



A New Equestrian Estate



Light Designed by the firm of Ferguson & Shattuckman, the stone house in Fairfield, Connecticut, is conceived as a main block to which wings were added.

Approach The entry foyer opens in grand fashion to the drawing room.

Inspired by her family's chateau in France, a transplant to New England commissions a compound centered on a grand country house. With a library and a conservatory, stables and a guest house, it has become a place of joy.

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ARCHITECTS often invent stories to give new structures a history and to explain the apparent evolution of buildings on the property over the course of hundreds of years.

In the case of the new equestrian estate in Fairfield, Connecticut, Ferguson & Shumansian Architects had to look no farther than their client for an incredible and inspiring back story.

The woman, a native of France, had come to America to study law. She had no intention of making this her permanent home but, as these things sometimes happen, she fell in love. She got married, earned her law degree, had two children, and settled down in Connecticut.

Her grandfather had left her the family chateau in France; she realized that she wanted an estate in America that her children could live in and pass down.



Above The 30-acre Connecticut property includes a barn and paddocks for the horses; the client is a competitive equestrian. **Top** The house is constructed of fieldstone and has a natural slate roof. Details were carefully planned to suggest age and evolution of the building over time. **Opposite** A special guest takes a peek into the drawing room through a set of French doors.





In the entry hall, woodwork's painted a saturated blue makes a bold statement. The floor is local, hand-hewn stone.

While the exteriors are decidedly American, the interiors reveal stylistic influences from its European owner. The client had specific ideas about her family's legacy compound.



Above A 19th-century Gothic Revival fireplace mantelpiece inspired the suggested time period in the library.

Left Wood paneling in the Butler's pantry is designed around the antique cabinet.

Right Even the landscaping reinforces the illusion of a long history. One wing of the house is clad in cedar. A labyrinth is found in the sloped meadow.





Above The informal kitchen, a gathering spot, has a large island and painted farmhouse-style cabinetry. **Below** The breakfast room's bay window takes in the view. **Opposite** Additional columns in the mudroom carry through on the farmhouse theme.



She set her heart on a stone house—the old chestnut is stone—and as it turns out, there's actually a precedent for that choice of building material in the area.

When members of the Ferguson & Sherman team showed her a 1920s stone house in Connecticut, which they had restored and renovated, the client told them it was exactly what she was looking for.

After touring three properties, she bought a 30-acre estate that included a house that had been poorly modified so many times that it couldn't be saved, says Ferguson & Sherman principal Andrew Oyer.

The client had very specific ideas about what would become her family's legacy compound. Her list included a living room/dining room combination that could be cleared of furniture to create a dance floor; a conservatory where she might sip a cup of tea in the afternoon sun; a library where she could work in the evening; a big kitchen for sit-down meals; and an unbeated screened porch where she could feel the cold air while bundled up next to a roaring fire on a winter night.



The client was clear about her wish list: a stone house with room for dancing, a sun-filled conservatory, a library to work in at night, and a big family kitchen.



Left The conservatory's durable floor is laid in boldly patterned geometric and encaustic tiles. **Above** The main structure is intended to appear as an old five-bay house to which was added wings and connecting passages. **Opposite** With darker window and decorative plaster, the primary suite is the epitome of elegance in white.





Left A massive stone fireplace warms the screened porch during the region's cooler months. **Below** Accommodating family and friends visiting from France, the guest house complements the main house. **Opposite** The hand-some pool-house spa and pool are adjacent to the main house. The stone wall incorporates an outdoor fireplace.



As a competitive equestrian, she also wanted a barn large enough to stable her horse and those of her friends, as well as a pool house with a spa where she could relax after rides. In addition, a two-bedroom guest house was needed to accommodate family members from Europe who come for extended stays.

Ferguson & Shamarian designed a 13,400-square-foot main house that looks as though it has evolved over two and a half centuries. The five-bay main house centers a five-part composition; subtle asymmetries suggest a modest original house to which a main block and balancing hyphen and wing appear to have been added during the 19th and 20th centuries.

The illusion continues inside, where the high-ceilinged drawing room, for instance, is intended to look as if a former loggia had been enclosed. The pool house is intended to look as though it had once been a farm shed.

While the exterior is decidedly American, the interiors

reveal the stylistic influences of its European owner.

"There were times where we broke rules," Oyen says. The library, for example, which was inspired by the Gothic Revival mantelpiece the client selected, recalls a room in Ireland's Lisnane Castle.

"Because of the mantelpiece, we placed the library in the 19th century," Oyen says.

The timing of the project was what Oyen calls "brisk"—three years from start to finish. The land itself created the biggest challenge. It looks like gentle, rolling hills but it actually has a big change in grade. The 10-foot difference from one side of the property to the other was rectified with retaining walls and step-down gardens.

"The project started with the interior designer, who's an old friend of the client," Oyen says. "He brought in his favorite players to form an extraordinary team. This isn't just a pretty house. It's a world where joy comes from seeing people happy using it." **► FOR RESOURCES, SEE PAGE 104.**

