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Eric J. Smith Architect reorients
a waterside Victorian for life in
the modern world, ever respectful
of its ties to the past

HISTORIC VIEWPOINT

full circle

Located on the home's main floor, a half story up from ground level, the circular porch serves as an outdoor living room, overlooking Peconic Bay. Architect Eric J. Smith restored the structure with ipe decking, bracketed posts, and an openwork railing adapted from the original, late-19th-century carpentry. The difference? "It meets code now," Smith notes.

gathering places

(THIS IMAGE) French doors make the porch accessible from the living/dining room, allowing traffic to flow freely, in and out. (BELOW) Off the entry hall and kitchen on the main level, a family room evokes a secluded treehouse effect.



a study in restraint

Cerused-oak paneling, mahogany-banded stripped oak floors, and a mullionless window and exterior door make the most of the paneled study's available views and light. In the corner of this private room—adjacent to the living area, family room, and porch—a fuel-efficient gas fireplace recalls an authentic Victorian-era coal basket. Mechanically, technologically, and environmentally, the systems in this room—and throughout the house—are state of the art.



"THE OWNERS WANTED THIS TO BE A LEGACY HOUSE," SAYS ARCHITECT ERIC J. SMITH. "They asked for a place that was respectful of the context in which it was built in 1880, but which would also be a comfortable, fun, family destination for today—and generations to come." Smith's firm, Eric J. Smith Architect, was hired to re-envision the 130-year-old Queen Anne as a well-functioning retreat for a modern family of six, plus extended family and friends. "Our clients needed a house that was not chopped up into small rooms, the way so many Victorian homes were. They wanted places where friends could enjoy cocktails overlooking the bay and where the kids could feel free to run around, indoors and out."

The desire for natural beauty—a given, thanks to the home's Shelter Island location—and a sense of play were both addressed in Smith's down-to-the-studs



grand openings

(ABOVE) Interior walls dividing three cramped rooms were removed to create one light-filled living/dining space. French doors open to the porch, creating an expansive setting for summer entertaining. (LEFT) White walls and woodwork keep the interior bright and modern in feeling. (OPPOSITE, TOP) The kitchen, formerly on the basement level, was moved up to the main floor, where it serves as the center of family activity. The bay-window glazing repeats the original tracery seen in the living room's seating alcove. (OPPOSITE, BOTTOM) A home office on the upper level of the two-story Queen Anne-style turret takes in a view of the bay and gardens, below. The fireplace is new.





private sanctuaries

(ABOVE) The main staircase leads to a wide second-story hall, where a new window seat near the custom-milled diamond-patterned, double-hung windows functions as a reading area. (RIGHT) A sleeping porch was transformed into a year-round master bedroom, with gap-planked beamed ceiling and windows all around. (OPPOSITE, BOTTOM LEFT AND RIGHT) "We wanted to create a bath and dressing area that felt as if they may have been converted from an existing storage room or closet, as so many were, 100 years ago," says Smith. Custom marble console sinks.



Designed for one of the family's children, a top-floor bedroom with slightly rounded dormers makes the most of its architectural angles and alcoves, with built-in bookshelves and a well-proportioned writing table/vanity by the window.





embracing nature

(OPPOSITE, TOP AND BOTTOM) An open-air pool pavilion, designed by Eric J. Smith Architect, extends the season with an outdoor fireplace. The dome and bracketed pillars are fast-ascending the soon-to-be-rose-covered trellises. (OPPOSITE, TOP) During renovation, the house's orientation was flipped: Its formal entry now faces the vehicular approach and pool, while the turreted porch now faces the bay. Smith extended the porch, so it now wraps around the house. (OPPOSITE, BOTTOM) Landscape architect Peter Cummin collaborated on grounds design.



renovation, which saw the house elevated on its bluff (to better protect it from the ravages of storms), turned around 180 degrees (to better expose its porches and main living areas to the tranquilizing water views), and re-landscaped, in collaboration with Connecticut-based landscape architect Peter Cummin (to provide a pool pavilion, outdoor fireplace, a snow-plow-friendly chip-and-sealed drive, and a lawn to kick a ball around on).

Of course, enchanting views from every window were of primary concern, but that didn't mean trading the historic clapboard Victorian for a glass box. "We felt it was important to honor the local, carpenter-built vernacular," notes Smith, a classically trained architect. "The discipline

comes in making the interior more functional, light-filled, and technologically up-to-date without losing the really fine details that give the house character." Smith's solution was to bring evidence of meticulous woodworking to every level of the house—from the paneled wainscoting in the stair hall to the beadboard in the master bath and the gap-planked ceilings and exposed rafters on the structure's porches and upper levels.

The results—open, airy, electronically and ecologically up-to-date—proved that it's possible to maximize a home's picturesque views without losing historical perspective.

The legacy continues. ➔ See Resources.