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REJUVENATING GEORGIAN

A NEW ENGLAND HOUSE FRESHENS A HISTORICAL STYLE

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While it is quite usual for new rooms to be added on to existing houses, it is a bit odd for a new house to be added on to an existing room. But that is just the situation an East Coast couple found themselves happily embracing. They had been living in a traditional residence of recent vintage in a bucolic part of New England when they asked interior designer Bunny Williams and the New York City architectural firm of Ferguson Murray & Shamamian to design a library addition. The library, a classically detailed pavilion, was an enormous success: With its pine-paneled interior and comfortable furniture, it soon became a sought-after retreat. The room's bowed façade, tall windows and French doors easily made it the strongest architectural feature of the exterior. Perhaps too strong—the rest of the house paled in comparison.

As a result, the library became the architectural inspiration for an entirely new house. "We wanted to keep the library because of its scale and the quality of the detailing," says architect Mark Ferguson, "so we let the new house grow around it." The husband, who collects antique architectural drawings, encouraged Ferga-

OPPOSITE ABOVE: "It looks like a country house you would have found in the eighteenth century," says Bunny Williams of a Georgian-style residence in New England that she designed with the architectural firm of Ferguson Murray & Shamamian. OPPOSITE: A circular staircase defines one end of the entrance hall. Kentshire Galleries table; Newel Art Galleries hall lantern; Brunschwig & Fils drapery fabric; Scalamandré wallcovering.

LEFT: "While there's mostly English furniture in the living room," says Williams, "there's also a comfortable sofa, end tables and good lighting—things you wouldn't find in a Georgian room." Scallop sconce from Newel Art Galleries; Brunschwig & Fils ottoman fabric.

"The goal was not to reproduce a particular style but to create something more integrated."

BELOW: For the dining room, Williams (left) created a wall painting based on an antique chinoiserie panel she found in Paris. "Since the panel was only four feet, we had to make up the rest of the design." Irish mahogany dining table from Kentshire Galleries; Regency serving table from Sotheby's; Italian wall light is from Reymer-Jourdan Antiques.

OPPOSITE: The Georgian style of the residence was inspired by the pine-paneled library, an addition the architects had made to the previous house on the site, the rest of which was torn down. Red paisley on bergère from Randolph & Hein; drapery fabric from Cowtan & Tout; rust cushion fabric from Schumacher; Clarence House floral print.

son to do research to come up with an appropriate design. "I was getting more and more interested in Georgian architecture," he says. The style, which became prevalent in Virginia in the early eighteenth century, when George I of England ruled the colonies, is generally characterized by rectangular brick exteriors, slate hipped roofs, central doors and pediments, white wood trim and symmetrical chimneys.

"The house has a strong Georgian influence," says Ferguson Murray & Shamamian's Don Rattner, who acted as the project architect, "but we did make an attempt to synthesize other traditions. The goal was not to reproduce a particular style but to create something more integrated." And indeed, certain features—the extensive use of stone, the widow's walk, the cupola and the double-height frontispiece—recall the house's late-seventeenth-century English ancestors.

The dramatic two-story circular staircase in the entrance hall was "inspired by Shirley Plantation," Rattner notes, referring to the Colonial Virginia landmark. "Because it's in the country, we didn't want the space to look overly formal," says Williams. "So we did several things to keep it from being too slick." Among them were plastering and painting the walls to mimic stone but with a warmer, softer texture and painting the floor's wide planks with a marble pattern. The wood emits a sheen slightly softer than the real thing.

Off the entrance hall is the living room, with its views of rolling hills and gardens and its French doors that lead to low stone-walled terraces. Although it stretches horizontally along the garden façade, it offers more intimacy than its dimensions would indicate, largely owing to the coffered ceiling, which is painted with Neoclassical motifs. Both the ceiling and the paneled chimneypiece were de-

With its green paneling, brick fireplace and antique chestnut floors, the kitchen resembles a restaurant in Provence or Tuscany.

signed as part of a scheme to "knit all the architectural elements together three-dimensionally," says Ferguson. The gray-green paint was rubbed into the grain to mute the tint, which makes the paneling appear older. "The architecture of the paneling and wainscoting is Georgian, and there's some Georgian furniture, but it's not a period room," says Williams. "I wanted to soften it a little, make it accessible to the twentieth century." To that end, she chose floral-print easy chairs and plump sofas and mixed them with French bergères, a Chinese Chippendale mahogany table and Napoleon III chinoiserie vases. "We use the house quite a bit for casual entertaining," the husband says, "including the living room."

An antique chinoiserie panel triggered the design of the dining room, whose walls are covered with a garden scene that was painted by hand on canvas and mounted on the walls. "I found the painted panel in Paris," Bunny Williams explains, "and we just expanded on that." A dozen Louis XVI–style chairs with needlepoint-covered seats, along with an antique Italian crystal-and-gilt chandelier, heighten the graciousness of the room, as do the swagged plaid draperies framing the French doors and windows.

Yet natural motifs still predominate. "The husband is an avid gardener," says Williams, who created a dado of a light lattice of wood. "The lattice carries the connotation of the outdoors," Rattner points out, "and it forms a transition to the more fully rustic screen porch."

The screen porch, which is adjacent to the dining room, occupies its own pavilion-like space. Its outdoorsy quality is underscored by the brick herringbone floor, the sisal rug and the liberal use of "real porch furniture," as Williams describes the sturdy mix of rattan, wicker and cane pieces. "We use the porch a lot in warm weather," the husband says. "It can get buggy up here."

On the opposite end of the living room, also facing the gardens, is the library. While the basic space has not changed, the library did undergo some "upgrading," as the husband puts it. "The room used to have simple crown moldings," he says. "We replaced them with more elaborate moldings by copying the motif around the antique fireplace." In addition, the knotty-pine paneling was scraped, then hand-waxed, to make it lighter; to add a casual tone, Williams installed a striped carpet of handwoven linen and hemp.

Since the couple like to spend time in the kitchen, the designer and the architects wanted one that didn't look institutional. In fact, with its green-painted paneling, raised brick fireplace, antique chestnut floors and oak trestle table with upholstered eighteenth-century chairs, it resembles more closely a restaurant in Provence or Tuscany. The ceiling is painted with Tudor-style beams and floral motifs in a manner similar to grottoes in Italian villas. "Although the kitchen is on the main floor," says Ferguson, "the vaulting was meant to evoke a kitch-

A trompe l'oeil Tudor-style ceiling with garden motifs animates the kitchen. Williams had the Georgian-style woodwork painted the color of an antique cabinet in the owners' collection. The oak dining table is Irish. David Duncan Antiques tole wall lanterns; iron chandelier from John Rosselli International.

A mix of French and English Georgian period details—toile de Jouy–upholstered walls, an English window bench and a French ladderback chair—prevail in a guest bedroom. John Rosselli International chair and valance; Osborne & Little drapery fabric and wallcovering; Cowtan & Tout chair fabric; Patterson, Flynn, Martin & Manges rug.

en located on a lower floor, as they often were in older houses."

A guest bedroom combines a country French wallcovering with American quilts as well as a four-poster bed and Chippendale armchairs. "Bunny takes conflicting patterns and colors and makes them work," the husband observes. "Yet the furnishings allow us to add to them all the time," says the wife, "without destroying the overall look."

Just as the library triggered the design of the new house, the house is having the same effect on the grounds. The husband is installing greenhouses on the property and is planning a "Giverny-style" garden. He points with pride to the woodland garden on the hillside and to

the perennial garden, the formal rose garden, the cutting garden and the vegetable garden.

Overlooking this panorama is a two-story semicircular balcony that projects from the back of the house. Most of it is paneled in wood and painted white. "The husband wanted a brick-and-stone house, but he also preferred large windows on the garden side," says Ferguson. "We had to struggle with a mass-void relationship, and that's why we decided to use wood, since it's lighter." This rear façade at the crest of the hill is as intimately detailed as it is commanding. "We all wanted to create an architecture that was grounded," Ferguson says, "something that would not lose its aesthetic value with time." □

TOP: The screen porch is used primarily in summer. The fern-pattern fabric is from Old World Weavers; Clarence House stripe. ABOVE: The architects chose wood instead of stone for the rear façade. "Since it contains the large doors and windows, we wanted it to appear lighter than the front," explains Mark Ferguson. The original library is at left.