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Classic American Homes

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To create homes that are
both grand and inviting,
American architects are
redefining Classicism



PREVIOUS PAGE: With its red crackle-glazed walls, the vestibule is "like a little jewel box in the house," says architect Kate Johns, AIA. Marbleized flooring spices up the pantry, where an antique drop-leaf table and a circa 1800 cupboard from New England share pride of place. LEFT: Fluted pilasters, a Palladian window, and a semi-circular portico are among the defining architectural features of the facade. BELOW: Johns used architect Asher Benjamin's pattern book as inspiration for the interior millwork. OPPOSITE: Under an archway, the staircase leads to a landing window seat.

classic design's new face

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOHN HALL PRODUCED BY BETSY MARX BY DIANE DIPIERO



DENTILED CORNICES and fluted pilasters dramatically frame the owners' collections of antique furnishings and modern artwork.





Nestled on a hill outlined by orchard trees, this 5,000-square-foot manse rises like an architectural gem above New York's Hudson Valley. The two-story core embraces elements perfected by 16th-century Italian architect Andrea Palladio: an entry porch with four columns, a central Venetian window, and symmetrical window placement. Hyphens connecting wings to the main block continue the classical theme with arched windows and gabled roofs outlined in dentils. Beyond the front door lie architectural details in the spirit of Asher Benjamin, an early 19th-century American architect. Dentiled cornices, fluted pilasters, and paneled doors crowned with entablatures were custom milled by the builder, James Romanchuck. They provide a dramatic frame for the owners' collection of antique furnishings and modern artwork.

Such intense detailing might overwhelm smaller spaces, but this house boasts high ceilings and doorways and broad



ABOVE: Built-in bookcases add warmth and coziness to the living room. THIS PHOTO: Columns divide three distinct seating areas in the living room. An inviting conversation area features curved-back chairs in a Clarence House fabric and a reproduction Heriz rug. The desk is an antique Bureau à Cylindre, circa 1830. Above it hangs a watercolor, *Untitled: Mushroom Studies* by Shelagh Keeley. OPPOSITE: A Neoclassical French recamier, circa 1885, offers elegant repose.





entrances between rooms. These features allow the architecture to sweep across the rooms and establish a warm elegance. "This is a very classical house but with an open plan," says architect Kate Johns, AIA, who designed the house. "There's also an open relationship between the exterior and interior with multiple views and a number of porches accessible from each room."

The design of the house meets the diverse needs of its occupants. "It had to work for a small number of people as well as for a lot of parties, kids, grandkids, and visiting friends," says Johns. The public rooms open onto each other, enabling large groups to gather in a space that resembles the grand lobby of an elegant old theater.

"The living room, dining room, and hall can function as one big space," says Johns. "The dining table seats eight, but when the owners entertain more people, they set up tables throughout the whole first floor." At the same time, each room provides an ideal spot for a small get-together. Antique and reproduction furnishings, handsome but not

ABOVE: The central section of the house contains the public rooms. The guest wing is to the right; the kitchen, butler's pantry, and "south room" are at left.

RIGHT: Reproduction Regency chairs ring the dining room table, which was fashioned from old wood planks. Antique Limoges china and 19th-century glasses set the table, while a Wilcox silverplate tea set graces the sideboard. The painting is by Rebecca Purdum.

OPPOSITE ABOVE: The owners entertain a great deal, so the kitchen had to be large enough to hold several cooks. Slate countertops and marble tile backsplashes add subtle depth and texture.

OPPOSITE BELOW: Beyond the kitchen is the "south room," which leads to a screened-in porch. Two Ellington wing chairs wear a Clarence House fabric. The pilastered fireplace is a salvaged antique, but the stripped wood finish lends a contemporary touch.







OPPOSITE: The master suite is located at the top of the stairway and opens onto a deck. Pocket shutters can be neatly tucked into the wall when not in use. A triple shield-back settee at the foot of the bed is a focal point. **ABOVE:** The greenery that decorates the conservatory is repeated in the colors and patterns found in this guest room. Wallpaper from Brunschwig & Fils bathes the room in garlands and flowers. The Regency-style bed is from Julia Gray, Ltd. **BELOW:** Even the garages boast refined details. SEE RESOURCES, PAGE 138

public rooms creates a base for a stately style. Casual areas, such as the guest wing and the “south room,” have antique pine floors and soft patterns on the walls and furniture. “We wanted to balance the traditional and informal aspects carefully, while never losing the feeling that you’re in the country,” says Johns. An abundance of tall windows means an infusion of light in the daytime. In the evening, strategically placed fixtures cast a dramatic glow on the decor. “We avoided general overall lighting,” says Johns. “We used a lot of recessed and directional spots focusing on places like the dining room table and picture lights to highlight artwork.”

To give this sprawling house a sense of place, Johns created a U-shaped entry court with a garage on each side. Boston-based landscape architect Elizabeth Hanna Morss, L.A., added an orchard along the street and a series of tall trees around the facade to create the illusion that the house had been there for centuries. Looking back, Johns declares the design a dream come true for everyone involved. She was able to express her fondness for classical architecture, while the owners indulged their affinity for things old and new. “They had fun placing contemporary artwork in more formal surroundings,” says Johns. “It’s part of the charm of this house.”

