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A WESTPORT COUPLE MIXES INFLUENCES TO
DESIGN A DREAM HOME



above An English Manor house feels at home in modern Westport. **inset** Off the front foyer, a handsome staircase inspired by the traditionalist British architect Edwin Lutyens leads to private rooms.



by **TOM CONNOR**
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Big, new houses that consciously reference the past don't always look graceful or feel cozy. But Joan and Bruce Nemirow's 8,000-square-foot composition of stone, stucco and shingle in Westport redefines "contemporary suburban mansion."

After twenty years of living and raising three daughters in a mid-'60s builders' Colonial in town, the Nemirows faced what some might consider the fortunate decision to expand and upgrade the house, tear it down and start over, or move. Consulting with a number of local architects, they came to the conclusion that the lot was too small to expand upon and the house too nice to level. So, they put their property on the market and began looking for land.

An interior designer, Joan often accompanied Bruce on business trips to London and found herself drawn to twentieth-century English architects, designers and styles.

Back in Westport, she did what every homeowner should do before building a new home. She drew up a list of influences—Edwin Lutyens, the Arts and Crafts movement, Cotswold cottages and English manor houses—then jotted down the qualities she hoped to replicate: "detailed but not overdone," "broadly connected yet individuated spaces," and "surprises just around the corner."

Builder Michael Greenberg of Michael Greenberg Associates found the couple a narrow, three-acre lot on the Westport/Weston border, and Mac Patterson of Austin Patterson Diss-ton in Southport was chosen as architect. His firm wound up collaborating on the interior with Joan's company, Joan Nemirow Designs, L.L.C.

What Patterson conceived is a hybrid architectural style that, given Joan's sensibilities, makes perfect sense: English Crafts Revival with a touch of Tudor. The form allowed what quickly became a kind of Arts and Crafts home-team to use a wealth of overlapping styles and materials. »



left A fireplace draws attention in the formal dining room. A slab of cedar from Good Earth Millworks frames the limestone surround. The yew-topped table is from Hickory Chair. **opposite** The end windows overlooking the gardens and pool fill the living room with light. Custom brass and stained-glass chandeliers are by Conant Brass in Vermont.

SENSE AND SENSIBILITIES

For all of the attention to influences and detail, this isn't a showcase home. You can't see it from the road. What's apparent, though, is an equanimity of materials and scale. Across the exterior, stucco panels and upper wood shingles give way to a lower level of thin, finely fitted stone before yielding the foundation to several courses of muted-red brick. A stringcourse of rounded brick defines the water table (a projecting ledge to throw off rain water). Flairs at the bottom of the shingles, and at the edges of the roof gables, raise the structure off the ground, reducing its mass.

This is big place: four bedrooms plus two bedroom-sized rooms over the garage used as offices; five full baths and two powder rooms; a huge party room; and a kitchen wing as spacious as some entire first floors. It's just that the house doesn't hit you over the head with its size.

The architectural firm, known for creating small spaces inside large houses, managed all the public expansiveness of the Nemirow's house with private areas waiting to be discovered.

Off the central party room, for example, a series of intimate rooms double as entertaining spillover areas and family getaways: A formal dining room, a paneled library, and an inglenook—a nook with seating area around an open hearth of the kind

often found in Arts and Crafts houses and cottages. Joan's love of materials and craftsmanship is on display especially here. White oak cabinetry frames a glass mosaic fireplace. Inspired by a work of early-twentieth-century Austrian painter Gustav Klimt, it was sketched by Joan and executed by Cecile Arnaud of Cheryl Hazan Mosaic Studio in New York.

ROOMS FOR TWO

By the time the Nemirows' house was finished, Joan and Bruce's three daughters had all grown up, and the couple found themselves alone in about 6,500 square feet more space than they really needed. Fortunately, Austin Patterson Disston has been designing large houses with this situation in mind.

Except for when the house is filled with family, friends and guests, the two spend most of their time in an empty-nester suite of interconnected downstairs rooms—daily room (or family room), butler's pantry, breakfast room and kitchen—on the far side of the party room. The wing, which can be closed off from the rest of the house by pocket doors, feels more like a luxurious but comfortable bungalow than a fancy suburban mansion.

While these high-ceilinged rooms naturally flow in and out of one another, Mac Patterson defined the openings to each with



right An imported La Cornue stove with hood custom-made to a design by Joan Nemirow and Kathy Poirier **inset and below** The kitchen, inspired by the British Museum and Brighton Pavilion, holds its glow from windows and track lighting behind a steel-sashed ceiling designed by Mac Patterson



low, paneled spans to create interior presence and drama, as well as a sense of entering new realms.

Kitchens are the heart and soul of a home, and that's true in this house. But the Nemirow kitchen is also a work of stunning period art and an example of design and craftsmanship at a high level. The area has an Edwardian look and feel, filtered through a number of other influences. The handsome walnut and burlled-walnut island, with teak counter and William and Mary-style legs was designed by Joan and former Austin Patterson architect Kathy Poirier, as were the cabinets. All of the woodwork is by Good Earth Millworks of Ridgefield. The La Cornue stove was imported from France, but the hood was designed by Nemirow and Poirier and custom-made by Creative Metal Fabrication of Stamford.

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far left False clerestory and a steel-sashed ceiling help highlight an elegant second-floor hallway. **inset** Fabrics from Old World Weavers in New York soften the bedroom. **below** Joan's Art-Deco bathroom, with cabinetry by Good Earth Millwork, and brushed metal banding and white onyx slabs installed by New England Stone.

No ordinary ceiling could top so spectacular a kitchen. In fact, one of Joan's dictates was that all of the ceilings in the house be "interesting rather than ignored." Early on, she had shown Patterson a photo of an English conservatory, and his inspired response was to extend the kitchen's central ceiling up under the second floor roof, then float a fourteen-by-fourteen-foot steel-sashed frame of frosted glass in the void. Creative Metal Fabrication constructed the massive piece. Behind the glass, the attic-like walls are painted bright white to reflect interior lights, which are mounted on a sliding track and accessed from a hatch in an adjacent second-story bedroom. The effect is a soft, natural-looking glow, day or night. "This project came out so well because of the collaboration with Mac Patterson and Joan," says Greenberg. "She was a particularly good client, with a deep understanding of where she wanted it to go."

Mixing and matching—past and present styles and materials, imaginations and artisans—has made this house a thing of diverse beauty, but also one of extreme comfort and familial pleasures. **W**

