TUDOR TRIUMPH

DESIGNER STEVEN GAMBREI
BRINGS LIGHT AND LIFE TO A YOUNG FAMILY’S HISTORIC HOUSE IN WESTCHESTER COUNTY

Text by Judith Nemerov - Photography by Simon Upton
Styling by Stedon Fingas
The library’s original oak paneling was completely restored, the leather armchairs and slipper chairs upholstered in fabric by Clarence House and Jane Churchill, respectively, and the French leather armchair by the fireplace dates from the early 1930s. Facade Mural: Gold Butterfly, a painting by Yves Serron, takes center stage in the second-floor hall, which is painted in Benjamin Moore’s Seagull Gray; the English bench is antique, and the vintage-side table and lamp were found in Europe. See Resources.

They were a young Manhattan family making the inevitable move from the city to the suburbs. The property, in a lovely village just 16 miles north of New York City, certainly had a lot going for it: six bedrooms and 10 bathrooms on two bucolic acres, with a terrific public school just a hop and a skip down the hill. Perfect—except that the house itself was stuffy, dark, and dreary. Built in 1927, it was one of Charles Lewis Bow- man’s Stockbroker Tudors, houses popular with Wall Streeters in one of New York’s earliest bedroom communities. But while fashionable in its day, the home’s weathered stone, brick, and holl-timbered exterior was no longer inviting. The couple had trouble imagining their three children (now six, four, and two) and their menagerie of pets—a Siamese named Tigger, three fish, and a baby gu- mas pig—living in a house straight out of an Agatha Christie whodunit. Enter Steven Gambrel, an interi- or designer known for his classical approach to modern comfort. “You have to help us make this house friendly,” the wife beseeched him.

Gambrel, who trained as an architect, knew that the key to warming up the place was to revise its floor plan. He spent a day alone in the home with his dog Dash walking through its rooms and studying their flow. The house had separate family and servants’ quarters—an upstairs-downstairs arrangement that no longer made sense for a modern family without a live-in staff. Even on the ground floor, there was no sense of continuity between the spaces. The dining room, for instance, was next to the kitchen—but there was no door to connect the two rooms. Gambrel had a vision: in order to get this old-fashioned house to relax, he would have to open it up to within.

He showed the couple some sketches. The din- ing room could become a casual family room with archways connecting it to the kitchen for easy snacking runs. And why not relocate the dining room to the striking but not particularly useful reception hall, where some of Bowman’s prettier details, including glorious, leaded-and-stained-glass windows and a massive oak staircase, could be enjoyed as a backdrop?
They loved it. And everything else followed: the servants’ wing converted into a guest room and bath for visiting grandchildren, plus a home office for the husband; a basement wine cellar, gym, and children’s art room; a light-washed playroom and the wife’s office on the third floor; and a cloud-like blue-and-white master suite on the second floor, close to the children’s rooms. Given the vast scope of the renovation, Gambrel and his clients brought in Boris Baranovitch, the architect responsible for the house’s last significant redo in the late 1990s, to oversee the interior gut work and to restore the exterior, where the half timbers were painted blue for a lighter effect. “It was said to watch all the antique paneling come off and to see the house come apart,” Gambrel says of the extensive renovation. “But then we watched it all come happily back together.”

With this streamlined new layout in place, Gambrel set out to make the interior design just as alluring. He used the wife’s favorite color, blue, in abundance, in pale hues that he contrasted with clark, dramatic grays. The casually elegant decor (Gambrel describes it as “an ode to a French country house with a fresh take”) features deep, comfortable seating, tailored draperies, pedigreed antiques, and striking artwork such as Hunt Slonem’s shimmering Glass Butterflies, which hangs in the second-floor hall. On the ground floor, the sumptuous—at one time an open-air dancing pavilion—has a bold octagon-patterned rug, a pair of French painted chandeliers, and two generous sofas designed by Gambrel.

The reception hall, with its original staircase, now serves as a sitting room; the chandelier is vintage. The English teakwood table is from the 1950s, the Louis XV chairs have commode leather seats, and the Persian carpet is from the 1920s. Made in the foyer, the antique chandelier was found at auction; the rescued wood-framed mirrors are from Paris, the console is vintage, and the lamps are fashioned from 18th-century French urns. The stair is a Gambrel design, and the silk roman is by ABC Carpet & Home. See Resources.
The kitchen features custom Melville cabinets, marble countertops, and a low-coffered ceiling; the light fixtures are vintage, and the refrigerator is by Viking. The area rug is from Stark, the family room ottoman is ottom, and the chandelier, which is updated St. Thomas, sits. All the decor, including the plant in the foreground, is from the collection of Christopher Moore. In addition, the stools are designed by California's first custom-made, the lamps are from the '60s, and the folding doors are original to the house. See Resources.
The living room, used for cocktails and post-dinner party gatherings, is furnished with a soigné mix of club chairs and vintage Maison Jansen and Italian cocktail and side tables, all centered on the original limestone fireplace. Meanwhile, the family's day-to-day existence revolves around the bright and expansive new kitchen, with its ample marble-top island and cozy dining area where a '70s karlin chandelier hangs from the room's new plank-and-beam ceiling.

Once Gambrel felt he had tipped the home's balance from stodgy to Hendry, the period architecture no longer distasted. In fact, he found himself admiring Bowman's workmanship and set out to restore what he could. He unleashed a team of three artisans who worked steadily for four months to strip the red paint off the wonderful oak paneling in the library. The floor-to-ceiling woodwork, gleaming and polished, now frames Gambrel's masterful update on traditional decor. "We weren't slaves to history," Gambrel says, "but we were certainly inspired by it. We took the pieces that worked for us and were really kind to the house."