



HOUSE BLEND

by SUZANNE GANNON photographs HÜLYA KOLABAS

Architects Paul Rice and Ward Welch originally planned to simply renovate their 2,800-square-foot home in Amagansett, New York. But a weak structure forced them to rebuild the footprint entirely.



Architects Paul Rice and Ward Welch transform a lackluster house from the '60s into a modern looker with distinctly **American charm**



An abstract painting by Sally Bruno hangs above a mid-century console refinished by Christophe Pourny in Benjamin Moore's Habanero Pepper in the foyer.



right: Lamps from West Elm sit atop a Chinese-styled console. below: A Thomas O'Brien chandelier hangs in the stairway.

THERE WAS SNOW ON THE GROUND in early 2004 when architects Paul Rice and Ward Welch first saw the taupe-colored barn of a house on a quiet, dead-end lane in Amagansett, New York, with real estate agent James MacMillan.

"I had sold them the cottage and it turned into a wonderful little place," MacMillan says of an old fish shack he sold the couple in 2000. "I'd call them every now and then thinking they might have a client, but I didn't realize this was the perfect project for them."

Built in 1965, the house had been owned by a local artist who maintained an active painting studio before converting it into a fourth bedroom when he became ill.

"Walk to town, walk to the beach," Rice says. "I was excited from the beginning." Over dinner that night, he began sketching a plan on a napkin — and continued to develop the entire scheme over the next few months, with Welch reviewing and suggesting revisions.

In the fall of that year, after the protracted process of settling the previous owner's estate had concluded, they closed on the house. And with their plan to renovate the existing 2,800 square feet already approved by the building department, they began construction.

One month and \$20,000 later, contractor Mike Davies called to say his initial demolition had revealed that the framing of the



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far left: A collection of keys bought at a Mexican flea market and a vintage mirror add interest in the powder room. The custom walnut vanity's hardware is by Vola. left: Vintage mixes with modern in the master bedroom. Pottery Barn drapes and lamp and a pony skin rug from Ikea allow the Eames chair and an antique desk bought with the home take center stage. below: In the sitting room, an antique French industrial cart-base table from R.E. Steele Antiques sits between two settees recovered in pony hair. Curtis Jere's nail sculpture hangs above the black slate fireplace.





"This is a fresh approach to a traditional idea. A modern, sleek farmhouse that has New York smarts."

—REALTOR JAMES MACMILLAN

left: The homeowners found the deer antler chandelier in the den at Horns-a-Plenty Antler Art in Ely, Nevada, while the driftwood lamp came from an antique store. The tile on the fireplace is Manganese Ironspot by Endicott Tile. below: Crate & Barrel's "Brooke" chairs are topped with lamb's wool throw pillows.

board-and-batten building was unsalvageable and the foundation weak. So they razed the house, poured a new foundation and re-configured the existing plan to include a few more bedrooms — without expanding the existing footprint.

"We didn't want to change the character of the houses on the street," Rice says. "But the land value had doubled and we realized we needed to make a house that would be competitive."

So the two resisted the temptation, rampant in the Hamptons, to build a mega mansion and instead honed in on a well-scaled modern design that riffed off the beachy American charm of the original building. It had to be viable as a rental, but appealing enough for them to enjoy themselves.

"A lot of it was our response to the excess we see all over the place," Rice says, who maintains his own residential practice in Brooklyn, Paul Rice Architecture, and designs houses on Long Island and apartments in Manhattan. "Having designed so many rooms for clients that nobody ever uses, it's not worth the square-footage cost."

To achieve a more spacious feel, they reduced the amount of circulation space and put the square footage they gained into the program, defining hallways and stairwells with shiplap paneling painted white to evoke the exterior of the house. »





Paul Rice and Ward Welch in their top-of-the-line kitchen, which includes Dynamic Interiors custom cabinetry, Calcutta Gold marble countertops and an Elkay stainless steel sink. The bar stools are by West Elm.



Vintage Eames chairs surround a Saarinen "Tulip" table by Knoll in the breakfast area. The pendant light fixture is from West Elm.

"The Dutch door and the breezeway are all little pieces of Americana we tried to work into the house," Welch notes, a partner in Brooklyn-based Coburn Architecture who spent his early career restoring old farmhouses in Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

"The giant mirror in the front entry hall was a way of expanding the space as much as possible," he says. "It makes you more aware of the rooms you're not in."

Early on, Rice and Welch called upon interior designer and feng shui practitioner Catherine Brophy to help develop an interiors plan. "They wanted a casual, user-friendly, durable beach house," Brophy says. "The key was to bring the existing furniture and accessories into a cohesive whole by adding new pieces, and/or refurbishing items. Custom items helped to achieve that."

The result is a thoroughly integrated combination of items inherited with the house, objects found at flea markets and auctions, furnishings from mainstream retailers and fine art.

Catherine's color palette for the house was driven by the feng shui plan. "The dining room and master bedroom needed fire energy, which is red," she says.

In the living room, which shares a wall with the dining room, a mid-century modern console they found at auction was given to

Christophe Pourny who hand-finished it in a high-gloss, hot-pepper red lacquer. Mounted above it is one of a pair of swirling red and brown abstracts by Sally Bruno they found at R.E. Steele Antiques in East Hampton.

"The little skirts on the dining room chairs came about because the table and chairs we inherited with the house looked like fat old ladies that needed to be dressed," Welch says, who hired Prestige Furniture & Design of Woodside, Queens, to create the skirts from GP & J Baker's brick-colored "Poppies" fabric.

In the central section of the house, they pursued a clean, open plan conducive to cooking and entertaining. A vintage Saarinen "Tulip" table by Knoll was paired with vintage Eames chairs in the breakfast area, and the adjacent den was organized around a fireplace.

"The den needed black, so the owners decided to go with a black tile (that looks like brick) over the fireplace," Brophy says. "It was a great way to achieve the goal."

The couple reupholstered a high-backed sofa they found at auction to define a sitting area, and detailed an alcove to enclose a wall-mounted, flat-screened television so that it would not dominate the space.

Welch found an antler chandelier at Horns-a-Plenty in Ely,



A pair of teak chairs bought at a yard sale on the sun deck outside the master bedroom. The custom headboard is covered in Lee Jofa's "Owls & Fruits."





A wall-mounted urinal by Duravit in the men's-only loo. *opposite page:* A Chinese bench, purchased at Homenature in Southampton, and a customized Pottery Barn Roman shade are the focal point of the master bath. The floors are Calcutta Gold marble and the wall sconces are by Thomas O'Brien for Visual Comfort.

Nevada, that, according to Rice, added an “earthier” element to the austere openness of the peaked ceiling.

Along the way, the two employed a series of tricks acquired over years of work on a variety of projects.

“Kitchen cabinets can sometimes look clunky,” Rice remarks. “Against the dark floor, the white cabinetry makes everything seem crisper and lighter. It blends out and becomes part of the architecture.”

They chose Calcutta Gold marble for the countertops and backsplashes and fitted the kitchen with high-end appliances from Thermador and SubZero, among others.

“Out here, it’s imperative to have a bar,” Welch says. “You have to be ready to have a party at the drop of a hat.” So they designed a mirror-backed bar in the corner of the kitchen that features separate storage for glassware and doesn’t interfere with the cooking. “Without a doubt it’s the best thing in the whole house,” Rice says.

Upstairs, the bedrooms are organized by color to facilitate room assignments for guests — as well as easy laundering of linens. Each room features its own bathroom, and curtains were purchased from Pottery Barn and Ikea and then customized into draperies and Roman shades.

Rice and Welch realized when they bought the house that they could hear the ocean from the master bedroom, so the room







A rear view of the home at dusk reveals a house that is party ready. The Cavendish Watson teak dining table and chairs are from Rumrunner Home, East Hampton. The patio chairs and coffee table are by Kingsley-Bate.

remained in that location. "It's the one spot on the property where you really don't see other houses, so it feels like you're up in the trees," Rice says. "From eleven in the morning to sunset it's heaven."

Situated on the West-facing rear of the house with a full-fledged sundeck equipped with teak chairs, the room also provides visibility to the pool "so that a parent could watch a child" according to Rice.

Welch designed an upholstered headboard — custom-covered in Lee Jofa's "Owls & Fruits" by Prestige Furniture & Design — shaped to echo the pitched roof.

The master bath features a separate stall shower and soaking tub from BainUltra, a wall-mounted toilet, twin sinks and a petite, wall-mounted Duravit urinal, which Rice believes "is the wave of the future."

"What they did was a little ahead of the market," MacMillan says. "There was a period of cookie-cutter post-modern that people had seen too many times. This is a fresh approach to a traditional idea, a modern, sleek farmhouse that has New York smarts." ■

Resources

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