

A FASHION INSIDER'S STAMFORD ESCAPE

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SEPT. 23

*Antique meets modern  
in Leslie Cohen's  
Westport home.*

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Because the house lacked a formal entry hall, the owners converted a courtyard into an outdoor foyer. Under a delicate arbor of birch trees, smooth river rocks carpet the ground and a bluestone path leads the way.

# MODERN VIEWS

For a fashion industry insider, this lakefront home in Stamford inspired a shifting of tastes from traditional to sleek, serene, and minimal.



by SUZANNE GANNON photographs HÜYLA KOLABAS

**R**oughly five years ago, when a broker described this circa 1965 modern on a wooded parcel in northern Stamford to its current owners, she described it as “odd.”

Odd, she said, because although an architect had designed it with super-clean lines and minimal adornments, a subsequent owner had come along and, you could say, “added a little character.” Longing for a Colonial, he or she had redesigned the kitchen in a country French motif, added crown moldings where they were never intended, and installed floral-pattern hardware in a bathroom painted an unflattering peach.

Her clients weren’t interested. They had been clear that they were in the market for an old house. One of the homeowners, in fact, had just restored with meticulous attention a 1734 salt box in Fairfield. (The furnishings were so period-correct that the buyer he sold it to bought everything in it, including the candlesticks.)





Natural light floods the upstairs through two walls of windows. The straight-lined dining set is centered on an alcove that showcases a piece from the owners' collection.

But toward the end of their appointment with the Realtor, as house after house in the day's lineup failed to pique their interest, they agreed to take a look, begrudgingly.

"I walked in, saw the view, and made an immediate offer," says the homeowner. The view that sold him was a sweeping vista of a sizable private lake, framed in latticed windows of single-paned 1960s glass. "It was too magical to pass up."

Situated under a leafy canopy, the house appears to float on the edge of a cliff, a box of light through which you can see the greenery of the nature preserve on the other side. It is a tree house from which one can climb, down a meandering footpath bordered by ferns, raspberry bushes, and other deer-enticing plants, to a dock at the lake's edge. (The dock, which features two lounge chairs and an idling canoe, is where, a bit more than

a year ago, the homeowners tied the knot and became husband and husband.)

For three years they lived in it, saving up for an interior renovation that would return the house nearly to its original design. One of the homeowners says he had fallen in love with the work of Austrian-American architect Richard Neutra on a visit to Palm Springs and that that experience informed his approach.

Two years ago, they were ready to begin the project, working directly with general contractor Bob Carlson, the principal of Carlson Construction, to oversee four principal changes: tearing down the wall that separated the kitchen from the living and dining areas, hijacking the third bedroom in order to create a dressing room adjacent to the master bedroom that was fit for a fashionable king (or two), opening up the fireplace on the kitchen side, and replacing the checkerboard of windows with large



The interiors were furnished in a neutral palette so they wouldn't distract from the view down to the lake. The owners opened up the space by removing a wall that had separated the kitchen from the living room and gave the fireplace two openings. The fireplace surround is lagos azul.







"We mixed a little bit of everything in this house. The furnishings are **SOFT AND TACTILE** but **FUNCTIONAL** too."

—THE HOMEOWNER



Since the new kitchen is visible from the living room, the owners chose custom cabinetry by Boffi in dark walnut that resembles a series of walnut armoires. The refrigerator and the hood above the range are concealed.



sheets of thermal-paned glass.

"Now when I turn on the heat," quips the homeowner, "I'm not heating the neighborhood."

The natural beauty of the three-and-a-half acre site—from which you cannot see another home—mandated that the restoration incorporate the outdoors into the indoors and vice versa. In other words, the transition between the two had to be seamless.

That mandate first focused on the entry into the house. Upon stepping over the threshold, visitors found themselves immediately in the living space, without the benefit of a vestibule for hanging a coat or stashing a dripping umbrella. The owners decided to make up for the shortcoming by transforming the courtyard into an outdoor foyer of sorts, planting birch trees with papery thin bark in a forest floor covered in loose river rock, each stone polished to the roundness of thick pancakes. A bluestone path laid into the river rock leads to the front door.

To design the interiors, they worked with interior



**right:** A closet fit for a king (or two), this elaborately designed walk-in/dressing room features a place for every garment and accessory, a necessity for the fashion-selling half of this couple. **below:** In the master bedroom and bath, a two-sided fireplace with a sleek, massive surround adds warmth and ambience. **below right:** Minimal accessories are in keeping with the master bath's clean lines.





designer Mar Silver of Westport. Together they chose a muted palette—taupes, beiges, shimmering silvers, and dark wood—that would not distract from the landscape outside.

They finished the hearth, mantel, and fireplace surround a masculine *lagos azul*. In the kitchen, country French gave way to Italian contemporary: dark walnut cabinetry by Boffi that conceals not only the hood above the range, but also the refrigerator.

“Because the kitchen is visible to the rest of the living room, we wanted it to look like furniture, like an armoire,” explains the homeowner. “And if I’m in there cooking, I want to be able to enjoy the company.”

With their spare but well-placed furnishings and décor—massive matching sofas and a square coffee table from Holly Hunt; a wall-mounted sideboard from Design

Within Reach that seems to levitate; tiny flutes affixed to exposed ceiling beams to soften the hard lines in the tradition of feng shui; mesmerizing landscapes they found off the Place des Vosges in Paris—the interiors suggest the hand of a skilled visual editor.

“It’s the antithesis of knickknacks,” says the homeowner.

So it’s no surprise that this traditionalist reborn as a modernist, a third-generation retailer whose family’s men’s and women’s apparel shop got its start in Westport, has honed his touch for marketing and merchandising by editing the collections on the sales floor. (The chain has now gone bicoastal.)

The master bath offers some of the same visual treats as the living and dining areas. The view of the lake is framed in a window just above a deep tub, and a stall

right and opposite:  
Side-by-side wall-mounted  
sinks and stainless steel  
shower pipes by Boffi  
riff on the theme of  
togetherness.  
below: The bathroom, like  
many rooms in the home,  
looks out on the lake.



shower with a frameless glass enclosure adds an industrial punch: side-by-side showerheads whose roughing is encased in fat, freestanding steel pipes that rise directly out of the floor. Designed by Boffi, each features a pop of color: a whimsical red handle for temperature regulation.

Silver, who had a previous passion for 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>-century furniture and who helped the homeowner decorate his salt box, says, "As creative people move through their lives, their world opens up a little bit more, and they feel like doing something different."

Working together was a "real collaboration," she says. "The space is so soft, there's nothing arresting to the eye."

Says the homeowner, "We call it Serenity Lake." **ah**

#### RESOURCES

Mar Silver Design, 203-341-0413; marsilverdesign.com

Boffi, boffi-soho.com





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Side-by-side wall-mounted sinks and stainless steel shower pipes by Boffi riff on the theme of togetherness.


below: The bathroom, like many rooms in the home, looks out on the lake.



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