



MIX IT UP The original dark wood paneling in the living room was restored and painted in a soft grey; the furnishings are a mix of mid-century modern and Scandinavian influences.

# Clean & Simple

A CONTEMPORARY TAKE ON A CLASSIC COUNTRY HOME

BY NANCY CLAUS // PHOTOGRAPHS BY AMANDA KIRKPATRICK



**SUNNY & SERENE** The home's exterior was largely untouched during the renovation. With the addition of a new heating and air-conditioning system, this porch can be enjoyed year-round. The new cathedral ceiling adds drama to the entryway along with lots of natural light. *Below*, Lou Longhitano of RC Torre Construction, architect Rafe Churchill, and interior designer Kathryn Fagin.



PHOTO: DOUGLAS FOULKE



**T**HE CIRCA-1880 HOME had lovely grounds and a stately exterior, but the interior hadn't been updated in decades. Rooms with low ceilings and dark wood paneling were uninviting, the kitchen and baths needed to be gutted, and the layout wasn't conducive to entertaining. The prospective buyers' goal was to seamlessly marry the old and new—to retain the country farmhouse look but with a clean minimalistic sensibility. Before committing to purchasing the house, they asked local contractor Bob Torre to walk through the property and weigh in on its possibilities.

"The hardest part about a project like this is figuring out how to bring the home up to modern standards without losing the authenticity and originality of the home," Torre says. Together with architect Rafe Churchill and interior designer Kathryn Fagin, that mission was accomplished in this stunning Bedford residence, now a sunny and serene retreat.

"New construction typically offers many more design opportunities, but the real challenge is knowing when to tread lightly during a renovation," Churchill says. "And honoring the history of a house has always been our top priority. These clients bought the property as a weekend getaway and were hoping to improve the interior spaces without losing any of the charm. We've found that some clients fall in love with an old house and then want to gut it. We tend to discourage that—it's better to embrace the elements they fell for in the first place. It's the irregularities of an old house that distinguish it from anything else."



**CONTEMPORARY KITCHEN**  
The former kitchen was small with a very low ceiling. Lowering the floor eight inches added much needed headroom and made the kitchen even with the other levels in the house. Bumping the space out seven feet allowed for the center island with a black walnut top.



Because past additions were done at different times—the most recent renovation was nearly 40 years ago—one irregularity to contend with were all the different levels on the main floor. You had to step up or down each time you entered a room. “Plus, the kitchen ceiling was very low,” Churchill recalls, noting his six-foot-five-inch height made this obvious every time he stepped into the room. “It was clear that we needed to lower the floor system to increase the headroom. Bob Torre and his crew were great with this challenge—we increased the ceiling by eight inches—it now feels like we picked up twice that!” In addition to the extra headroom, the kitchen was extended by about seven feet.

“When the client first asked if we could lower the floor, both Rafe and I thought that it would be prohibitively expensive,” Torre says. “But since we had to replace all the heating vents and plumbing anyway, we were able to find a cost-effective way of making the kitchen the same level as the rest of the house. Now, instead of lots of levels, there is just one step up into the living room.”

New windows were added throughout the house, along with oak flooring finished in Woca oil, which gives the floor a subtle matte luster and is easy to maintain and repair. “You can just buff out any imperfection, and then oil and buff it again,” Torre says. “When feasible, existing wood paneling was restored and painted. When not, reclaimed materials, such as old beams, were purchased and used to give rooms the look of being from the late 1800s.”





**OLD MEETS NEW** The original wood beams and paneling in the family room (left) and library (below) were restored; cozy new window seats flank the fireplace. Four windows were added to transform the library into a bright, inviting space. The freestanding tub is part of the redesigned master bath.



The homeowners brought in Boston-based interior decorator Kathryn Fagin early on in the process. "I had worked with these clients before, so I knew that they liked to be very involved with the design process," Fagin says. "For example, the wife saw that we could create a dramatic double height entry by opening up the stair area." This also added much needed light, one of the priorities of the renovation.

One of Fagin's biggest challenges was settling on a defined vision of the style the clients wanted to achieve. "It could be easy to get caught up in a very 'country' feel or a very 'modern' feel," she says, "but getting a balance of the two was where we wanted to end up. The mix also included mid-century modern and Scandinavian minimalist influences."

Fagin enjoyed the collaborative process, working with the owners and the architect on everything from the paint colors, tile selections, and lighting to the furniture and the rugs. "When you work as a team, everyone brings different sources and ideas to the table and together we really brought the entire space to life."

An apt description indeed. This property is still an antique, but a living one designed for the family to enjoy. The homeowners are delighted with their "new" old house. "The most fun part was seeing the final result, followed by being able to use the house as we had envisioned it from the outset. It has also been really enjoyable seeing the overwhelming response of family and friends to the end result!" ■

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203 972 1028 | [info@prutting.com](mailto:info@prutting.com) | STAMFORD, CT