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DESIGN TO INSPIRE

HOUSE & GARDEN

CLASSIC AMERICAN DECORATING

+42 PAGES OF GARDEN IDEAS

designer savvy

A mural by Daniel Mulligan in the informal dining room, opposite page, and a sunny orangery, this page, give the house a sense of history.

trade secrets

FURNITURE The George III breakfast room table and the Regency shield-back side chairs are both mahogany. In the orangery, a Nantucket sofa, club chair, and ottoman are from Walter's Wicker. FABRICS Dining chairs are Royal Suede in Tomato from Edelman Leather, NYC. Leaf Green Chiltern by Cowtan & Tout covers the cushions on the wicker furniture. The throw pillows are Nesfield Figured Woven from Brunschwig & Fils. CHANDELIER Mid-20th century, from Objects Plus, Inc., NYC.

built a terrace behind the new wing for outdoor relaxing and dining. The previous owners had lunched by the swimming pool, situated on a lower terrace, but without servants going to and from the kitchen, the terrace had become an inconvenient place to share a meal.

Decorating was a formidable task. "When we moved in, what we had looked like doll furniture, it was so out of scale," the wife recalls. Nevertheless, the couple didn't want to rush the job. "Bunny Williams is used to coming in and decorating houses from top to bottom, so she must have found us a little aggravating, because we wanted to find many of the pieces ourselves," she continues. "For us, that was the pleasure of the process: remembering we had bought a table on a cold, rainy day in Paris—that kind of thing." The husband did discover that he and Williams shared a passion for porcelain, especially Sèvres and Meissenware, something his wife finds mystifying. "When I look at those things," she confesses, "I just think of them collecting dust."

Williams's primary focus was on establishing the structure and background for the various rooms, starting with the rugs, and then

the curtains and walls. "Once you have the plan right and the seating, the puzzle is solved," she says. "The background can stay the same for a very long time, while the furniture changes as you collect different pieces. That's what gives the house its life. This is still a work in progress."

The owners were eager to put their own stamp on the place, while preserving the spirit of its past and remaining mindful of the traditions of its previous mistress. One of the guest rooms featured a mural by a longtime friend of the original owners'. It was preserved not just because it is lovely but because it gives the room a sense of history.

Such generosity of spirit impressed Williams. "It's wonderful when people buy a house, a good house, beautifully lived in, and respect that," she says. "There's a sense of keeping the legacy." Just another element, it seems, in what makes this house so rare. □

Marisa Bartolucci is the author of Gaetano Pesce, *published by Chronicle Books.*

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Williams has rung different variations on the floral theme in every room.

trade secrets

FURNITURE In the master bedroom, opposite page, a Louis XV–style commode serves as a bedside table next to the vase top Julia Gray bed. In the powder room, this page, a 19th-century Swedish mirror from H. M. Luther, NYC, and a pair of 19th-century gilt-bronze sconces from Nesle, NYC, hang above a late-17th-century console used as a vanity.
FABRICS The head- and footboards, bed curtains, and chair are by Brunschwig & Fils. The bedspread is Dilly Stripe by Scalamandré. The walls in the powder room are covered in Le Pecheur from Travers.
Sources, see back of book.

"It's wonderful when people buy a good house and respect that"
—Bunny Williams

florabundance

Bunny Williams revives a stately country house with a distinguished past

The owners were eager to put their stamp on the house, while preserving its past. In the blue guest bedroom the walls were painted by Richard Neas for the original owners. The bergère is covered in Floral Calendar by Bailey & Griffin.

WRITTEN BY MARISA BARTOLUCCI PHOTOGRAPHED BY SIMON WATSON PRODUCED BY CYNTHIA FRANK

IMPOSING AS IT IS, this is a much beloved house. It always has been. Not long after it was built, in 1910, fire consumed it. But calamity did not deter its owners, who loved it enough to set about building it all over again. Spectacularly sited atop a ridge, this Georgian-style brick manor possesses uninterrupted vistas of meadows, woods, and lake. It's the kind of setting one expects to find in the distant countryside, not a mere hour from Manhattan. The house is unusual as well: its architecture may be traditional, but the way its rooms flow out toward the garden is remarkably modern. A row of towering French windows opens the living room to the loggia and the formal gardens and fountain beyond; the pine-paneled library frames a window bay with a view of rolling hill and dale.

In the 1960s, the house was acquired by a socially eminent family. Decorated by, among others, the fabled Sister Parish, it was host to numerous galas and served as a home away from home for many

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The architecture of the Georgian-style brick manor is traditional, but the way the rooms flow toward the garden, left, is remarkably modern. New York garden designer Madison Cox brought the original gardens back to life.

trade secrets

FURNITURE In the stately living room, opposite page, an 18th-century pier mirror hangs over the fireplace, which is flanked by a pair of Sheraton painted and gilt-wood demilune consoles; 18th-century French gilt-wood stools sit between the custom sofa and club chairs. FABRICS Clarence House fabrics on the sofa and chairs. Jaune from Pierre Frey on the stools. RUG An antique Bessarabian. PAINTINGS *Jules Standing with His Mother*, by Mary Cassatt, hangs to the left of the mantel, and *Anémones en Pot*, by Claude Monet, is on the right.

designer savvy

The owners were able to incorporate their French and English antiques into Williams's design.

trade secrets

FURNITURE A 19th-century French octagonal table is nestled between the club chairs, with an 18th-century English pedestal table next to the couch. The ebonized Steinway piano is ca. 1930.
LAMPS The etched glass and brass lamps behind the sofa are from John Rosselli, NYC.
CURTAINS Ombre Silk by Old World Weavers.

titled guests. One of the family's many residences, the house was not much used after the patriarch passed away. So, some seven years ago, the elderly matriarch decided to give the house up. But she remained possessive to the end, making her approval of the buyer a proviso of the sale.

The new owners, a married couple, were smitten by the place, and a little awed by its provenance, but they knew at once there would be changes ahead. Down-to-earth people—as a girl, the wife had spent school holidays in the Australian outback, herding sheep on horseback—they didn't want a house with a platoon of live-in servants. "We wanted a home," the wife stresses, "where we could raise our two young daughters."

"It had to be made functional for today," assents New York interior designer Bunny Williams, who was called upon to help with the decorating. "It's a wonderful house," she says, "but it was built in a different era." Williams turned out to be the perfect choice to direct this domestic evolution. Although the couple did not know it when they hired her, she had worked on various projects at the house years earlier when she was an assistant to Sister Parish.

Making the place functional meant turning the servants' quarters into a floor of bedrooms, guest rooms, and study areas for the girls,

transforming the old hairdressing room and two other rooms into a state-of-the-art media center, and remaking the cook's kitchen and staff dining room into a convivial family kitchen and gathering space. It also meant building another wing, nearly half the size of the house's original footprint. The casual needs of this young family couldn't be served by the house's stately living room, so a more relaxed family room was added—granted, one capacious enough to accommodate the Kennedy clan—as was a more low-key "family entry" (adorned with black walnut paneling that was harvested from the estate), a domed skylight, and a welcoming hearth.

SINCE WINTERS can be long and bleak in this locale, an orangery inspired by the one at Dumbarton Oaks was constructed and filled with an exceptional trio of mature lemon trees. "Incredible specimens—they're the kind of thing one sees in villas in Italy but seldom here," says New York garden designer Madison Cox, who worked to restore the estate's gardens to their original glory.

When constructing the new wing, New York architect George W. Sweeney stayed as true as he could to the original house's period details and materials, carefully matching the brick, using plaster for the walls, and embellishing the family room with plaster tracery ceilings and the orangery with plaster moldings and pilasters. He also

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Williams's aim was to establish a structure and background for each room. In the dining room, above, she started with the rugs and then moved to the curtains and walls.

trade secrets

FURNITURE An Irish Regency dining table is set with Murano glassware, Meissen porcelain, and vintage Tiffany silver. The chairs are 19th-century Regency style. CURTAINS Clarissa by Colefax and Fowler, through Cowtan & Tout, with wood and crystal bead trim from Tassels & Trim, NYC. The pelmet is a Boussac Fadini fabric.

"When we moved in, what we had looked like doll furniture, it was so out of scale"