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2011 PALLADIO AWARDS

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Restoration & Renovation

Winner: Hilton-VanderHorn Architects



Project: French Country Farm, Greenwich, CT

Architect: Hilton-VanderHorn Architects, Greenwich, CT; Charles F. Hilton, design partner; Daniel Parady, design partner; David Newcomb, project manager; Thomas Danis, team member

Contractor: Home Construction, LLC, New Canaan, CT

Interior Designer: Davenport North, Greenwich, CT

Landscape Architect: Charles J. Stick, Inc., Charlottesville, VA

Connecticut French

When a roadside property in Greenwich, CT, went on the market a few years ago, an adjacent neighbor quickly purchased the four-acre plot containing three dilapidated structures. The acquisition allowed the neighbor to expand his estate and beloved gardens, while also precluding many homeowners' worst nightmare: the construction of a large spec house next door.

To design the renovations of the existing structures, the new owner turned to a familiar firm. For over 15 years, Greenwich-based Hilton-VanderHorn Architects had worked with the client, designing everything from the renovation and expansion of his 1940s Georgian main residence to a pool house, gazebo and even the doghouse for the property. The goals for the new property were to renovate and enhance the character of the existing structures and to facilitate the addition of a large greenhouse adjacent to a new formal vegetable garden. Not only is the owner – who now produces organic fruits, vegetables and honey for his own use (and is in talks with local restaurants) – thrilled with the result, but the renovation has also been recognized with a 2011 Palladio Award.

In examining the existing structures back in 2008, Hilton-VanderHorn principal Charles Hilton and his team, which included design partner Daniel Parady, project manager David Newcomb and Thomas Danis, found traces of a French design aesthetic. "Further research revealed that the original architect, William F. Dominick, was known for his French Country houses," says Hilton. "Although the structures were clad in shingles typical of New England, there were recognizable French touches. So we went in that direction, also thinking it would be a nice complement to the Georgian main house on the client's property next door."

On a trip to France, Hilton toured the Palace of Versailles, where he visited Marie Antoinette's Petit Hameau, a little farm in the corner of the estate. "I thought it was the perfect feel for what we were trying to do," he says. "That became a key part of our inspiration."



The potting room of the French Country farm in Greenwich, CT, features wraparound cabinets, a farm sink and a view of the vegetable garden beyond.

All photos: Woodruff-Brown Photography unless otherwise noted



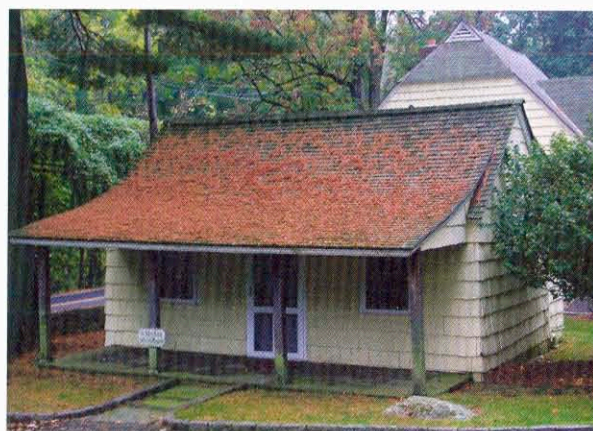
Seen from the rear, the renovated structures of the farm include the main service building at center flanked by the studio to the left and the greenhouse to the right.

Back in Greenwich, the main challenge at the outset was to create a French Country feel while complying with town zoning. As the buildings sat along a road, completely in the front yard setback, the firm was not permitted to expand the footprint of the buildings or enlarge their volumes. To create a French Country feel, the buildings would have to be completely re-dressed.

“On the second floor of the main structure, we thought that half timber and stucco would have a nice effect, based on the volumes of the buildings and French Country precedents,” says Hilton, noting that granite walls were used on the first floor of the exterior. “In French architecture, you see a lot of cut limestone, but here it is not typical or particularly appropriate. We decided on granite as a substitute because it is more typical of New England and fit in with the stone walls surrounding the property.” After considering thatch and tile, the team decided on a graduated slate roof, in keeping with the Georgian buildings on the adjacent property.

The one-story wing of the main service building posed an additional challenge in the reconstruction of the slate roof, as it is built into a portion of the stone wall that curves to follow the adjacent road. New rafters were cut to varying lengths and slates were laid to accommodate the convex and concave shapes of the roof. Roofing material was supplied by the Evergreen Slate Company of Granville, NY, and installed by One World Construction of Wilton, CT.

As is commonplace in updating historic structures, the interiors lacked sufficient wall space for modern amenities. In the renovation process, the 1920s buildings were taken down to the studs, and, in the case of the first floor, to dirt. Some utilities were buried, and the walls were enlarged to accommodate better quality windows and insulation.



The original structures, including the studio and the main structure, were built in the 1920s and poorly maintained over the years. *Before photos: courtesy of Hilton-VanderHorn Architects*

room and storage areas, with access to an apartment above. The detached studio now serves as the owner's personal office. A new greenhouse, supplied by Hampden, MA-based Private Garden Greenhouse Systems, extends from the potting room and opens up on the new garden. "It separates the entry court area, which is cobblestone, from the formal vegetable garden, creating a soft separation between the two," says Hilton.

Key suppliers for the project included Stephen Gamble Signature Finishes of Norwalk, CT; Artistic Doors & Windows of Avenal, NJ

Right and below: A complete design transformation gave the farm a French Country feel. Instead of the limestone typical of French buildings, granite more common in New England was used; portions of the second floor are half timber and stucco.





The property now operates as a small organic farm, complete with beehives and an orchard.

(exterior doors and windows); Hahn's Woodworking Company of Branchburg, NJ (garage doors); Design Associates of Hamden, CT (entry gates); Fontrick Door of Batavia, NY (interior doors); Canaan Distributors of Stamford, CT (hardware); and Waterworks of Greenwich, CT (plumbing fixtures).

The property now operates as a small organic farm, complete with beehives and an orchard. (A chicken coop, also designed by Hilton-VanderHorn, is next in line for construction.) "Last year was the client's first full season, so he is just figuring out what they should grow, and what volumes to produce," says Hilton. "He also hopes to bring schoolchildren in to teach them about sustainability and healthy eating." And the design work continues – Hilton-VanderHorn is now tackling another structure on the property, a guest house in the style of a French County barn.



Above: The flagstone floors of the main structure extend into the new greenhouse addition.

Left: The renovated studio space serves as the owner's personal office.