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DETAILS

ELEGANT ARCHITECTURAL
ELEMENTS BY GIL SCHAFFER
IMBUE A NEW DUTCH COLONIAL
WITH A VENERABLE OLD SOUL



WRITTEN BY DEBRA STELLER
PHOTOGRAPHY BY ERIC PIASECKI



A LOVE OF OLD HOUSES

has been ingrained in Gil Schafer since childhood, when he lived in a 19th-century farmhouse and vacationed at his grandmother's Colonial Revival home in Georgia. So it's no surprise that Schafer's designs are always grounded in history.

"We try to find that balance between a sense of connectivity and the ability to maintain the character and soul of an old house," says Schafer, founder of G.P. Schafer Architecture & Design in New York City, a firm renowned for translating traditional architecture into comfortable spaces for modern life.

And that's exactly how Schafer approached the design for this house in Middletown, New Jersey—where early Dutch colonists built homes that resembled the ones they left behind in Europe. But it wasn't just historical precedent that drove Schafer's design. His clients wanted a Dutch Colonial house that was scaled to suit their new status as empty nesters. They also wanted the house to have a subtle presence on its deep, narrow lot with a view of the Navesink River.

Working with a landscape plan devised by landscape architect Miranda Brooks, Schafer designed a house with a compact front facade—nestled into a tree- and boxwood-lined setting. The broad rear facade boasts two wings that project forward, a dramatic Dutch gambrel roof, and a series of connected porches that run the length of the house. Painted wood-shingle siding gives the home the appearance of a house added to over time.

Why does that matter? Because many old houses—at least in the East—started life in the late 18th century. "If they're still around, they probably were added to by each generation," Schafer says. "We follow that idea when designing a new house. It breaks down the scale of the house and adds a sense of history."

Library This paneled space doubles as the living room. **Architect** In addition to his architectural prowess, Gil Schafer is also author of his second book, *A Place to Call Home: Tradition, Style, and Memory in the New American House* (Rizzoli). **Entry** Double-hung sidelights frame a wide Dutch door. **Staircase** Custom-carved stringer brackets embellish stair risers. **Guest bath** An eyebrow dormer funnels in light. **Exterior columns** Federal-period moldings reinforce a sense of history. **Window seat** Muntined windows offer river views. **Back stair** Dark-stained banisters and newels add elegance. **Guest bedroom** Upper-level rooms nest under a gambrel roof. **Rear facade** Scrolled console brackets flank the central dormer. **Preceding pages** Nestling the house into the landscape masks its size.





Surprisingly, first-time visitors to the 7,500-square-foot house might not even know the Navesink River is nearby. They drive up the crunchy gravel driveway, park their cars in the motor court, and enter the seemingly landlocked home through a refined entry portico and wide Dutch door. From there they look down the grand stair hall and through French doors to discover the riverbank is only 80 feet away.

That front hall is more than a threshold to the view, though. "It also tells the story of the home," Schafer says. "You see the staircase with its curved landing. You see detailed millwork. You immediately understand the character of the house."

Character is big with Schafer, who believes in "getting the bones right." For this house, it meant looking at architecture and millwork from the first quarter of the 19th century. "Federal-period moldings are more delicate, more refined," he says. "We tuned our proportions and details to that language. If you get it right historically, the decoration can stray a bit and integrity isn't lost."

As for the "new" part of this house, every inch of it was designed for how the homeowners want to live, Schafer says. Rooms are small enough to make the couple feel cozy. Four bedrooms, five full baths, and two powder rooms accommodate family as well as guests. A

modern cook's kitchen connects gracefully with the spaces around it. The house includes a gym on the second floor, a golf simulator in the basement, and a geothermal heating system. "They can control everything in the house through an iPhone," says Schafer, who also emphasizes that the architecture doesn't stand alone.

"The house really knits well into Miranda's gently terraced landscape," Schafer says. "And Libby Cameron [the interior decorator] chose decor that reinforces traditional architecture while holding its own. Collectively, we made something magic." ■

Architect: Gil Schafer **Interior designer:** Libby Cameron

Landscape designer: Miranda Brooks

For more information, see sources on page 105

Grand stair hall Painted turned colonette balusters and a railing topped with dark mahogany highlight the curved landing. **Dining room** Wainscoting, moldings, and a Federal-period mantel wear vibrant teal paint that plays off English hand-blocked wallpaper. **Kitchen** Painted ceiling beams, recessed-panel cabinetry with wrought-iron hinges and painted knobs, and a furniture-style island give the thoroughly modern cook's kitchen a period feel. **Butler's pantry** Bright blue-painted cabinetry with gold hardware contrasts yet complements the kitchen cabinetry. **Rear facade** The living room, dining room, and breakfast nook open to porches along the riverfront facade, creating a powerful connection with the water. Schafer's strategy of tucking rooms under the gambrel roof reduced the scale of the house.

