

# ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

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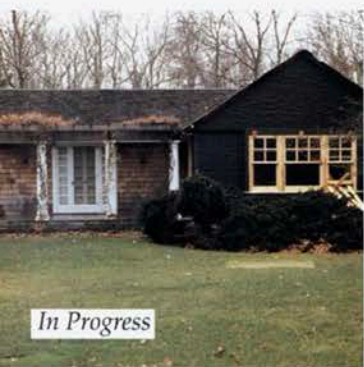






Before

ABOVE: Architect Robert A. M. Stern renovated his 1930s East Hampton, New York, bungalow in stages over an extended period.



In Progress

ABOVE: Stern, known for his Shingle Style residences, replaced the house's white siding with red-cedar shingles. The columned loggia was a later addition to the front garden façade. BELOW: The east-facing tower encloses a second-story guest bedroom.



In Progress

## AN ARCHITECTURAL EVOLUTION

ROBERT A. M. STERN RENOVATES HIS OWN EAST HAMPTON RETREAT

ARCHITECTURE BY ROBERT A. M. STERN, FAIA  
TEXT BY PAUL GOLDBERGER  
AFTER PHOTOGRAPHY BY STEVEN BROOKE



"I did the house in measured campaigns," says Stern (above). "Otherwise I'd have been locked into certain momentary thoughts."

Stern, who has lived part-time in East Hampton since the 1960s, purchased the cottage as a four-room bungalow in 1978. He has remodeled it several times since then, each time inching it gently toward monumentality. The final renovation, completed last year, does not turn it into one of the huge, rambling Shingle Style houses for which Stern is famous—he knows better than to coax this structure into more than it is capable of—but it is full of references to these houses. They come together to make a building that is amiable, welcoming and just the tiniest bit too grand for its situation.

It is hard not to think of this house as being very much like Robert Stern himself—rippling with erudition, full of aspirations to grandeur, but with a layer of whimsy and a splendid sense of irony that make him a consistently pleasurable companion. This house is a consistently pleasurable companion. It seems to know that its origins are common: It doesn't hide its bungalow beginnings, even as it makes its Jeffersonian gestures here and its Schinklesque allusions there. The house wears its knowledge lightly, and like a thoughtful conversationalist, it makes every statement with the intention of putting one at ease. The

Architects face a frustrating dilemma when designing for themselves. Nothing is more tempting than to make a house a living demonstration of all an architect's ideas, a kind of catalogue for potential clients. But serious design does not come cheap, and few architects can afford to do for themselves what they do for their clients. It's no accident that many architects, unable to indulge personal tastes in the way that, say, Sir John Soane did in the nineteenth century or Philip Johnson did in the twentieth, retreat instead into a kind of sophisticated blandness in their own houses.

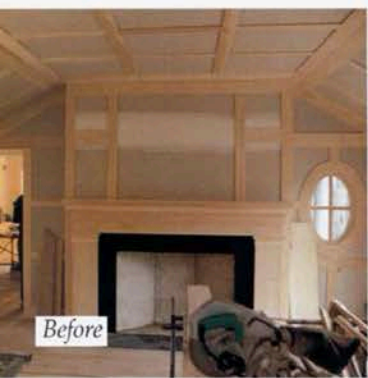
Robert A. M. Stern admits to no such compromise. Indeed, his house in East Hampton, New York, might well be thought of as an attempt to prove that the architect can be as generous to himself on a limited budget as he is to clients who commission him to build on a larger scale. The clients get more square feet, and often more elaborate details, but Stern has given his 2,000-square-foot cottage nearly as much architecture as any of his major projects.

"A one-story house in California is a charming hacienda," says Stern. "But a one-story New England-style house—without the vertical—is a ranchburger." RIGHT: The tower "makes the house look like an outbuilding of a large estate," he adds. The entrance is beyond the privet hedge at far left; clematis vines cover the central loggia.



After





result is that it comes off as gracious rather than overbearing, as witty rather than pretentious.

When Stern bought the house his first order of business was to strip off the white siding and black shutters and cover the small bungalow with shingles. Later he changed the fenestration pattern, added a kitchen wing, paneled the living room and used some Postmodern cutouts as exterior elements.

By then it was the early 1980s, and as Stern recalls, "The real estate market was going up so fast I thought that with the increase in value I could sell this and buy something nicer. But, of course, everything else in

East Hampton was going up equally fast, and so what could I do? I made my peace with staying here, and did some landscaping."

Landscaping—in the form of a picturesque rear garden and a more formal front garden, a remarkable square defined by privet hedges and corner trees that is virtually an outdoor room—was not all that Stern did. After completing these areas with a four-columned front loggia and some new decking facing the rear garden, he embarked on the most ambitious phases of the renovation: first, a new master bedroom wing in the back of the house, and then a wing to the side containing a new living room,

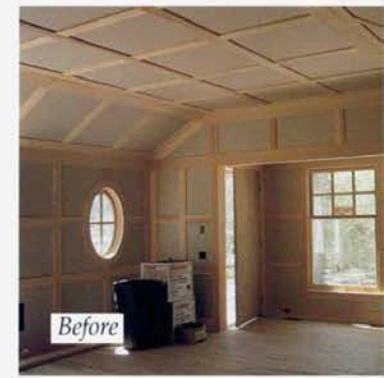
porch and entrance. The side addition gave the house its one piece of verticality, a tower with a bedroom and bath for Stern's son, Nicholas.

"I realized that the only way to really change the cottage from being a ranchburger was to give it a vertical element," Stern says. "I wanted this to be a tower you could see from the road." In fact, it's the only thing you can see from the road now that the more elaborate landscaping has largely obscured the view of the low original structure.

The tower is a kind of beacon, shining the light of Palladianism. It is a bit stubby in its proportions, but like everything in the final phase of

the house's expansion, it is robust and has a compelling presence. A squarish form, covered in shingles and punctuated by a huge central arched window in the front and a weather-vane on the roof, it more than balances the mass of the original cottage. It does not so much extend the old bungalow, however, as straddle the cultural divide between the architecture of the house Stern bought and the architecture of the houses he builds for his clients. The tower is not quite a part of either one, but is something in-between.

Stern says he likes to think of the house as representing the history of his own practice and architectural



ABOVE: Formed by Doric pilasters that echo the exterior columns, the mantel makes the hearth the nucleus of the living room.

ABOVE: A well-placed front door was an essential aspect of the renovation. Entrance previously had been through the kitchen.



ABOVE: Stern's plan evokes the "living hall" of Shingle Style houses, where the entrance hall and the living room were combined into a single space. Above the mantel, Andy Warhol's silk screen *Liz Taylor* is flanked by a pair of bronze sconces cast from branches found in the nearby woods. Stern's "Bodeleian" chair is in the dining room beyond.



ABOVE: The living room—the final phase of the remodel—displays pieces of sentimental value to Stern. The chesterfield is from a former apartment; the 1880s British wood chair was a find. The club chairs, covered in a Donghia raffia, are his design. Robert Rauschenberg's 1967 *Paris Review* is to the left of the oval window, which Stern says "punctuates the room."





sensibility, and it is full of signs of his evolution as an architect. The earlier renovations are full of frankly Post-modern details, such as the two-dimensional cutout columns that were plunked next to the side door. By the time Stern designed the loggia facing the front garden, the classical joking was gone and the columns had turned serious, as real as any three-dimensional objects can be.

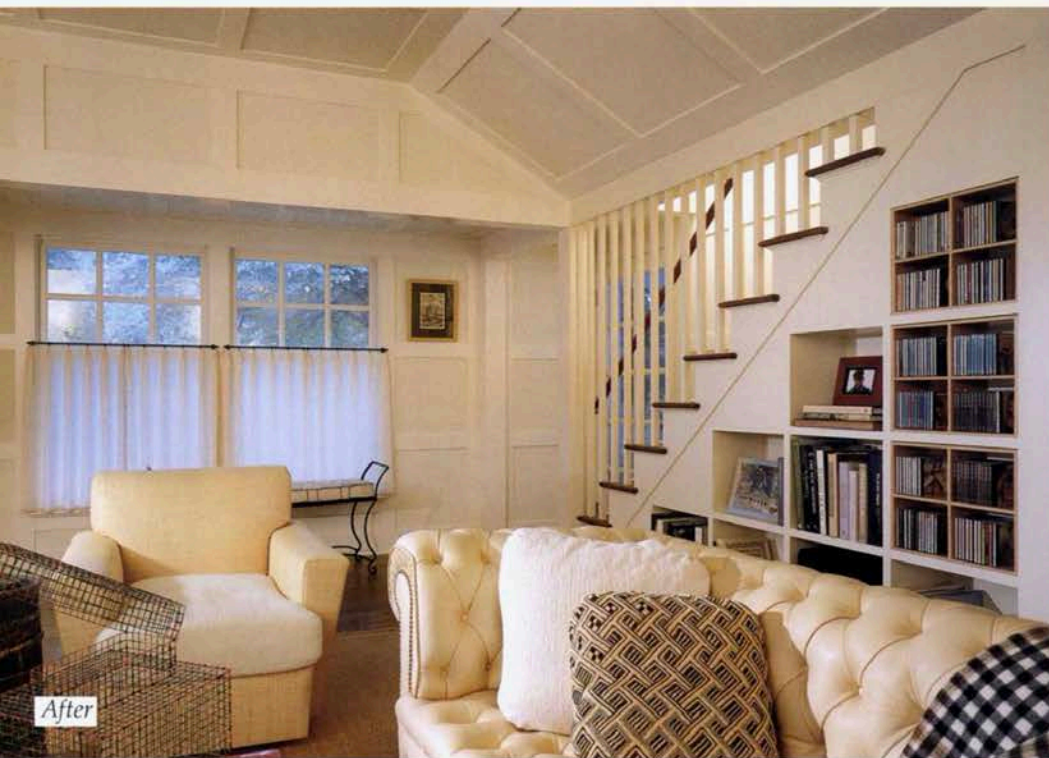
The detailing became more elaborate still in the master bedroom wing,

which Stern refers to as an homage to Thomas Jefferson. This particular area of the house honors Jefferson both literally and conceptually: Its outside elevation, with fluted columns under a low arched window, incorporates motifs that strongly suggest Jefferson's architecture. But the spirit of the book-lined room, which is truly as much a library as a bedroom, evokes Jefferson in its combination of functions.

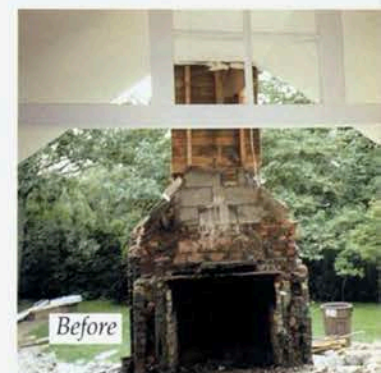
"You should either eat in a library

ABOVE: A stair in the living room leads to the guest bedroom. To enliven the walls and ceiling, the wood paneling—"inspired by nineteenth-century Arts and Crafts interiors"—was painted in contrasting shades.

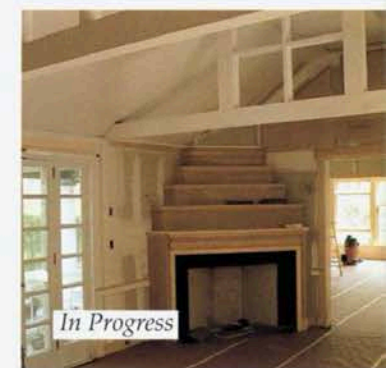
BELOW: In keeping with the tenets of the Shingle Style, Stern conceived the living room stair as an important part of the architecture. "It borrows space: It opens onto and extends the room," he says. The trapezoidal pattern at the corner of the tray ceiling is repeated on the stair wall, where recessed bookshelves create a grid that complements the paneling—another Shingle Style reference.



ABOVE: "The house reflects ongoing thinking," Stern says. "The dining room, for instance, has elements in it that are clearly 'eighties-ish.'" The room's French doors open to the front loggia; the living room is through the doorway to the right. At the fireplace are a pair of "Hauskoller" chairs by Josef Hoffman from ICF. A late-19th-century oak-and-inlaid-tile dining table is in the foreground.



ABOVE: Stern retained only the fireplace from the original living room, stripping it of its red-brick facing and using it as the starting point for the new dining room.



ABOVE: The scale of the dining room is enhanced by "window frame" trusses and a stepped mantel. Putting it on axis to the living room "augmented whatever slight sense of spaciousness existed," says Stern.

Stern has given his 2,000-square-foot cottage nearly as much architecture as any of his major projects.





BELOW: Detailed as a classical pavilion, the master bedroom contains the architect's personal library. Stern designed the bed linens; the chair is his "Bodleian" prototype. ABOVE: A half-elliptical window looks out to the garden.

Stern cites a Jeffersonian influence: "He exaggerated the scale of interior elements, producing a weightiness of architectural expression." ABOVE: The recessed niche over the bed corresponds to the window on the opposite wall.



or sleep in a library, and I made my decision to sleep in one," says Stern. "To control all the elements of your mind from one spot, to be surrounded by books and nature—to me, that is Jefferson."

The room is a kind of classical pavilion, a bit more genteel than the newer tower wing. The elegantly crafted built-ins that flank the bed in the small room are stained a deep green, almost black, and the floor is dark too; the somber tones together with the precise detailing give the room something of an urban quality, and the shift in mood from the rest of the house is palpable.

If the master bedroom/library represents Stern's academic side, the new living room and its accompanying tower show his more gleeful eclectic impulses in full flower. And while the house in a sense replicates Stern's architectural history, it contains his personal history as well. The chester-

OPPOSITE: Doric pilasters and a carved triglyph frieze and pediment frame the headboard wall. The Greek Revival motifs and the Stern-designed obelisks are in stark contrast with the Jeffersonian barrel-vaulted ceiling.







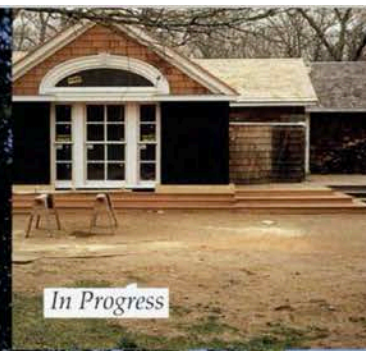
Before

"The garden was a tangle when I arrived on the scene," Stern recalls. "But it had great possibilities, and it's become a spectacular focus." ABOVE: The house had no outdoor deck.



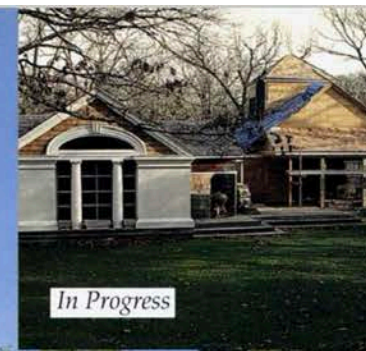
In Progress

ABOVE: Stern took the rear portion of the residence down to its foundation, installing a master bedroom. He added slate steps, white trim, and windows that establish a Shingle Style link.



In Progress

"I always liked the way Jefferson handled the suppressed curve," Stern says. ABOVE: The stepped platform and half-elliptical window were nods of classicism he used on the facade.



In Progress

ABOVE: "The screen porch is the big element," notes Stern. The open deck eventually became relatively small. The red cedar roof shingle were stained weathered gray Marvin windows.

field in the living room came from a Manhattan apartment he designed for himself and his former wife nearly twenty-five years ago; other pieces are from his office, from forays into Long Island antiques shops and from his travels. A red-lacquered low table, an 1880s wood chair, a 1950s reading lamp and raffia-covered club chairs share pride of place in the room, and they join in establishing a considerable degree of harmony.

In the end, the living room is like the house itself: an essay in combination, in juxtaposition, in making much out of what is there. It rambles with the ease and self-assurance of a very large house, though it is in fact so small that it contains no real circulation space to speak of. Yet it proves that the essential qualities of Robert Stern's architecture come not from scale but from an intelligently crafted sensibility focused on comfort more than theory. As Stern himself puts it, "If I had a motto, it would be 'Not defiance—alliance.'" □

RIGHT: The rear garden façade is composed of two classical pavilions that provide a visual counterpoint to each other. The templelike structure at left contains the master bedroom; the more open colonnaded pavilion features a truncated gable and a screen porch. "It's all about the pleasure of a miniature," says Stern of his house.



After

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