folly, took over both houses and anywhere else her friends wished to frolic. (Charlie and Bee have now banned weddings at the house: they want to preserve it for their own some day.)

For myself, I love this house because it gives me a place to be quiet. Here I never go into town except for the vegetable market. There is one movie theatre, but the walls are so thin that you hear every film playing at once. Here, on weekends, I read novels, speak on the telephone to family in England, watch a bit of television and recharge for the week ahead. Although the house may be challenging, life here is anything but.

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