

Lots of white expands the living room. The house's exterior was clad in a combination of white-painted siding (in rear, shown) and natural cedar shingles, in front.

a little place on the island this wallflower in the hamptons got a glamorous makeover without razing the roof.

Steve and Nancy Fabrikant's summer house in Westhampton, Long Island, started out as a soul-dampening structure too banal to qualify even as an ugly duckling. Built in 1974, it was standard-issue, mass-produced suburban ennui, from its plaster-board walls and sliding-glass doors to its unadorned brick fireplace and wall-to-wall carpet.

The Fabrikants had already renovated an older cottage on a small lot directly behind the shoddy ranch house. Just before their daughter was born, they decided, with some trepidation, to buy the bigger place and use their cottage for guests.

"When we bought the front house, we didn't even want to go inside," say the Fabrikants.

The couple, who own and operate a women's fashion company, called in designer Benjamin Noriega-Ortiz, who had just finished helping them remodel their apartment on Manhattan's East Side.

The Westhampton house, innocent of character or charm, presented a greater challenge. All agreed its interior had to appear larger and brighter. Slapdash construction had to look more substantial, and dull, boxy rooms had to be jolted out of their torpor.

The relatively inexpensive solution shown here represents a true collaboration between client and designer. Steve Fabrikant, a habitual collector who trained as an architect, supplied plenty of brio and a fashion designer's willingness to court inspiration by

going a little too far. Noriega-Ortiz guided, edited and kept the rooms looking unified but never commonplace. He and the Fabrikants settled on a highly textured but muted, monochromatic scheme that accomplishes something far more important than just beautifying the house. It also gives it a soul.

Produced by Newell Turner. Photos by Peter Margonelli. Written by Michael Cunningham.



The kitchen was altered with little reconstruction: New limestone counters and beadboard provide warmth and texture; a canvas curtain can be drawn to separate the kitchen from the dining area.

The Fabrikants saved money by resurfacing instead of rebuilding. Outside, they covered the original plywood walls with natural cedar shingles on the front and white clapboard at the rear of the building, a whimsical take on an old Shaker custom of using better-quality materials for the front of a house. They added a portico over the entry, and capped the roof with a copper-topped tower that functions as a light well in the foyer.

Inside, they pulled up the carpeting and installed oak floors, intentionally using second-quality boards for their variety of grain and color. They covered the wallboard with a mixture of beadboard and wider tongue-and-groove paneling throughout the house. The different facings not only add texture, they make the flimsy walls look thicker and more solid.

The Fabrikants economized on doors, covering the existing hollow-core versions with the same beadboard paneling they used on the walls. Then they splurged on hardware, embellishing the doors with a trove of antique porcelain knobs found at a salvage shop.

"Using good-quality hardware is very important," says Noriega-Ortiz. "I think of it as jewelry."

The designer feels just as strongly about using a light, monochromatic color scheme to make cramped rooms feel larger. He stained the floors and painted all walls and ceilings in Benjamin Moore #869, a color he describes as "a very clean blue white."

Furnishings tend to be simple, with nearly all upholstered pieces done in white. New pieces are freely mixed with slightly battered treasures from

antiques shops. While the blanded color scheme is strictly maintained, the ebullient eclecticism keeps the result from looking too formal or self-serious.

"I like a lived-in, slightly haphazard look," says Steve Fabrikant. "I think television sets look great—why not expose them? Pictures sometimes look more interesting just leaning against the wall than they would if they were hung."

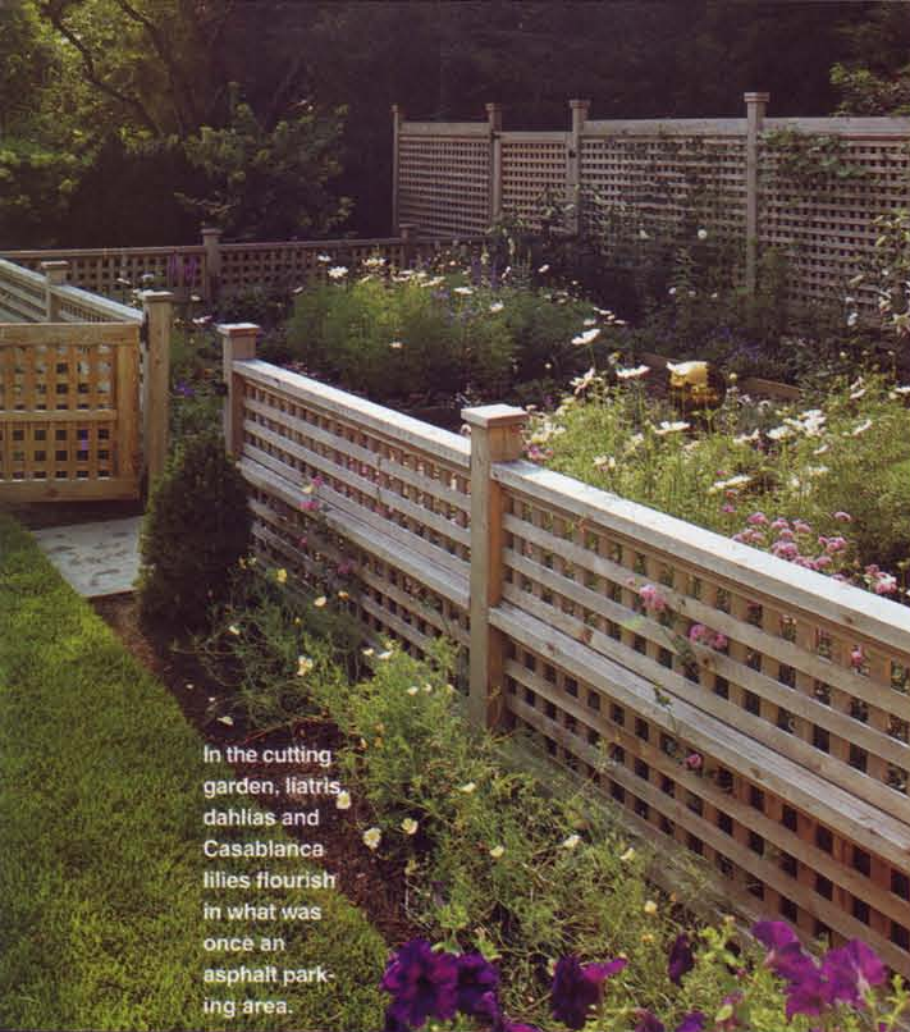


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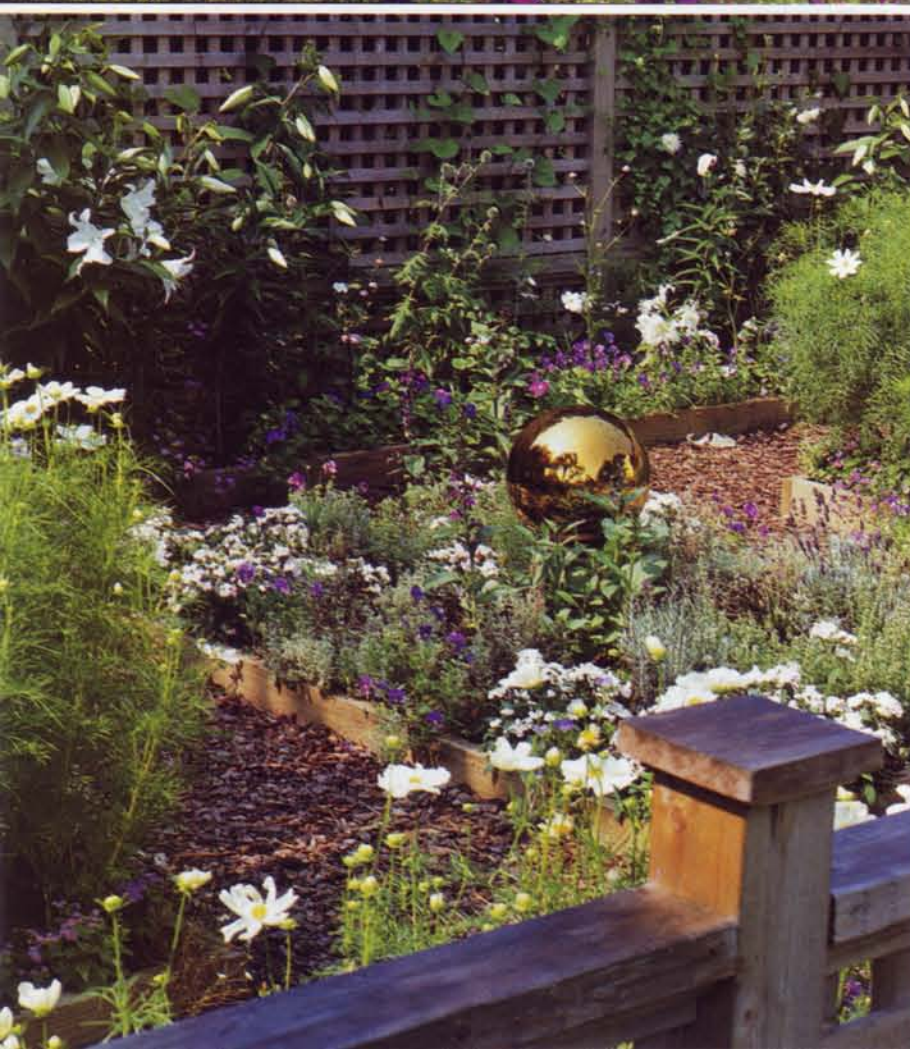


In the bedroom, silk organza is simply doubled over a rod. The old farmhouse table had to be lowered, but its partially charred leg was preserved.





In the cutting garden, liatris, dahlias and Casablanca lilies flourish in what was once an asphalt parking area.



Outside as well as in, the Fabrikant house has been made to feel like *architecture*. It's an important, maybe even quietly revolutionary, example for an era in which 100-year-old wrecks, enhanced by history and crumbling moldings, often cost more than new houses. These jerrybuilt suburban boxes of the '60s are the fixer-uppers of the '90s: They're often well within the price range of people who couldn't possibly afford an endearingly derelict Victorian.

As the Fabrikants and Noriega-Ortiz have shown, the transformation can be effected with an attitude of restrained extravagance. Vast sums are not required. *For Resources, see last pages.*

WHAT THE PROS KNOW ABOUT WINDOW TREATMENTS

Benjamin Noriega-Ortiz believes in curtains, especially when confronted with small, undistinguished rooms. "The flow of fabric softens the edges," he says. He suggests using curtains as room dividers and in place of closet doors. "In small spaces," he

explains, "every time you swing a door open, you use up room." Curtains are also inexpensive. "You can buy canvas for less than \$10 a yard," he says. "It's easy to sew, it looks beautiful, and you can wash it when it gets dirty." He has used costly fabrics like silk at a client's request, but he prefers cheaper, less delicate material. "Silk defeats the purpose," he says. "You can't just wash it when it gets dirty." Simple cotton canvas is his favorite, although he used parachute nylon in his own beach house because it resists mildew. In curtains' more traditional role as window coverings, he counsels minimalism. One of his simplest, most elegant solutions is to take a length of sheer fabric, trim the edges with silk cord for weight, then double it over a rod and tie the inside half in a knot.

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Jaunty details like a leopard-pattern lampshade enliven the space. In the den, an antique mirror reflects the view through living-room windows.



A sliding door opens the small bathroom directly into the master suite. Drapery is silk organza folded over a rod, with one panel knotted below the sill.

