

Peter Casolino/Register photos

Housewright Skip Broom in front of a home in Lyme, which was built around a one-of-a-kind, 1750 blacksmith shop.



Above, an architectural detail that is a remnant of the old New Hampshire blacksmith shop in the Lyme home.

HOMES FOR THE AGES

Housewright
Skip Broom
has a way
of saving
historic gems

By Karena Garrity

His name is synonymous with the resurrection, restoration and reconstruction of 18th-century post-and-beam homes and buildings throughout the Connecticut River Valley and beyond.

He is known for his keen sense of historic style, his attention to detail and his amicable business savvy in the ever-changing world of house construction.

He is Skip Broom, owner of H.P. Broom Housewright, and he is not

just a builder, developer and preservationist. He is a visionary who has developed a unique ability to preserve the historic buildings of our past, juxtaposing their presence with modern-day amenities, creating distinctive multimillion dollar homesteads to be enjoyed and revered by their owners as well as designers, architects, builders and all who appreciate homes with "good bones."

Broom, who started out life on the outskirts of Philadelphia, first fell in love with old homes on his many visits to open houses, accompanying his mother, who shares his affinity for finely constructed houses. During his youthful years, he very much enjoyed working with his hands and creating things.

But as he grew up, his education took him in a different direction, first as an undergrad majoring in economics and ultimately a graduate degree at Columbia University. From there, it was off to Vietnam. When he returned from the war, he gave up his corporate job in New York City and decided that antique home restoration was the "road less traveled" and for him, "it has made all the difference."

"I put my diploma in my lunch box, so to speak, and I never looked back," says a soft-spoken Broom who now resides in an antique, Federal-style home in Hadlyme, which was built in 1790. It was owned by Edith Hamilton, who entertained such distinguished guests there as Albert Einstein. The property sits just a stone's throw from the Chester-Hadlyme Ferry on the Connecticut River. Broom, however, admits that his most favorite style of older homes is the Greek Revival "because of their grand simplicity."

"I am in business because I love it," says Broom. "I think that has given me the advantage, because I have chosen this, which automatically makes me better at it, because I didn't just end up doing it."

Broom is being modest. It's well known that his restoration work is some of the very best. It's eerie the way he seamlessly marries the old and the



The kitchen is bright and modern-looking even with the wide board floors and hand-hewn beams.

new to create masterfully built homes that retain the charm, essence and allure of the past, coupled with all the bells and whistles that current technology affords its owners.

A perfect example of such a home is the one he built in his Lyme development. The core of the home's floor plan is a one-of-a-kind, 1750 New Hampshire blacksmith shop, which

was slated for demolition. It was transported from its original location in 2002.

The home, which was reassembled for its first owner, designer Gretchen Mann, has now been renovated and expanded in collaboration with its current owner, designer Mark Archie of Mark Inc. in Greenwich. It sits on almost 5 level acres on Old Stone Post

Road and affords expansive views of private fields from every period window. At first glance, the home deliberately appears to be a series of interconnected barns, dressed in unique siding, some of which is fashioned after the Victorian Era board and batten siding, to add visual interest to the structure.

The “barns” are centered around the facade of an old stone paddock, which is home to an elaborately landscaped courtyard. Once inside this distinctive residence, the impressive post-and-beam structure of the former blacksmith shop — complete with soaring ceilings, a commanding fireplace, wide-plank pine flooring and walls of French doors — is opened up by a sprawling antique hand-hewn beamed foyer.

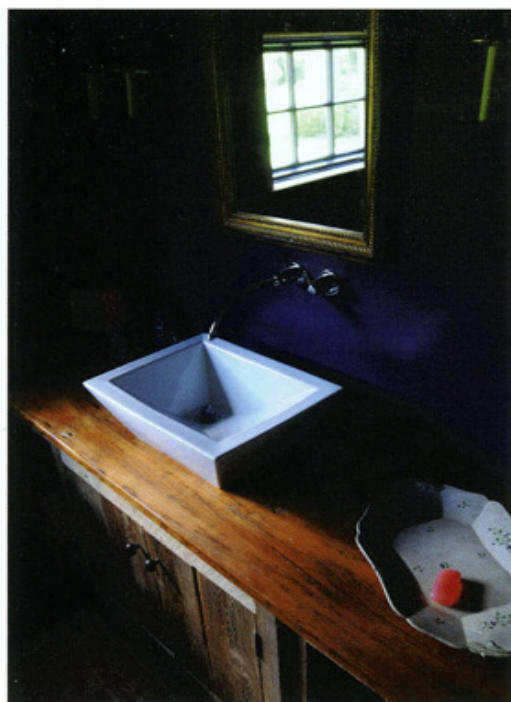
This home is only one of the unique residences that Broom has created in his 12-site, 35-acre enclave appropriately named, Stone Post Road Development, which he started in 1985. To date, he has five available sites, with three antique homes wait-



Blending the old with the new. Broom utilizes all the bells and whistles of modern technology, yet his homes retain a period look.

ing in storage for soon-to-be owners. One is a Gambrel Style home saved from demolition on its original site at the Berlin, Conn., fairgrounds. Another

is an 18th-century Cape moved from Middletown, and the last is a home that was slated for demolition in Tiverton, R.I., with eight original fire-



A modern vessel bathroom sink looks right at home in this rustic vanity.

places, all of which were “very carefully” dismantled and catalogued for reconstruction.

“I feel as though we are saving a part to history here,” says Broom, who is distraught by the alarmingly high number of historic homes and barns that are being destroyed and demolished.

“I have always loved antique homes, and it always bothered me to see these amazing homes sandwiched between a 7-Eleven and a drugstore, falling apart, so I got the idea to save some of them and make a development here in my own community,” explains Broom.

“This has definitely been a labor of love,” he smiles. “It has not been a huge financial success.”

Broom has weathered the “painful” housing market of the ‘80s as well as the recent real estate decline. He attributes his staying power to his demand for quality and resistance to cutting corners on any of his projects. In addition, he praises the efforts, hard work and personal ethics of his 20-plus employees who ensure that his clients always get what they expect.

“I started this business just me and



Skip Broom even put in a small roof sag to make the newer part of the structure look antique. Though he jokes that it won’t get any worse.

one other guy. Now I have 20-plus guys working with me, and they are all very loyal. We are like one big extended family and during recent slow times, we made a huge effort not to lay anyone off. What we did instead, was rolling layoffs so no one ever lost their jobs,” explains Broom, who hopes his biggest legacy is not just his preservation of history, but

also passing on his love for his vocation to his daughters.

“Both my children are pursuing jobs that they love as much as I love this job,” says Broom, with a large, proud smile.

His daughter Adrien Broom is a photographer, who has been featured in Rolling Stone magazine as well as many others and his daughter Margo

Broom is a yoga instructor who recently opened her own studio in New Haven.

Broom's passion for what he does is evident as he tours the exterior of the Archie home, which is currently on the market. His steel blue eyes light up from behind his wire-rimmed glasses as he points out the old barn door on the backside of the home, which is not a door at all, but from the inside reveals adjacent bedroom windows and a flat wall.

He goes on to call attention to the identical, weathered bird houses flanking the upper exterior back wall of the bedroom wing, which cover up a dryer and bathroom vents.

It's this acute attention to detail that sets Broom and his company apart in the world of restoration and construction work. He is exuberantly proud of the noticeable "sag" in the roofline of the main body of the home.



Above, an old 1752 blacksmith shop is the focal point in this home's floor plan.



While breathing new life into old homes is Broom's passion, he does not build museums. Above, a very livable nook in this old structure.

"We purposely built that into the roofline to create the sense of age and wear. It's not getting any worse," he explains.

Broom has been successfully making a living out of breathing new life into old homes for the past three decades. He has quite a following of devoted customers and has made a reputable name for himself in his specialized niche of historical reconstruction.

He says he has no favorite house to date, just like he has no favorite child. He loves them all and hopes to keep on doing what he is doing until his development is completed and he has "rescued" the last historic home in need.

Karena Garrity of Westbrook is a freelance writer who specializes in writing about real estate, construction, architecture and home decor. She is a frequent contributor to the ShoreLine Times.