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SMOOTH SAILING

A grand Greenwich estate is refreshed
with a spirit of ease and livability.

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Architecture: Charles Hilton and Nicholas Rotondi, Charles Hilton Architects Interior Design: Robert Rizzo, Cobble Court Interiors
Home Builder: Colin Christensen, CBC Construction Corp.

It isn't hard to understand why Henry Steers, an early-20th-century construction tycoon, chose this site on Long Island Sound to build a home for his family. The property, which includes a dramatic expanse of rocky shoreline and a private dock, must have appealed to the yachtsman. In fact, the sight

lines from the home, perched atop a sloping lawn, give the feeling of being at sea. "It's a spectacular waterfront setting with views from Long Island to Manhattan," says architect Charles Hilton, who has spent a large part of the past 18 years preserving its legacy.

Once called Eastover, the estate was designed as "an austere, masonry-stucco house consistent with European country homes," Hilton explains. "Our involvement began in 2005, when we were hired by the previous owners. At that time, the residence still had a flat roof and the original stucco siding had been covered with an exterior insulation system with a pink finish." In collaboration with colleagues David Newcomb and Daniel Pardy, Hilton designed a full exterior face-lift—including a new roof and cornice—and replaced windows and doors. The team also tackled extensive water damage to the ocean-facing rooms.

When the restored abode changed hands over a decade later, the new owners asked Hilton back to finesse its next chapter. "It was great to have a second opportunity to enhance our original vision," the architect shares, noting the contributions of project manager Nicholas Rotondi and general contractor Colin Christensen. Work for the second renovation included enlarging the kitchen and adding garage bays, a mudroom, and en suite bathrooms for every bedroom. The basement went through an extensive overhaul, gaining entertainment areas, a wet bar and staff suites. A portion was even excavated ("Through the hardest rock in the state!" Hilton adds) to make room for a golf simulator. Finally, both the interiors and exteriors were given new finishes. "Outside, the owners allowed us to complete the unfinished trim work,

stain the terra-cotta roof black and refinish the stucco to a brilliant white," Hilton says. "Everyone thought the previous pink exterior needed to go," he adds, commending designer Robert Rizzo's suggestion of the black-and-white concept that was chosen to complement the more modern interiors the clients wanted. "It was a dramatic transformation," the architect notes.

Knowing the clients through prior projects, Rizzo understood their contemporary aesthetic and family-oriented lifestyle. "Robert listened when I told him that, as a mom of four littles, I needed them close by while I work in the kitchen," the wife shares. Rather than reconfiguring the home's gracious layout by knocking down walls, the designer simply reassigned spaces. Notably, the former dining room off the kitchen became a family hangout area with comfortable seating and a big table perfect for homework or crafts. "It's not an open-plan house, which is kind of nice," Rizzo notes. "Each room has big pocket doors that can join or separate spaces."

In a clever stroke, the designer then turned the trellised garden room into a formal dining room, painting Hilton's woodwork a neutral gray to meld the wife's favored pale blues with the original tile floor. The living room remained much as it was, with Rizzo using its generous proportions to create elegant seating groups at either end, joined by stools in the middle that are perfect for uniting the space when friends and family convene. Bringing a sense of ornamentation in keeping with the adjacent dining room, the designer also customized a hand-sculpted bas-relief wallcovering depicting flowering plants, bees and butterflies with the art studio MJ Atelier.

"Many people want new houses these days, but older homes have architectural details that make them unique," Hilton muses. "They're part of the fabric of historical neighborhoods and worth a little extra time, effort and imagination to preserve." That the couple has since brought the design team back to build a pool and pool house is proof of their commitment to enjoying every inch of this enchanting estate for years to come. ■



In a turn-of-the-last century home brought up to date by architect Charles Hilton and designer Robert Rizzo, a hallway near the foyer was papered with a hand-painted print by Schumacher. The clients' pottery sits atop a Jonathan Adler cabinet.



At one end of the living room are two Ferrell Mittman sofas covered in Rosemary Halgarten fabric and a coffee table from Swam. Above the fireplace are Vaughan sconces and a mirror from Ironies.

BRINGING A **SENSE OF ORNAMENTATION** IN KEEPING WITH THE ADJACENT DINING ROOM, ROBERT RIZZO CUSTOMIZED A **HAND-SCULPTED BAS-RELIEF WALLCOVERING.**

In the trellised dining room, Rizzo paired a walnut table from Parish Co with Vanguard Furniture chairs covered in a Zimmer + Rohde textile. A chandelier from Bella Figura hangs above and underfoot is a rug from Castellux. In the corner stands a monumental antique drum.

