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New Design & Construction — more than 5,000 sq.ft.

Winner: **G. P. Schafer Architect, PLLC**



Project: Willow Grace Farm, Dover Plains, NY

Architect: G. P. Schafer Architect, PLLC, New York, NY; Gilbert P. Schafer III, AIA, principal

Contractor: Goehring Restorations Ltd., Brooklyn, NY

Landscape Designer: Deborah Nevins & Associates, Inc., New York, NY

Interior Designer: Michael S. Smith Inc., Santa Monica, CA

Eastern Heritage

The natural beauty and storied history of New York's Hudson River Valley has long attracted attention and sparked imaginations. In 1996 legislation that designated the valley a National Heritage Area, Congress described the region — which is commonly defined as stretching from the Tappan Zee Bridge in the south to Albany and Troy in the north — as “the landscape that defined America.” Among the region's many pivotal roles, it was an important trade route to Canada and the western frontier during the 1600s, and in turn, a major point of conflict during the American Revolution. Following the completion of the Erie Canal in 1825, the valley became an important industrial center, attracting tycoons such as John D. Rockefeller, Frederick William Vanderbilt and Franklin Roosevelt, who built grand estates there. Its extraordinary vistas also inspired the Hudson River School, a group of 19th-century American Romantic landscape painters that included Thomas Cole and Asher Durand.

Today, the Hudson Valley is home to the largest concentration of recognized Historic Places anywhere in the U.S., including many fine examples of beloved historic northeastern housing types from the 18th and 19th centuries. Therefore it was the perfect location for a new home and outbuildings for a family of East Coast returnees who wanted a refuge from their busy lives in Los Angeles. As Gil Schafer, AIA, principal of New York City-based G. P. Schafer Architect, PLLC, explains, the clients had cherished memories of time spent in New England farmhouses. “That was where we started from,” he says. “We wanted the house to be simple and unpretentious, but a little more elegant on the interior. So we looked at some of the more elegant farmhouses in the valley, particularly those with Dutch Colonial influences in terms of molding shapes. However, we wanted strong simple shapes and details so we didn't lose the farmhouse sensibility.”

The site is a high wooded knoll with sweeping views from the Berkshire Mountains in the east to the Shawangunk Mountains in the west. As a companion to the project, a nearby loosely Federal-style farmhouse was also purchased by the client; the initial intention was to move it to the new site, but ultimately it provided a variety of antique building materials for the new house, including floorboards, beams, doors, hardware, mantels and ornament. “Style-wise, the original house was a late-18th-, early-19th-century farmhouse that had had wings added to it, so that was the basis by which we started our design,” says Schafer. “The problem with the house was that it had been built into the side of a hill and was also a mishmash of styles, so we said, ‘Let's look at its origins, its early-19th-century life as a farmhouse.’ And that became our pretext.”

The 8,500-sq.-ft., three-story new house is set within an assemblage of sage-green buildings arranged around a central court to create a farm-like composition. On the southern side is a large clapboard barn with a central pass-through from the court to the garden to the south; and a smaller stone and clapboard shed at the northeastern edge provides a sense of enclosure. New retaining walls visually link the buildings and accommodate for shifts in grade. These were carefully positioned to allow for the retention of existing trees close to the house. Landscaping by New York City-based Deborah Nevins was kept deliberately informal to preserve the character of the site, and to blur the transition to adjacent woodland.

As the house is taller than a typical farmhouse, the entry façade's Federal proportions are carefully scaled. Windows with friezes and cornices are anchored by the columns, delicate pilasters and moldings of the entry



A new 8,500-sq.-ft. house and outbuildings by New York City-based G. P. Schafer Architect, PLLC, draw on local Hudson Valley precedents — and utilize materials from an existing Federal farmhouse — to create an authentic, sustainable family home. All photos: Carter Berg

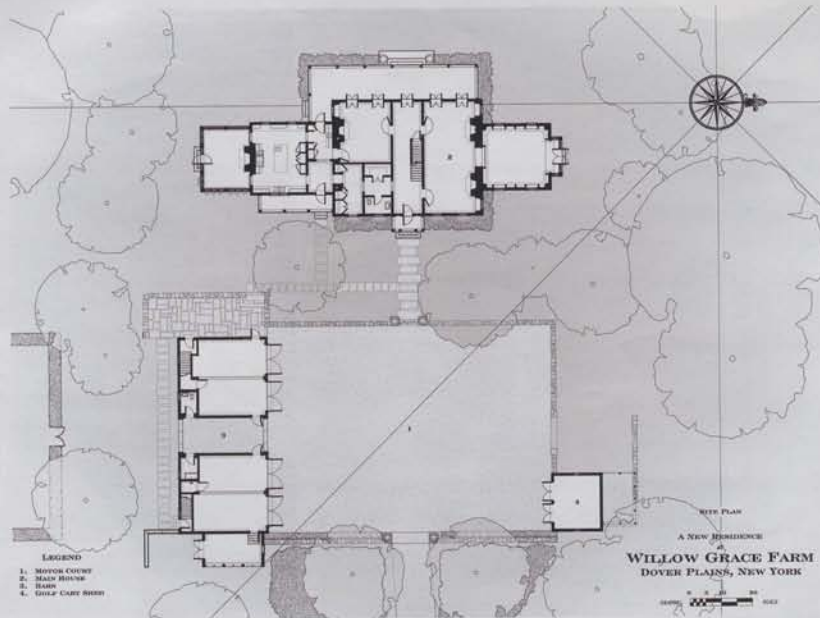
porch—a single door surrounded by a transom and operable sidelites. “The client wanted the ceilings to be all on the tall side,” says Schafer. “We tried to scale the windows so that we didn’t exacerbate this extra height. Plus, we really tried to nestle the house into the trees—we kept as many of the original trees as we could—and bring the understory of the forest up to the house so that it appears blended with the site.”

In accordance with the clients’ requirements, the house features more generously proportioned interior spaces than typical Colonial models. Public and entertaining rooms are located on the first floor; the living room and library are on the northern side and less formal spaces such as the dining room, kitchen, mudroom, powder room and fully glazed porch are on the southern side. A large central stair hall stretching from the front to the rear of the house is bathed in natural light from the entry door and sidelites on the eastern side and French doors on the western side. This hall is repeated on each of the upper floors, as is the light interior palette. All of the ceilings are brush-painted with lime wash paint and walls have an applied plaster texture above and below the applied chair rail. This treatment provides an unobtrusive backdrop for the clients’ collection of 18th- and 19th-century English and American antiques and paintings, as well as the hand-painted mural of Hudson Valley scenes specially commissioned for the dining room.

Like most of the rooms in the house, the living room is positioned to receive the maximum natural light and flow to other spaces—it spans the full depth of the house and has exposures on three sides. Along the fourth wall, it is anchored by a pair of fireplaces with matching mantels; one is an original 19th-century Hudson Valley piece found by the interior decorator, Michael Smith of Santa Monica, CA, and the other is an exact copy. The dining room has a similar period mantel. The mantels are lined and faced in plaster with hearths of antique brick salvaged from the original house.

The living room flows into the library via a large paneled jamb between the fireplaces. Two steps down provide extra height and also the suggestion that this wing may have been built at a different time from the central section—a notion that is reinforced by the less formal beamed and wood-plank ceiling. Hierarchy is indicated here and in other rooms by scale and detail choices. (For example, all of the “Colonial Revival-era” bathrooms feature Art Deco-style fixtures.)

Throughout the interiors, millwork and interior details remain strong but simple. Wide-plank floors, also salvaged from the original house, were hand-sanded and finished by contractor Gochring Restorations of



The house is set on a high wooded knoll on the property, where an assemblage of buildings arranged around a central “farm court” creates a context—or “precinct.” Site plan: courtesy of G. P. Schafer Architects

Brooklyn, NY, with “railroad varnish” to preserve natural imperfections. In the stair hall, the robust stair balusters and simple newel posts speak to Dutch Colonial, rather than Federal, regional styles. “It is elegant, but unpretentious,” says Schafer. “For example, the simple block newel comes straight down, as opposed to something turned or curvilinear as later detailing would have been—we didn’t want to lose the sense that this was a farmhouse.”

This character is much in evidence in the kitchen, where the same wide-plank floors suggest that this room is on equal footing with the more formal areas of the house. Cabinetry details resemble furniture, rather than utilitarian, casework—raised panel doors with custom turned wood knobs and custom-made wrought-iron “L” hinges, anchored by “absolute black” Belgian marble countertops, acid-washed for a distressed texture. To give the room a lighter feel, the ceiling’s salvaged antique-timber beams and planks were lime-washed.

Utilizing the materials from the original house posed exciting challenges and opportunities for the firm. “The salvaged house was a complete mishmash of virtually every style from the 18th century,” says Schafer, “from very simple Colonial millwork to more Victorian-style windows and early-19th-century Federal detailing. We weren’t able to use all of the materials in their original functions—the doors, for example, were shorter than the code-required height for contemporary houses, so we put them in closets in the basement.”



A broad central stair hall extends from the front to the rear of the house and is repeated on each floor. It is bathed in natural light from the entry door’s transom and sidelites.



The living room spans the full depth of the house and has exposures on three sides. It is anchored along the fourth wall by a pair of fireplaces with matching mantels; one is an original 19th-century Hudson Valley piece and the other is an exact copy.



Above: The kitchen's architectural character makes clear that this room is on an equal footing with the more formal areas of the house – its cabinetry details resemble furniture, rather than utilitarian casework, and it has the same wide plank floors as the more formal rooms.

Left: This doorway opening from the stair hall into the dining room reveals another of the early-19th-century mantels acquired for the house; the doorway is aligned with a similar one across the hall that leads to the living room.

While LEED certification wasn't sought by the firm, the combination of "green" design strategies throughout the house certainly qualify as sustainable design. Besides modern measures such as Icynene insulation, multi-zoned climate-control systems and insulated glazing, the program was also guided by traditional – and inherently sustainable – principles, such as maximizing natural light and ventilation and using porches to provide shade. An abundance of materials were also incorporated in a sustainable fashion from the existing house, and recycled denim insulation was used in the walls. "We did things that were 'green' on an intuitive, common sense level," says Schafer. "We weren't cutting down more trees for floorboards or paneling or things like that. While it was not a LEED's approach per se, we followed traditional, basic principles."

Other materials used include: brass hardware by Ball & Ball Hardware of Exton, PA; iron hinges by Historic Housefitters of Brewster, NY; interior lighting by Price Glover, Inc., and Ann Morris Antiques, both of New York City; and mantels were by Francis J. Purcell of Philadelphia, PA.

Only after entering the house is its greatest asset revealed at the rear. Beyond the French doors, a porch that stretches along the entire central block and a broad lawn, a circular fire pit situated within a grove of trees provides the perfect setting to enjoy magnificent views of the Hudson Valley. "You drive through the woods for quite a while, winding and winding your way up the property with no idea where you are headed," says Schafer. "Then you come around a bend and see the house, naturally nestled into a woodland grove. But you never see the view until you are invited in." – *Lynne Lavelle*

WEB ONLY: For a list of suppliers for this project, go to www.period-homes.com/extras/SchaferSuppliers.htm; for additional photographs, go to www.period-homes.com/extras/July09Schafer.htm

A circular fire pit situated within a grove of trees provides the perfect setting to enjoy magnificent views of the Hudson Valley.



To give the impression that the house may have grown over time, the rear façade is less formal in composition. A long porch stretches across the entire length of the central block and leads to a broad lawn.

