



# playful spirit

SWEEPING VISTAS OF  
A BAY FILLED WITH  
BOBBING SAILBOATS  
INSPIRED ARCHITECT  
**STUART DISSTON** TO  
REACH FOR THE SUN

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e Eliza Gatfield is happy to give credit where credit is due, and when it comes to her gently worn pine floors, the honors go to Pug, Mopsy, Cooper, and Sesame. “We have four dogs, and they have aged the floors beautifully,” she says, “I know it would drive some people insane, but I love the wear and tear. It gives the floors such a wonderful lived-in feel.”

This single mom’s attitude about the floors—as well as her willingness to share her home with four dogs, two cats, two parrots, plus a couple rabbits and chinchillas—says as much about her easygoing character as her design sensibilities. “I want casual and comfortable,” Eliza says. “Certainly nothing fancy, dressy, or ornate.”

This relaxed approach doesn’t mean anything goes, however. Educated in art and architecture, Eliza values authentic crafts-

**Left:** Elvis, one of the family’s two Burmese cats, enjoys the library couch. The rug was designed by homeowner Eliza Gatfield, borrowing on painterly ikat motifs. Eliza designs textiles for her business, Custom Cool. **Above left:** Paneled doors flank the living room fireplace, linking the room to the library. **Above right:** The butler’s pantry cabinets are decorated with shirred fabric panels. Eliza found the cabinet hardware in English antiques shops. **Preceding pages:** Inspired by an old Shaker design, architect Stuart Disston created a curving staircase near the kitchen. ■ Eliza’s mix of fabrics enlivens the master bedroom.

manship, materials, and architectural detailing, and she brought all those elements to play when she and then-husband Stephen Gatfield built their home on New York’s Long Island.

“I like things to be done with integrity and with a true understanding of materials and detailing,” she says. After living abroad for several years, in 2004 the couple purchased a virtually undeveloped wooded lot overlooking Oyster Bay. “It’s an amazing piece of land with exquisite views.”

Although she worked as a designer in England, Eliza sought professional advice for this stateside project. “I’m trained as an architect, so I wanted to have a large say in the whole process,” she explains. “But I also wanted to partner with a designer who could help me bring my vision to life.” Enter Stuart Disston, a New York-based architect with 27 years of experience designing classic American homes.

The architect was both inspired and challenged by the site. “It was completely wooded, so we had to figure out how to situate the house,” he says, “and how to take advantage of this really spectacular view.” To stay in tune with the existing late-19th- and early-20th-century homes in the area, the architect designed a two-story shingle house. The house presents a traditional face street side, with a subtly bowed front facade swelling above the portico. In contrast, the back or water side of the house features less formal details, such as barn-like gambrel rooflines. In keeping with beach tradition, the house is clad in





A stack of sun-warmed pillows on a bench in the breakfast room is a perfect place for Pug to take a nap. Eliza had dining chairs covered in a mix of fabric patterns for a lighthearted style. Top right: The 21-foot-square kitchen is anchored by an island that Eliza designed around a small Dutch baking cabinet with pull-out storage canisters. Far right: Eliza on the back terrace with Pug and Cooper, two of her four dogs.





cedar shingles, allowed to weather to a cloudy-day gray, and trimmed with sea-blue shutters.

To create as many water views as possible, Disston strung together the main living spaces—library, living room, family room, breakfast area, and sunporch—on a north-south axis, so each room has views of the bay to the east. The rooms are linked by a series of double doors that open for easy traffic flow and unfettered views through the house. Five fireplaces arranged along the home's center line (including one on the terrace) introduce symmetry and warmth.

Disston and Eliza collaborated on architectural features to give the house a cozy, lived-in feel. Rooms are scaled for intimacy, with built-in shelves and cabinets providing interest and character. "There is height and breadth because the rooms are open, but you don't feel diminished in any of the spaces," Eliza explains. Ceilings in several rooms were clad in beadboard, painted blue, and accented with exposed beams. When she couldn't find salvaged wood for beams, Eliza had new lumber distressed, using liming wax. She also worked with painters to create timeworn finishes on the cabinetry she designed.

While the open floor plan makes the house feel spacious, Eliza's playful mix of finishes, fabric patterns, and materials makes it relaxed. "I use traditional materials, but I combine them in unusual ways," Eliza says. "What you achieve by mixing and matching is a lack of formality." In the breakfast room,









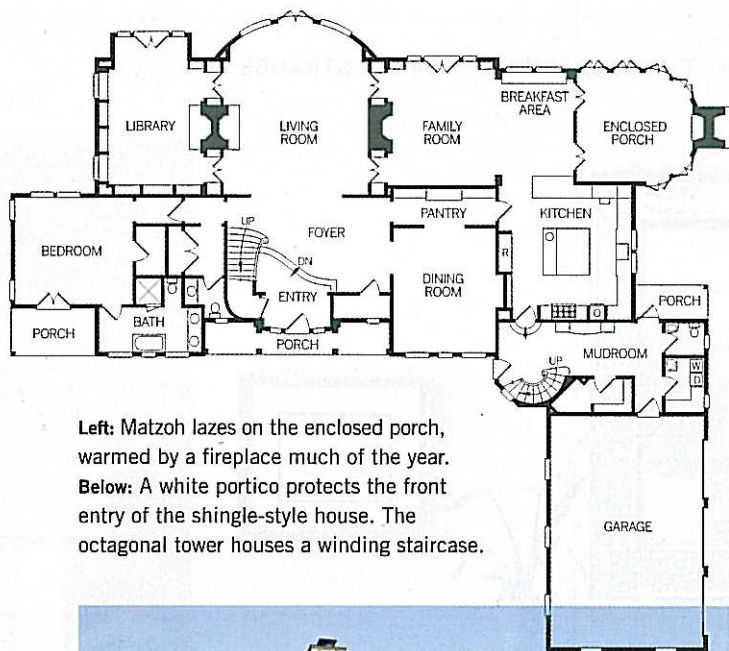


A sky-blue ceiling and an array of quaint fabrics keep the mood light in the master bedroom. Curtain panels in alternating fabrics offer privacy when needed, but don't block the view. "I wanted the landscape to become part of the architecture," Eliza says.









**Left:** Matzoh lazes on the enclosed porch, warmed by a fireplace much of the year.  
**Below:** A white portico protects the front entry of the shingle-style house. The octagonal tower houses a winding staircase.



dining chairs are upholstered in eight different fabric patterns, with no two chairs sporting the same combination. The master bedroom has a similarly eclectic mix of pattern, with curtain panels in alternating fabrics.

Ditto the butler's pantry and master bedroom, where nearly every cabinet front features a different shirred fabric insert and even the hardware is mismatched. On a trip home from England, Eliza loaded her luggage with an assortment of antique bronze and brass cabinet latches and handles. "I bought as many as I could fit in a suitcase," she says.

"I generally am not a person who likes to follow a lot of rules," Eliza says. "If I have a Georgian table, I don't feel compelled to use Georgian chairs. There is such great beauty we can glean from so many different eras."

Chocolate-stained wide pine planks aged by the dogs and human traffic contribute to the house's casual attitude, too. Carpenters hammered black nails randomly into the planks to play up the antique look. "The floors are key," Eliza says. "Everyone who comes here comments on how it feels like the house has been here for centuries, and gradually updated."

Eliza put a fresh spin on the utilitarian kitchens of early-20th-century manor houses she had admired in Europe. "I love to cook, and I wanted a kitchen that would function properly but not be overly modern." White subway tiles cover the walls nearly to the ceiling, and appliances are white rather than too-

## REMEMBER WHEN:

nov '99

A traditionally styled house built in 2009 will resemble one built 20 or 50 years

ago, but the square footages, floor plans, and mechanical systems are likely to be much different, says architect Stuart Disston, who has been designing homes in New York and Connecticut since 1982. Disston is a partner with Austin Patterson Disston Architects, and leads the firm's Quogue, New York, office. "Houses have certainly gotten larger in the past 20 years, but I think that trend is going to change dramatically," Disston says. In addition to the economic downturn, "People are becoming more conscious of the environment." That means more energy-efficient building and thoughtful use of space. *Traditional Home* has featured several of Disston's designs, the first appearing in November 1999, below right.



21st-century stainless steel. Eliza and daughter Ella, 10, often bake together, so Eliza designed a spacious island with storage for baking supplies. At the heart of the island is a Dutch baking cabinet Eliza found in Europe. "It was made to sit on a counter and has glass containers that pull out for flour and sugar," she explains. "We literally built the island around that piece."

When Eliza couldn't find the style of refrigerator she liked, she designed a wall of built-ins that resemble old iceboxes. Working with a company that installs commercial coolers, Eliza had three refrigerators and a freezer built in, with the compressors in the basement below. The units are fitted with reproduction heavy-duty latches and temperature gauges above each unit.

A Dutch door next to the range leads to the mudroom and the house's exclamation point: a serpentine staircase with beadboard walls and clerestory windows. Even the dogs appreciate it. "They love to sit on the stairs and look out the little round window," Eliza says. "It's probably the most perfect space in the house."

**Architect:** Stuart Disston **Architectural and interior designer:** Eliza Gaffield

For more information, see sources on page 178