APRIL 2003

House Beautiful

WEEKEND LIVING

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This view: The kitchen's hutch is a 19th-century bakery étagère from the Dordogne; it holds the clients' collection of earthenware, linens, and majolica. Far right: The café stools, a subtle counterpart to the reticulated blue lanterns, are from T&K French Antiques.

tous mix, Williams started from scratch, except for the clients' wonderful collection of paintings. She looked for English, French, and American antiques that were, she says, "elegantly country—not formal, but not too rustic. I love a house to look as if it has evolved over time. I like furniture to have character, to provoke interest—through beautiful woods or lacquer finishes or painted ornament. I'm particularly drawn to pieces that have a patina, and I wanted mellow pieces for this mellow house."

There's always one factor, says Williams, that gets her started in each room. In the entrance hall, it was the decision to leave the walls neutral and to stencil the floor. To expand the space, she filled a neat architectural niche with a substantial carved and mirrored William IV console and hung an Irish mourning mirror above it. The living room's bright, art-enhanced decor emerged from the floor up: Williams had a Bessarabian rug copied to fit the space's dimensions and looked to it for cues to color (splashes of orange offset with neutrals ranging from cream to taupe to soft gray) and pattern (filigrees, leaves, and arabesques).

The first time the designer saw the house, she knew she "would paint the dining room walls in grisaille. It's an interior room with no windows, and I knew that the grays and whites wouldn't be too dark—or too much." The dining table, a hefty

Edwardian number with a massive, eccentric rootlike base, works as well at mealtime as it does for Scrabble, card games, or jigsaw puzzles. Like much of the house, the kitchen is light-filled and topped by a ceiling with exposed beams. One long wall backs a massive country hutch, which stores linens and dishes and displays the clients' colorful collection of majolica. The expansive space opens onto a screened porch (glassed in during the winter) that doubles as a breakfast room or casual dining area. The tile floors are warmed by radiant heat, and there is a fieldstone fireplace.

Both the master bedroom and main guest bedroom suites are downstairs, off a corridor to the left of the foyer. Each has an attached sitting room framed by walls of windows that seem to stretch all the way to the water. The guest bedroom features a bed with an upholstered headboard ("It looks like a chair back," says Williams) and a palette of soft peaches, roses, and creams; white walls and white shutters frame the sitting room's mid-19th-century English writing table, red leather desk chair from the 1920s, and Moroccan rug in deep blue and red. The master bedroom includes a black bed with a tester. "I had it copied," notes the designer, "because it's very hard to find big beds. At the foot of it is a bench with painted bells. I found it in L.A. and just knew it would work.

"We always have a plan with our projects," adds Williams, "and we try to stick with it. But then you find things that you fall in love with. These clients get as excited as we do, so they're always receptive to that approach. When your clients get excited, it means that the house will have personality, and will feel spontaneous. The goal is to create a house that continues to reveal more the longer you live in it." ●

This view: The bench in a guest room is upholstered in Cowtan & Tout's Lucienne Weave in persimmon. For left: The tester bed in the master suite was custom made by C. Robert Huggins and painted and gilded by Paul Boyko; the headboard and tester are upholstered in Brunschwig & Fils' Betsy taffeta. The 19th-century French bench is upholstered in an antique French textile. For more details, see Resources.

SOUND INVESTMENT

A couple ask designer Bunny Williams to decorate their sprawling family retreat on suburban Connecticut's rocky coast

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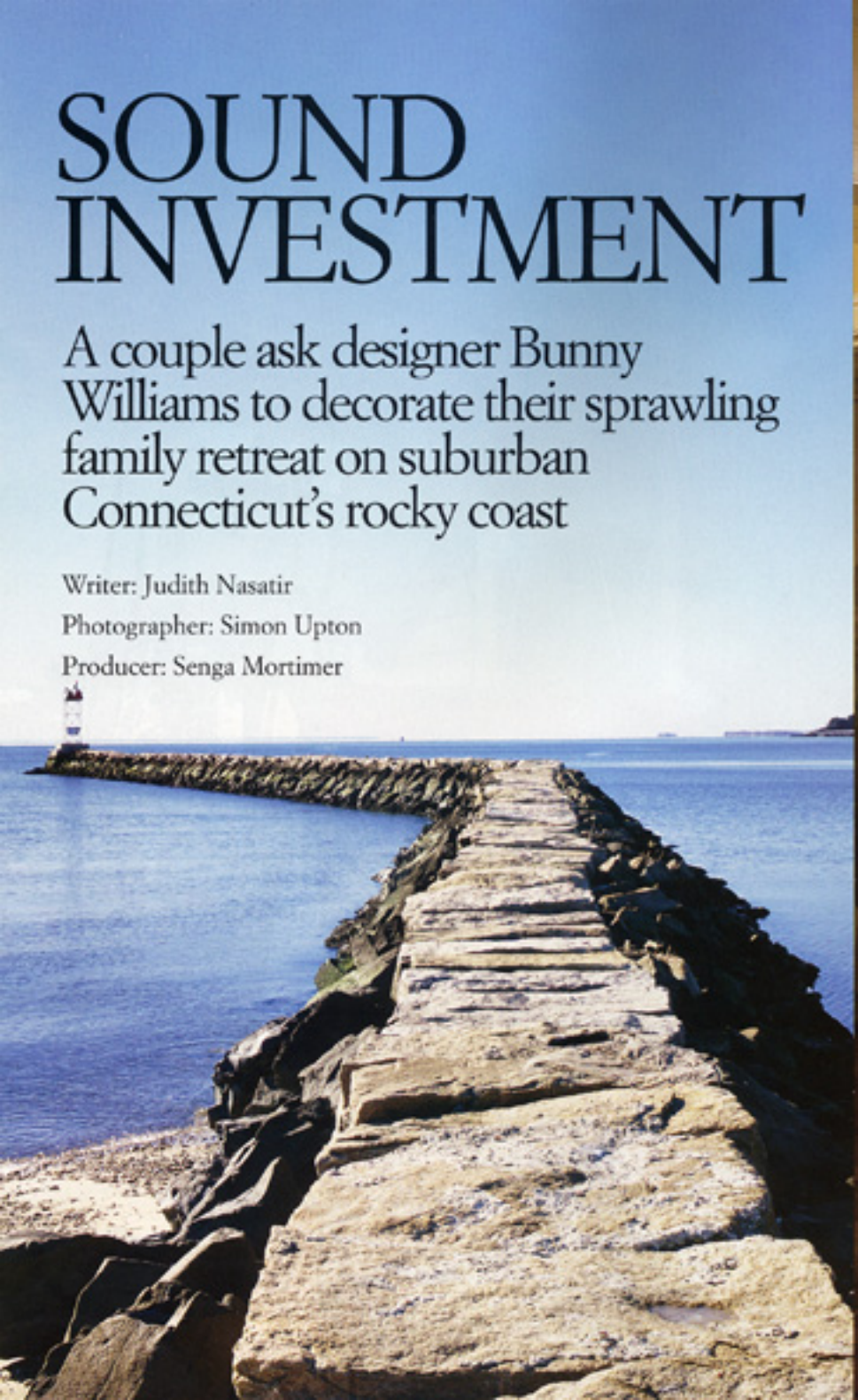

This view: In the entrance hall, an Irish mourning mirror hangs above a carved and mirrored William IV marble-topped console; both are from John Rosselli. The floors were stenciled by Chris Pearson. Far left: A jetty extends from the edge of the property into Long Island Sound.

PICTURES MAY BE WORTH THOUSANDS OF WORDS, BUT THEY never tell the whole story. Take the photographs of this 8,600-square-foot (more or less) weekend retreat on the water: the complex looks like a classic Cape Cod–style compound, with the clearly dropped hint of Hyannisport, the veneer of the Vineyard, and the grace note of Nantucket (sans cedar shakes, widow's walk, and captain's chair). But abundant references notwithstanding, this is suburban Connecticut, on Long Island Sound—not Massachusetts's far-flung Atlantic shore. The compilation of gabled and cupolaed Colonial-style structures, designed by the Santa Monica, California, architectural firm of Thomas Callaway Associates, is as good as brand new. As for the blithe and breezy interiors, New York–based decorator Bunny Williams and her design assistant, Nancy Boxhardt, are to be credited with creating the house's casual, collected-over-generations comfort.

This view: In the sitting area of the master suite, generous windows and French doors allow untrammeled views of the water. The sofa is upholstered in Rogers & Goffigon's Puissance; the curtains are made from Kathryn Ireland's Ikat Check hemp linen. The circa-1900 walnut cocktail table is Italian. For left: The elaborately detailed compound was formerly a clump of modern outbuildings.

The antiques are "not too rustic. I like

Both views: Designer Bunny Williams asked decorative painter Patrice Yourdon to paint grisaille murals on the dining room walls. The Charles X mahogany dining table dates from around 1830; the chairs are upholstered in Rogers & Goffigon's 18-oz. linen in stone. The 18th-century marble-topped console is Swedish. A 19th-century Italian bed crown from Amy Perlin Antiques was fashioned into a chandelier.

furniture to have character, to provoke interest"

This ode to a timeless architectural vernacular consists of a 4,600-square-foot main residence; a 3,000-square-foot barn with an indoor swimming pool, a playroom, and a basement gym; and a 1,000-square-foot carriage house—not including garage space. But the characterful multiple gables were actually predated by mid-20th-century modern angles. Before Callaway's handiwork, the estate was made up of an odd lot of undistinguished streamlined boxes clustered around a 1960s ranch house. Given the natural poetry of the site, the decision to go Cape Cod was a no-brainer. "This wasn't a teardown," says Callaway. "The zoning almost required that we stick to the footprints of the existing structures. We did a complete gut, and a roof raising to redefine the style of the gables, cupolas, and fenestrations. And we opened up the rear of the house to the water." To make the new place feel both old and authentic, Callaway rebuilt everything from the pegged floors to the beamed ceilings, using vintage American timber he imported from sources in Connecticut, Maine, and New Hampshire.

In pursuit of that same sense of rightness for the interiors, Williams turned to the traditional—her decorating forte. Especially in the four-bedroom main house, the clients "wanted a family place with a welcoming spirit," says the designer, "because their children and grandchildren often come and visit. It's a relaxed house, not overly formal, meant for weekends and holidays." Known for apt combinations and a felici-

This view: A pair of 19th-century French Directoire pedestals flanks a fieldstone fireplace on the screened porch. Chairs from Walters Wicker surround the folk-art table; the Chinese wicker chaise, which dates from 1885, is covered in a sea-green Sunbrella linen. Far left: The sitting area of a guest bedroom is furnished with a late-18th-century Neapolitan *bureau-plat* and a Moroccan rug.