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EAST HAMPTON HAVEN

ACCOMMODATING SEASIDE COMFORTS AND CONTEMPORARY ART



Architecture by Bruce D. Nagel, AIA
 Interior Design by Vicente Wolf
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"I wanted to create a space that speaks of the past, but with a contemporary point of view," says Vicente Wolf (below) of a house he designed for a couple in East Hampton, New York. ABOVE: Architect Bruce D. Nagel expanded the house while opening it up to the landscape.

"The interiors needed to be comfortable but strong enough to support the clients' lifestyle and collection of contemporary art," Wolf says. LEFT: Sol LeWitt's 1994 *Wavy Vertical Brushstrokes* rests on the mantelpiece in the living room. Manuel Canovas upholstery fabrics.



Sometimes it helps to be given a script," says Vicente Wolf. "The restrictions and parameters can push you—and your work—in a new or unexpected direction." This analogy seems especially suited to the East Hampton house Wolf designed for a film executive and his wife, who didn't provide him with a scene-by-scene blueprint so much as a list of inform-

ing themes that were non-negotiable but still open to interpretation. Wolf's clients didn't want a typical Hamptons house, which the designer took to mean "beachy and unbuttoned"; they insisted on a blue-and-white palette; and they wanted interiors that would be comfortable but at the same time elegant and rigorous enough to hold their own against a handsome col-

BELOW: "The butterflies behind the glass give the work an almost surreal quality I was glad to have added to the living room," says Wolf of Damien Hirst's 1994–95 *Brilliant Love*, which hangs near a 17th-century Cambodian torso.



RIGHT: Nagel installed French doors to enhance the flow between the entrance hall and the dining room, which is dominated by Marc Quinn's 1996 *Framed Bread Hands*. On a high shelf is the wife's collection of Roseville pottery.



lection of contemporary art.

"When I first saw this place I thought of a Russian dacha," Wolf recalls. "I don't know where the idea came from. Those houses were grand and had volume, but there was an off-the-cuff quality to them that I particularly admire." For Wolf, a Russian dacha evokes a mixture of high and low, city and country, sophistication and simplicity—just the sort of casual but controlled jumble he sought for these interiors.

First, though, came some fairly dramatic remodeling. The house, a Shingle Style structure built in the early 1980s, was enlarged and modified by East Hampton architect Bruce D. Nagel, who more than doubled its original 3,500 square feet to its present 8,000 and rethought some of the archi-

tecture's less successful aspects along the way. "The biggest problem, for me, was that the house didn't properly address its outstanding virtue, which is the spectacular piece of land," Nagel explains. "I opened the house up more to the garden while at the same time enhancing its flow and replacing all of the former, rather poor detailing." The original baseboards were skimpy, the doors hollow core, the hardware unimpressive. Nagel took the house down to the drywall—in some rooms, beyond the drywall—and built it up again with more appropriate, and graceful, finishes.

In addition, the architect reconfigured the entrance hall, which was too small for its imposing staircase. He doubled the room's volume and then scaled down



the staircase itself, providing a more understated banister. He applied strong but simple wainscoting and laid down new oak floors (as he did throughout the house), which Wolf, in turn, stained a color he calls driftwood, a hue inspired by the nearby beach.

Indeed, Wolf turned to the sea to help him solve one of the project's early challenges, which was the palette requested by his clients. Blue and white, to him, had conjured a cottagelike American country informality that was at considerable odds with his own more exacting sensibility. But then the designer spent some time looking at the water, and he observed a range of blues stirred by the tide, shades

that went from moss to blue green to slate, depending on the sun and the clouds and the wind. "I love colors that you can't quite define," Wolf says. "The ocean is full of them. When you bring a similar elusiveness into a room you give it a longer life."

Both the architect and the designer envisioned the combined living room and library as a kind of bifold space, connected and yet subtly differentiated. Formerly a screen porch, the library was added to the living room at the request of the clients, who wanted to be able to host large parties yet weren't interested in creating a single cavernous room. Nagel and Wolf devised a transparent wall consisting of open bookshelves,

continued on page 169



ABOVE: Rick Shaefer's *The Sun Sets On Both*, 1994, is over the sofa in the library. "I conceived of the room not only as a place to house books but also as a warm and inviting space to enjoy the view," Wolf says. The linen rug is from Stark. Manuel Canovas upholstery fabric.

RIGHT: "Before, the master bedroom was rather dark and had an eighteen-inch balcony to nowhere," notes Wolf. A spacious deck added by Nagel, along with large windows, French doors and flowered chintz, now give the room a gardenlike atmosphere. Stark carpet.





continued from page 168

settee to the grouping. The table, which expands for dinner parties, was refinished and painted by Haupt in the belief that "every room needs a piece of painted furniture." The walls are whitewashed, giving the pine a pale, evanescent sheen while maintaining its ruggedness.

A nine-foot-tall freestanding fireplace enclosure divides the living area and the kitchen; the fireplace—well used during the comparatively chilly winter season—is remarkable in that it

"I take pleasure in the composition—and in details that are a direct result of the building process."

is different in architectural tone from everything around it. "Contrast," says Watson, "is very important."

The first floor is private space, taken up by two bedrooms, one on each side of Walstrom's painting studio. A stair in the small entrance vestibule leads to the second floor. There, the covered porch is shared by the living area and another bedroom, which lies below the lookout tower. It's the tower, with its branchlike exterior braces supporting a second low-pitched roof, that establishes the house's town presence and connects it, through panoramic views, to the Gulf of Mexico in the distance.

Watson's scheme employed just four colors. Both inside and out, the trim is painted what he terms "a very, very light creamy-green off-white." The dull olive of the façade is accented by red shutters and window mullions, the red chosen in part because of the owners' interest in the Far East. The base of the house and the door on the street are a deep, rich green, what might be called—and not inappropriately—forest.

"The house sits where the woods begin, and that had a strong influence on its character," Watson remarks. "The site and orientation dictated a certain roughness. But with Roy and Bill, it could only have ended up a *refined* roughness." □

continued from page 150

paired Doric columns and an ample passageway, with the living room half being given a somewhat more formal treatment. Wolf's anchor there was a Craftsman-like nook, which he treated, however, in a most un-Craftsman-like manner. He painted the bookshelves that make up the sides of the alcove a sharp yellow and white and upholstered the back wall in the same difficult-to-define blue fabric that covers the sofa. A mirror hanging in the center of the alcove reflects the see-through wall.

The formality of the living room lies in the nineteenth-century limestone mantelpiece, the dark wicker chairs and the artworks, among them several rather cerebral works on paper by Brice Marden and Sol LeWitt. The looser tone of the library, by contrast, is evident in Wolf's choice of textiles—the living room's leather, for example, becomes wool in the library, still in the same elusive blue—and in the way the furniture encompasses varied cultures and periods. The *mélange* includes an Indian trunk, a Philippine table and a group of blue-and-white Chinese porcelain jars and vases. "This kind of mixture gives personality to a space," Wolf remarks. "It shows that you're not thinking narrowly, in terms of just one idea."

A similar interplay of styles characterizes the television room, which Wolf conceived as a kind of cocoon. There, furniture of his design is matched with a severe contemporary table and the husband's collection of nineteenth-century game boards. The room also doubles as a guest bedroom, since mattresses are built into its sofas.

Formerly "hemmed in and undistinguished," according to Nagel, the dining room was expanded into the backyard and opened up to the landscape with the addition of a generous bay window. Interior French doors replaced the plain pocket doors that used to connect the dining room to the entrance hall; matching French doors also enclose the bar and the linen closet that flank this opening.

"There's a better transition as well as more stateliness now," says the architect, whose bay window allowed Wolf to create two different kinds of seating areas in the dining room: The clients'

large nineteenth-century library table and Windsor chairs constitute the main one, while a more intimate seating area fits neatly into the bay. The designer also came up with an imaginative means to display the wife's collection of Roseville pottery: He arranged it on a high, back-lit shelf that follows the contours of the room, treating it as a kind of three-dimensional frieze.

Of all the directions Wolf received from his clients, the most demanding one came from the wife. "She told me that the downstairs would be my terrain but that the bedrooms upstairs had to be more her thing, which meant pretty, flowery, with lots and lots of chintz." Wolf's famously spare, crisp interiors do not comfortably embrace fripperies and flowers. "I must have looked at a hundred chintzes until I found one I could work with. It had a white background—great. It had urns—fine; that made it more architectural. And it had enough blue in it to allow me to continue with the house's general scheme." One thing Wolf has learned about chintz ("And I *had* worked with it before, believe it or not") is that "if you're going to use it, you have to load it in, so I did." At the same time, though, he inserted other, more somber elements into the space: A hint of deep burgundy upholstery fabric flashes out from beneath a white slipcover; an oversize mirror rests against one wall; and a period mantel links the bedroom to the living room downstairs. "It is indeed a gardeny room," Wolf says, "but still it's no American Beauty rose. There's a European flavor too."

The room's gardenlike quality is due in no small part to the architect, who added a large (twelve feet deep by thirty feet long) deck to the upper level and pierced the exterior wall with generously proportioned windows and French doors. But its European undercurrent, like that of the entire house, very much reflects the collaborative nature of the enterprise. "Bruce and I took the clients' script and directed our own movie, as it were," Wolf observes. "For my part, I tried to keep the interiors within my vocabulary—very clean and with odd twists and juxtapositions—while still meeting their requests. How else could a Russian dacha end up in East Hampton?" □