

Rural Villa



No one is really sure what style this used to be, but everyone agreed it was one of the ugliest houses they had ever seen. "I don't know who built it," notes Skip Broome, the builder, "but it was really ugly." "It was about as bad as you get—it just had this hideous envelope," recalls Brian Lewis, a friend of the owner and an architect in San Antonio, Texas. "Nobody could believe I bought it," adds Sue Cutler, the owner. "This is what tornadoes hit in Florida."

When Sue moved to New York City from Texas a few years ago, another friend of hers, the writer Dominick Dunne, suggested that she find a weekend home near his in northeastern Connecticut. Like other owners of houses in this book, Sue was lured by the land: sixteen high acres overlooking the Connecticut River. The real-estate brochure about the property called the house "French eclectic," but in reality it was a '60s Raised Ranch with metal-frame windows, a speckled red-and-white brick façade, and a TV satellite dish on top of the hip roof.

Carpenters on the job chose to call this transformation of an eclectic Ranch "The Alamo," but it's really closer in style and spirit to an exotic villa.

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The central addition, left, rises above the remodeled wings and pool to take advantage of spectacular views of the Connecticut River in the distance.

blocks of limestone into the façade. He installed a limestone floor in the entry hall and a spiral staircase. The wrought-iron balconies in the front and back are custom-made.

The two-story center section completely changes the proportion and focus of the house, not to mention the look. Now, although Skip's crew likes to refer to it as "The Alamo," no one's really sure what to call the new house, and it no longer really matters.





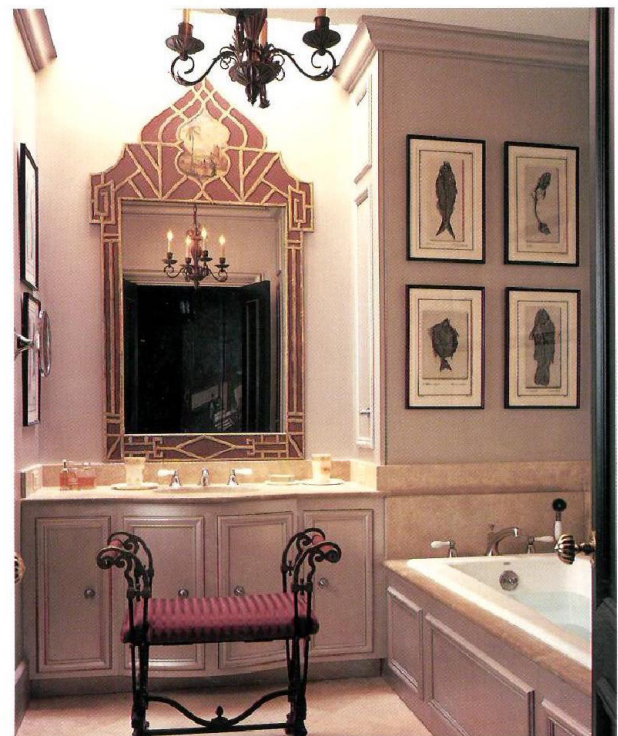
The expanded and completely refurbished interior, left and below, vanquishes any suggestion of "ranchness."

Right, a nautilus-like staircase leads to the owner's private second-floor apartment within the house.



Sketching ideas on a piece of toilet paper, Brian came up with a redesign that solved the ugly issue and gave the owner the space she required. "Sue wanted a new master bedroom, that's all," he says. "Essentially, we just put a house on top of a house and created an 1,800-square-foot, second-floor apartment for her." To get Sue into the house before the snows, Skip Broome's crew cut holes in the existing roof and built the second floor and new roof, then took out the old ceiling and roof.

After jackhammering the old brick and the windows, the contractor reframed the house and stuccoed the exterior, setting





English Sunroom

Many owners of Builders' Colonials like the way their houses look and wouldn't change a thing, at least not out front. Yet nearly all of the homeowners in this book shared a common dream and goal — to open up small rooms, create bigger family spaces, and bring broad views and full light into once-dark interiors. And for most of them, including this couple, the back of the house is ideal for such dreams and transformations.

Here, architect Robert Orr took a plain, unornamented Builders' Colonial in Connecticut and added a rear sunroom inspired by John Nash (1752–1835), the English architect noted for opulent Georgian homes (he redesigned Buckingham Palace) and solariums. These two almost opposing styles produced in Connecticut this addition, that is somewhere in the middle. “The house had very simple materials and detailing, so we didn't want to do the John Nash thing full-blown,” says Orr. “We tried to make a kind of crude interpretation that would fit into the American Colonial vernacular. We were aiming toward Georgian but through the eyes of a Colonial builder.”

The sixteen by twenty-four foot room more than makes up for the architectural details the rest of the house lacks without calling too much attention to itself. In the recessed triangular eave (or

The “before” of this Builders' Colonial can be seen behind the new formal addition. Inspired by British architect John Nash, the room opens the back of the house to the land and light.



A most un-Colonial-like room, the addition's elaborate interior features two-inch crown molding assemblies, paneling, niches and antique pine flooring. Through French doors, a terrace, pool and shingle-style poolhouse with dressing rooms, kitchen, laundry, bath and sauna.

tympantum) above the French doors is a custom-made “wheel” window inspired by a Nash solarium in London. Unfluted Doric columns with extended entablature rise to meet the rake returns. The terrace was designed by Orr's wife, landscape-designer Carol Chamberlain. Inside, builder Skip Broom turned an existing fireplace ninety degrees so it faces the new room. In his shop he custom-milled and installed assemblies of crown moldings that define the gabled ceiling and the ornate niches along the interior walls. The wide antique-pine flooring was stained and stenciled.

When one arrives here at the end of a placid walk through the rest of the Colonial, notes Orr, “this room blossoms into a sensational space that is the pièce-de-resistance of the entire house.”

