

Modern History

In Westport, Connecticut, an 18th-century farmhouse is gracefully adapted for contemporary tastes.

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Interior Design: Kathleen Walsh, Kathleen Walsh Interiors Home Builder: Sean Desmond, John Desmond Builders, Inc.
Landscape Architecture: Brook Clark, Seventy Acres Landscape Architecture and Design

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evamping an almost-250-year-old New England house for a modern aesthetic might seem potentially problematic, but in the hands of designer Kathleen Walsh, it turned out to be a match made in heaven. Having grown up

in Massachusetts, Walsh was well-versed in the language of old houses, and thus enthusiastic, when repeat clients—a Manhattan couple with two teenage children—asked her to compose a new chapter in the Westport farmhouse they purchased as a weekend residence before deciding to relocate full time.

While the original structure dates to the late 1700s, the property had undergone a historically sensitive renovation in the early 2000s resulting in a large addition, as well as the refurbishment of a connecting barn. The infrastructure was brought completely up to date and its prize period details, including wide-plank pine floors, carved-wood fireplace surrounds and rustic ceiling beams, were beautifully preserved. Walsh tapped general contractor Sean Desmond for key cosmetic upgrades (a facelift for the barn's wet bar and bathroom; a redesign for the breakfast nook) and the stage was set for decoration.

Averse to discarding the beautiful contemporary furnishings Walsh had sourced for their Upper East Side apartment, the owners had another idea: *Could she find a way to use them anew?* Rather than feeling stymied, the designer instead saw the brief as an opportunity to do something unexpected. “My desire was never to make this a typical, ‘ye olde’ New England home,” she explains. “I wanted to approach this with a clear vision and having modern furniture to work with opened the door for us to do so.”

And so, the collection made its way to Connecticut, with Walsh reconceiving, reupholstering and filling in holes with newly purchased bells and whistles. Working with a backdrop of predominantly white walls and warm wood details—a combination the wife appreciates for making “the oldness of the house pop”—the designer looked to rich hues and lively patterns for a fresh perspective. “I hadn’t worked with pine in so long, and it was really invigorating,” Walsh recalls. “It brings a natural warmth to everything,

which allowed us to use color differently.” Take the guest room, where tangerine curtains and lilac upholstery spice up the quiet country ethos. In the dining room, chair backs beg a second glance with splashes of mauve-and-navy floral fabric. And the living room’s cossetting palette of mustard, aubergine and charcoal feels decidedly au courant yet appropriate for the context.

There and throughout, the designer relied on tricks of the trade to imbue a 21st-century sensibility. “When you walk into a room with low ceilings like this, it can either feel super charming or really off,” Walsh muses. To prevent the space from achieving the latter, she employed strong vertical design elements, such as columnal drapes at the windows and linear contemporary wall sconces. “We had to create some kind of vertical rhythm to counter the horizontal lines of the beams and how low all of the furniture is,” she explains. Together these details embiggen the room while unifying the architecture with its ground-hugging Vladimir Kagan sofa, Wendell Castle coffee table and barrel-backed lounge chairs.

Although the house might cater to every aspect of modern life, Walsh has interpreted it in ways that allow the family to enjoy its history. The barn, a structure dating back to the days when the property was an onion farm, has been reimagined as a lively hangout for the couple’s teenage children and their friends. And the breezeway, composed of materials salvaged from centuries-old former outbuildings, now serves as an indoor-outdoor lounge in the summer and garden room in the winter, when potted plants are brought indoors. Its French doors lead to mature gardens thoughtfully designed by landscape architect Brook Clark, who has since opened her own eponymous firm, and which similarly mingle past with present, situating new amenities such as a hot tub and fire pit within the timeless, pastoral setting.

While the compatibility between an antique house and a contemporary lifestyle was never really doubted by the homeowners or Walsh, the union ultimately proved so successful that the designer admits to being struck by it. “Eighteenth century met 21st century, and they liked each other and got along really well,” she says. “I think it surprised all of us completely.” ■



Greeting guests in the entry hall, an antique sideboard is joined by modern accents including alabaster-and-bronze sconces by Allied Maker, ceramic mirrors from Studio Van den Akker and a contemporary painting by artist George Xiong.



The living room marries centuries-old architecture with modern furniture, including a Vladimir Kagan sofa, Holly Hunt armchairs and barrel-back chairs by A Rudin. The coffee table is Wendell Castle, the watercolor is Nicole Schmölder and the sconces are from Lightmaker Studio.



Left: Walsh repurposed the living room's existing built-ins as a Scotch cabinet. The family enjoys playing chess at the Mattaliano game table. A Peter Dunham fabric covers the chairs, which are also Mattaliano.

Opposite: The dining room is a mix of styles, starting with an antique Jacobean dining table with a Libeco tablecloth and a bronze chandelier from Cartwright NY. The dining chairs by Jasper Furniture wear Ferrick Mason's Kinkead patterned linen on their backs.





Above: Matching Dmitriy & Co sofas covered in a Schumacher velvet and a pair of A Rudin chairs provide comfortable seating in the family room. A Lawson-Fenning coffee table sits atop a custom rug from Patterson Flynn.

Opposite: Located within the kitchen, the breakfast area includes a set of Jean Prouvé chairs, Justin Van Breda London table and bespoke chandelier from O'Lampia. The woven window shades are from Horizons.

Colorful accents give the guest bedroom a sunny disposition, particularly Natasha Baradaran's Giamba drapery fabric. A dresser sporting a natural wood finish from Room & Board ties to the nightstands from Shoppe Amber Interiors and Ralph Pucci bench.





Above: In the teen lounge, a blue bar fabricated by Fairfield County Millwork adds a splash of color against reclaimed-wood walls. Rejuvenation's Carson Cord Pendant light hangs above the sink. The cabinet hardware is RH and the stool is a custom piece.

Opposite: Walsh employed a blue-and-white palette for the outdoor living spaces, as seen on the Dedon sectional covered in Perennials' Ishi fabric in Blueberry. A Janus et Cie cocktail table and Surya garden stools finish out the charming pergola sitting area.