

Country mews



PHOTOGRAPHS BY ROBERT BENSON

An entablature in the Adam style surmounts the front doorway (left) of the John Flynn house, relocated from Mendon, Massachusetts, to Lyme, Connecticut. A classical urn (above), designed by Skip Broom to complement a motif found in the dwelling, adorns an entrance gatepost. In the entrance hall (opposite), a carved archway provides visual continuity with the front door's fanlight, which retains its bubbly original glass. A replicated 18th-century box lock on the paneled closet door to the left comes from Ball & Ball of Exton, Pennsylvania.

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The “mews” of our title is Stone Post Road in Lyme, Connecticut, a secluded approach to a 35-acre tract on which Harry P. “Skip” Broom—of H.P. Broom-Housewright, Inc.—reconstructs antique dwellings brought from other locations. Skip and his partner, William Oberg, plan to fill 12 sites on the land through their company, Sterling City Properties. We show on the following pages the first two homes that have been completed.

Skip and his family currently live in this c. 1800 clapboard Federal house with a hip roof, originally built by Colonel John Flynn in Mendon, Massachusetts. “We followed our customary practice of having the job foreman—in this case,

Bill Lawlor of Lyme—supervise the dismantling as well as the reassembly of the house on Stone Post Road,” says Skip.

Bill and his crew meticulously numbered every salvageable frame and joist as the dwelling came down, noting what pieces would have to be replicated. The components of the house went into a trailer until the new site in Connecticut was ready. Then, the structure rose again with modern heating, septic, and electrical systems in place. Skip’s crew spent extra hours working on the paneling and moldings. “My carpenters brought their families by to see what they had been doing,” he says. “They were that proud of their handiwork, and understandably so.”





"We haven't decided yet what to call this room," says Skip Broom. "It's a combined great room, kitchen, and keeping room, measuring approximately 22 by 20 feet." Late-Georgian paneling on the fireplace wall boasts Ionic pilasters and crown moldings with meticulously rendered dentelation. The handwoven Oriental carpet, c. 1910, comes from Romania. An oversized fanlight tops the wide doorway to an adjoining morning room. A work island with raised 18th-century panels marks the spacious kitchen area to the right.





A closer look at the Brooms' conjoined family room, kitchen, and morning room shows three distinct zones. In the first (opposite above), two camelback sofas, one adorned with a paisley throw from Laura Fisher Antique Quilts & Americana, face an 18th-century English tray table brightened by a Chinese export bowl. Claude Vernat painted the landscape above the Georgian fireplace. In the morning room (opposite below), 19th-

century Hitchcock chairs surround a country table covered by a wool shawl from Laura Fisher and displaying "Worcester Herbs" porcelain dinnerware by Royal Worcester. The pair of binoculars and a watering can are from Golden Oldies, an antiques and reproductions emporium in Queens, New York. In the kitchen area (above), spotlights recessed beneath a carved molding brighten a granite counter holding collectibles and plants.



Spode's "Savoy" bone china adorns a Sheraton mahogany table set for afternoon tea in the dining room (above). The table displays a wool shawl from Laura Fisher Antique Quilts & Americana of New York City. The Brooms decided not to use curtains in the recessed windows "because we wanted the beautiful paneling to be visible at all times." Two woodcarvers worked for almost three months to complete the pendants and detailing of the molding around this room. A portrait of Dan-

iel Webster by an unknown artist hangs against a backdrop of painted clouds. The structure's original floorboards taper from one end to the other, reflecting the determination of Colonial craftsmen who planed the trunk to get the most out of a tree, says Skip Broom. In the master bedroom (opposite above), a silk throw on the bed is by FaribolThree Weavers. A mirrored petite dresser rests atop the inlaid Sheraton chest, an heirloom dating to 1820 (opposite below).



A saltbox reborn

The second of Harry "Skip" Broom's relocated antique houses along Stone Post Road in Lyme, Connecticut, has an unusual feature. This commodious saltbox boasts a gambrel roof allowing substantial headroom in second-floor bedrooms. "We don't know the original designer's intent," he says, "but the structure was certainly larger than the average house when it was built in 1753 in Salem, Connecticut." Very soon, it became Captain Billings' Tavern, a convivial hostelry with a public room downstairs and three bedchambers upstairs for travelers. In the Colonial era, as many as four strangers shared a bed at an inn, and less capacious taverns acquired the ambience of slatternly cribs. The Billings establishment survived its public days and enjoyed continued good luck for the next 230 years. In 1989, doomed by a site coveted for commercial purposes, it faced demolition.

"I knew from my first look that this structure had potential," says Skip. "Much of the interior was unusable, but you could see how the rich wood floors had been laid. My foreman for this job—Steve Kearns of Kensington, Connecticut—started marking joists with his crew. They were a month taking the tavern down, and almost a year and a half raising it on our new site in Lyme. You see, we work slowly. You can't rush the dismantling. It's important to have a sense of how it was, particularly in those places where you know that paneling has to be replicated.



Lustrous wood tones, emboldened by sunlight, bring palpable warmth to the living room (above). Stacked twin ovens to the right of the fireplace are original to the house. The double chest of stained pine was made to the present owners' specifications by a friend. Interior designer Sandy Ceppos chose the 19th-century Canadian sawhorse for a richly hued serving table. In the master bedroom (opposite), a reproduction sleigh bed comes from Grange Furniture. Carefully gauged plantings on the new site (right) enhance the entrance facade.

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In the dining room (left), pride of place goes to an oversized hutch, a 19th-century country piece from New Brunswick, Canada. The sturdy oak dining table dates to the turn of the century and comes from a farmhouse in Ontario. Both hutch and table display Baccarat crystal, "Albi" flatware from Christofle, and "Red Aves" china by Royal Crown Derby, a division of Royal Doulton. Reproduction side chairs (opposite) have a carved snowshoe motif on their splats. The imposing, two-tiered tin chandelier was ordered from New England Coppersmiths in Haddam, Connecticut. Exposed beams in the kitchen (below) are from the original tavern. Recessed ceiling lights between crossbeams make food preparation easier at night. All counters have hardwood tops; a built-in refrigerator complements the trim cabinetry flanking the window opposite.





"Reconstructing antique dwellings really stirs the fires of some preservationists. The stauncher ones don't want to see anything really modernized about a house. Some would rather have a fine old dwelling razed than be dismantled and then raised on a new site. To them, such a house becomes less pure, albeit more comfortable, if it acquires state-of-the-art electrical systems, heating, air-conditioning, and cable television, however hidden these conveniences may be.

"My credo is that a restorer who works in the reconstruction field must have a good sense of design as to what is practical," Skip continues. "It also helps to have a superb team of artisans to assist you. I started out by putting my graduate degree in my lunch box and working as a free-lance carpenter in the Lyme area. Today, my restoration company employs 30 people, including carpenters, masons, painters, mill workers. We know each other's skills and temperaments, and most of us have made showplaces of our own homes because we love the look of old houses."

Skip and his crew successfully turned the

Billings tavern into a private home. Steve Kearns, the job foreman, is particularly happy with a replicated fireplace wall in the master bedroom. The owners saw the house just after the artisans finished their

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work. "It was turnkey ready," says Sandy Ceppos, of Sandy Ceppos Designs for the Home in New Canaan, Connecticut, who assisted the owners in their decorating. "Skip had even put a plug in a kitchen closet to accommodate a microwave oven. Everything was perfect. We waxed the floors to

help bring out their really amazing colors, had the interior walls painted, and then brought in furniture. The owners knew what they wanted, and we obtained most of the pieces from local shops. With some antique houses, re-sited or not, you often have to look for items that will correct, or perhaps cover, a design flaw in the room. We never had to do that. The artisans who raised this house had thought ahead of us.

"We decided not to use many curtains through the house because of the quality of the moldings around the windows," says Sandy. "There are unobtrusive curtains in the bedroom dormers to control morning light and in the kitchen to reduce glare." The owners also decided against laying down Oriental carpets that would conceal the richness of the floors, many comprising boards from the original tavern.

The 12 sites along Stone Post Road have sweeping views of surrounding meadows and woodlands crossed by the Falls River, a tidal stream. There is a walking path to nearby Hamburg Cove on the Connecticut River, where boats may be kept at marinas.