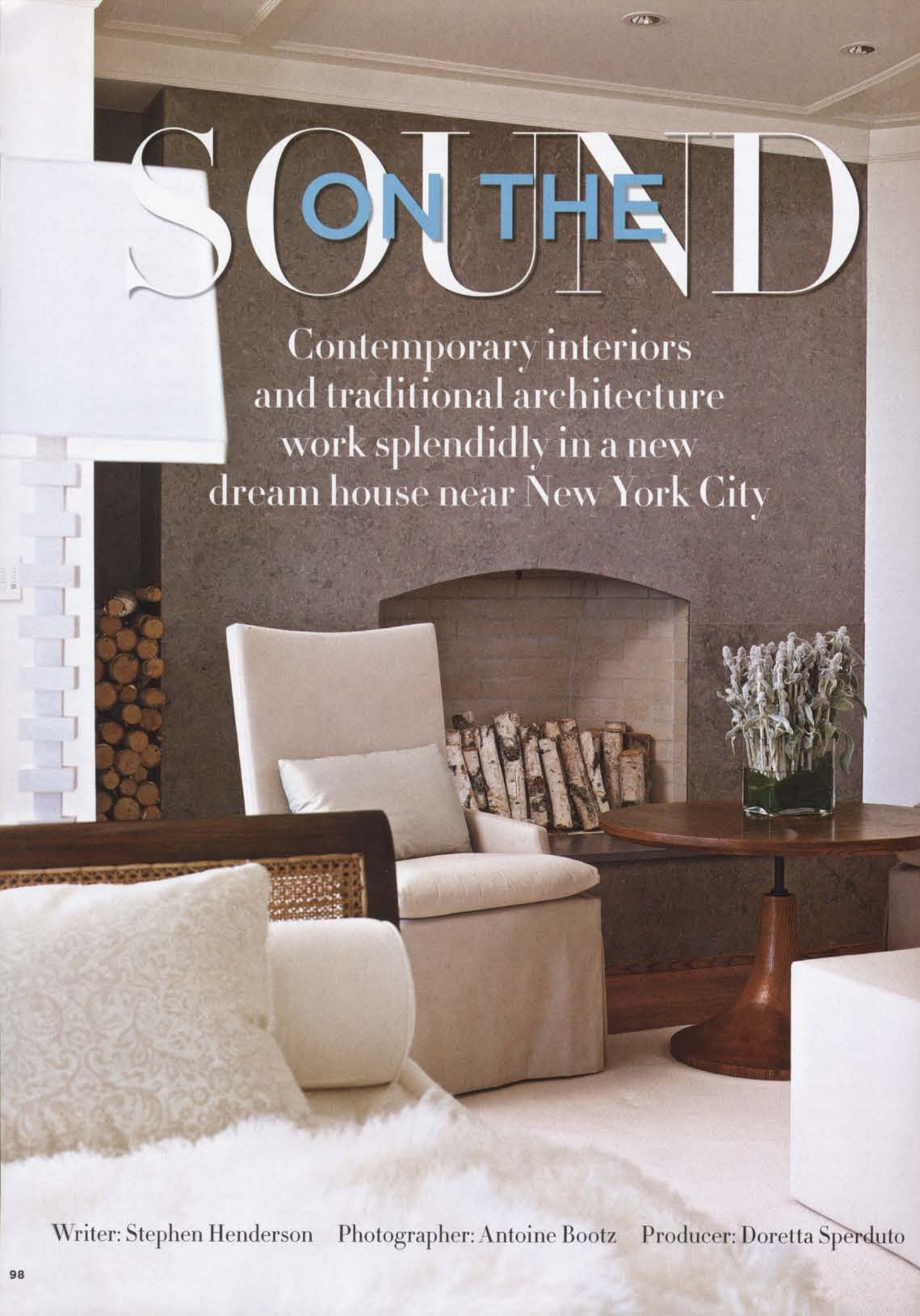


SOUTHERN

Contemporary interiors
and traditional architecture
work splendidly in a new
dream house near New York City



Writer: Stephen Henderson Photographer: Antoine Bootz Producer: Doretta Spurduto



This page: In the music room, Roman shades are made of Henry Calvin fabric, Gauze Natural #1207. Cassina two-seater sofa and Holly Hunt club chairs are covered in Cortina leather. Opposite: The living room fireplace is faced with limestone. The chair is a custom design by Benjamin Noriega-Ortiz, and the table is a custom design from Christophe Pournay.

The octagonally shaped living room is decorated in various shades of cream and brown. The Ladybird Daybed is from British Khaki, upholstered in Savel Paddington fabric. A pair of curly-backed chairs are from Manzanaras. Coffee table is a Noriega-Ortiz custom design. The room is oriented by a quartet of Stephen McKay Blockwood floor lamps and four Huron Martini tables from Koch Smith. Circular white rug is by Philippe Starck.



The ever-changing light from outside plays on subtle shades, altering them by the hour

WHILE THERE ARE many ways to build a dream house, undoubtedly one of the most stressful involves a teardown. This is real estate parlance for love-the-lot, hate-the-hovel, and it's not a transaction for the faint of heart.

Or so a married couple with two young children discovered when they first spotted a one-acre site in Mamaroneck, New York, a town hugging the Long Island Sound's northern shoreline. Set on a promontory, the wide lawn ended at a

curving sea wall. Clearly, this was Paradise Found, especially since it was only a half-hour commute into Manhattan, where the husband works as a private equity investor. There was only one problem: the house.

"It was pretty ugly, a 1950s one-story," recalls architect Robert Keller. "When they asked me about renovating, I explained we could create another piece of architecture. But we couldn't reorient the building or take full advantage of the location unless we started from scratch."

After much agonizing, the couple decided to level the existing house.

"We'd never done any kind of building project, not even remodeled a kitchen or a bath!" exclaimed the wife, a former attorney and now full-time mom. "Luckily, we didn't know enough to be scared."

"We spent a lot of time thinking about what we wanted," the husband says. "We certainly didn't design the house, but we gave very clear specifications for the way we live."

What evolved resembles the kind of traditional shingled cottage that is prevalent in Mamaroneck, but with a decidedly contemporary interior. Since they like to enter-

This page: An entrance foyer opens into music, living, and dining rooms. The two-tiered console table is from Room, while the table and vase behind the living room sofa are Korean antiques. The walls are painted with Benjamin Moore #HC117, Hancock Green. Floors throughout are stained light walnut. Opposite: The shingle-style house faces south across the Long Island Sound.



tain, and family or friends often visit, the couple envisioned a house with two zones, a public and private side, each having a separate entrance. They also wanted a playroom for their son and daughter at the center of the house.

"Anywhere they are in the house, the parents have a connection to their children," says Marla Pasareno, who works with Benjamin Noriega-Ortiz, the project's interior decorator. "This is something you never get in old construction, and was even hard to do in new construction this size."

At nearly 10,000 square feet, the house (with six bedrooms, seven baths, and a three-car garage) is big. Yet it presents a deceptively modest facade because it's designed around a curving series of octagons, with only the apex turned to the street. "I often use geometric shapes as a way of breaking down the scale of a massive building," Keller explains.

Angled walls in the main foyer open into living, dining, and music rooms, with water visible in all directions. A spiraling stair ascends to the master bedroom suite, and a wide hall leads to the ground-floor kitchen and play-

room, family room, as well as to the children's bedrooms upstairs in the house's private wing.

The house's footprint was shifted to one side of the property so when driving toward it, the view straight ahead is of the Long Island Sound, not a garage door. "It's almost Pavlovian," laughs the wife. "When I see the water, I know I'm home."

Construction was well under way before decorator Noriega-Ortiz entered the picture. While he admired the house's overall sensibility, he felt some of its angles needed to be softened. In the master bedroom, for instance, he devised a circular rod holding sheer curtains to smooth out the room's shape, and in the adjoining bath, a concave wall of sea-glass tile nestles the tub.

Originally, too, the interior was to have an Arts & Crafts feel, with ceiling lattice, windows, doors, and balustrades stained a dark color. "I thought this would make the house too agitated and intense," said Noriega-Ortiz, who painted all this woodwork cream. Flooring throughout, however, is a light walnut to ground the decor's ethereal color palette.



This page, below left: The dining room walls are painted with Benjamin Moore, #2122-50 Iceberg, and the candlesticks are by Ted Muehling. Below right: Curtains are Moons Europa fabric from Tapestry. Bottom: Kitchen Twist barstools are from Knoll. Opposite: Family room walls are painted with Benjamin Moore #2068-70 White Heaven. George Smith sofa and chair are slipcovered with natural linen from Savel. City Studio floor lamps are from Pranich & Associates.



At first glance, much of the house appears beige. Yet on closer inspection there's actually a pale, pale rainbow of pastel colors—such as the living room's celadon, or periwinkle in the family room. The ever-changing light from outside plays upon these subtle shades, altering them by the hour.

While there are a few Asian pieces, on the whole remarkably little artwork is displayed. "Instead we chose just to frame the views," says Noriega-Ortiz.

Working with the couple, he was struck by their divergent aesthetics. "They both wanted something serene and calm. But he's into minimalism, and would be happy with two chairs and a table. She is more romantic and likes detail, color, and curves. The whole project was 'you get one, I get one.'"

"Actually, it was an extremely cour-





teous and civilized way of dealing with things," Noriega-Ortiz continues. "Sometimes clients argue in front of me, and I get all nervous for them. But with this job, we ended up feeling we did it all together."

The harmony was clearly evident on a recent Sunday afternoon. The son and his friend were busily pasting up a school project while the daughter roller-bladed about in the driveway. Mom iced a chocolate cake, as Dad stepped out of a town car, just off a flight from San Francisco. All these activities were lulled into one by the dazzling vistas of sky and water that surround them.

"We're so fortunate to be here. It truly was beginner's luck," says the wife, as she stares dreamily at the horizon. "It's like we opened an old shoe box and found a diamond ring." ●



This page, top. Master bathroom has Philippe Starck tub and curved wall of Oceanside Glass tile. Above: Both boy's (red), and girl's room (blue) headboards and night tables are from Maine Cottage. Table lamps are Noriega-Ortiz custom designs. Opposite: Master bedroom canopy bed is from Holly Hunt. Paramount console is from Baker Knapp & Tubbs. For more details, see Resources.



Finishing Touch

WRITER: CHRISTINE PITTEL PHOTOGRAPHER: ANTOINE BOOTZ

“THE GLASS
TABLES ARE
GUTSY,
YET ELUSIVE”

Floating Islands

A surface,
just where you need it

Any decorator worth his tape measure knows that when a client leans back on a chaise, he'll need a place to set down a drink within arm's reach. "But a spindly wooden table would have broken the mood," says designer Benjamin Noriega-Ortiz. For him, this bedroom—with Long Island Sound just beyond the diaphanous curtains—is all about water and light. The effect he wanted was transparency, beautifully embodied in these glass baluster tables that hardly take up any room and manage the neat trick of being both practical and ethereal. Why two? "I used a lot of paired elements in this house. Balance equals serenity." For more details, see Resources. ●

SOTHEBY'S

On January 27th, 2004, during Jack Levy's "Design for our City" event at Sotheby's, members of the design industry came together, donating items or services to be auctioned to raise money for The Mayor's Fund to Advance New York City. Liz Smith was honored that evening for her dedication to helping make New York City better. One of the many highlights of the evening was Liza Minnelli and Billy Strich's surprise serenade to Ms. Smith.



Liza Minnelli & Liz Smith



Benjamin Noriega-Ortiz & Lisa Young



Jamie Drake & Keith Langham



Janet Rogers & Susan Zises Green