

EAST COAST

HOME

+ DESIGN



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OPPOSITE

The amusing pair of unusual concrete 19th c greyhounds from Christies flank the main entrance to Nor Tor.



The Rebirth of Nor Tor

N

estled on a prime Greenwich property is a magnificent home masterfully renovated to maintain its original integrity. Having received an award in Greenwich's Landmark Program, the home called Nor Tor has been accepted through Phase 2 of the National Registry of Historic Homes.

The original property comprised 33 acres. Most of it was sold off in the 1960s, leaving a proper drive and entrance for an estate of this caliber lacking. This problem was resolved in the current renovation by re-contouring the front land, cutting back an extensive hill, and creating a new private drive, thereby developing a proper entrance marked by stone pillars that create a distinct sense of arrival.

STORY BY MEG MCAULEY KAICHER

PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHICHI UBINA





The homeowner has over thirty years experience with a broad range of skills and experience in high level historic renovation, project management, decorating and real estate, enabling her to take on sizable projects such as Nor Tor. “When we purchased the property, the original kitchen and bathrooms were in their original state. There was a wing of tiny bedrooms that had been built to accommodate the original owner’s nine children,” explains visionary Robin Kencel.

“Though the floor plan of the house didn’t accommodate today’s lifestyle, we were determined to keep the original integrity of the house in its renovation and expansion.

Architect Ira Grandberg, AIA, of Grandberg & Associates, and Kencel have worked

on several significant pre-war Greenwich properties, but Nor Tor was the most complicated project for several reasons. An incinerator arose through all four floors of the house which chopped up the kitchen and bedrooms.

Architect Grandberg solved this by having the incinerator removed while maintaining the chimneystack supported on a substantial steel truss. This manifested design balance on the exterior. The remedy also allowed the development of a garage, a number of family bedroom suites, and a spacious kitchen and breakfast room appropriate for a home of this caliber.

Also challenging was the lack of family spaces, very typical of homes from this period.

“Ira and I have successfully converted

OPPOSITE TOP

Said to be “the finest example of tudor revival in Greenwich” by architectural historian Nils Kurchas, the home was expanded by seven feet at the south end, in order to accommodate attached garaging. Stone for the exterior walls matching the original home were achieved by dismantling an extensive dog run.

ABOVE AND OPPOSITE

Exterior pool area exhibits symmetry and elegance, replacing what was a run for ponies when Kencel purchased the property.



The handmade, knife edged pleat on the living room curtains are elegant without being overwhelming in a room that has rich architectural detail with a diverse collection of antiques.

OPPOSITE TOP

An antique Agra rug in the living room sets the color palette for the entire room, showcasing 18th and 19th French and Continental furniture with John Dickinson's small African tables. Balancing the collection are comfortable seating groupings including the pair of Babe Paley club chairs purchased from Christie's and recovered in a dramatic aubergine and olive silk damask from Pierre Frey.





third floor spaces in all of our home renovation projects,” shares Kencel.

Their deft handling of the third floor spaces achieves a real sense of presence. The rooms seem intentionally suited to entertainment and relaxation, achieving a terrific sense of purpose. The livability of the rooms suggests comfort rather than afterthought.

“With the glass transoms and progression of rooms in Nor Tor’s third floor, we created special game and entertainment rooms that the decorating reinforced.”

Definitive site lines lead naturally through the spaces. A progression of color and texture in elements realizes a subtle animal theme, seen in the use of a leopard wilton carpet and decorative accessories such as a collection of deer trophies, a pair of early 20th century tortoiseshell lamps and a 19th century Black Forest mirror.

ABOVE

Off of the living room, the large solarium with its original warm wood and leaded pane windows lent itself to the use of larger scale furniture such as the 19th century English daybed, the highback French chair, contemporary coffee table and custom mohair sofa. The porcelain baboon on the coffee table is by Jean Rene Gauguin, Denmark.

RIGHT

Striking marble bust of Apollo juxtaposed against leaded glass window lends chic drama to complete the classic composition.



Echoing the blush roses in the entrance's Gracie wallpaper, the Dining Room is painted in Farrow & Ball's Pink Ground. Rose and gold Fortuny fabric is used on the window curtains which are trimmed in Christopher Hyland silk tassels who's color is repeated in the horsehair seats of the Italian dining chairs, providing an unexpected burst of color.







Definitive site lines lead naturally through the spaces.

Each of Kencel and Grandberg's design projects, from both architectural and decorating perspectives, takes its point of departure from the architectural style, site orientation and natural lighting of the particular house.

States Kencel, "While it is important that the final product reflects the personality of the owners, the renovations and additions as well as the decorations need to be in harmony with the original home."

This 1929 Tudor Revival home has wonderfully proportioned rooms and splendid architectural detail. Remarkably articulated moldings purport unparalleled stature. Arrival spaces are especially important in prestigious homes; this foyer does not disappoint. Grandberg was able to replicate interior detailing to maintain

the scaling of the original home.

Gracie wallpaper was selected for the entrance hall and main staircase as it had the right strength of design and integrity to stand up to the home's rich architecture. The paper was custom colored, playing off the colors of an antique Agra rug placed in the living room which sets the soothing color palette for the entire residence.

"Nor Tor is a decorator's delight in that the generous proportions of each of the rooms gives ample breathing space to each furniture piece and accessory," notes Kencel.

The original solarium with its triple exposure leaded windows and oak paneling exemplifies this, where a vintage Steinway grand piano, modern gilded iron coffee table, 19th century Irish daybed and high-back French chair with original needle-

By removing the original incinerator, a proper gourmet kitchen was created. Kencel is careful to weave in elements from the original home, doing so here by copying the library's cabinetry style for the kitchen, matching new windows and leaded glass upper cabinets from window styles elsewhere in the house and through commissioning a replica of the stainless steel hood that was found in place but in poor condition when Nor Tor was purchased.



TOP

Custom colored Gracie wallpaper in the entrance hall provides an elegant background.

LEFT

Third floor media room is opened up with reflections from cleverly sited transoms.



The upstairs game and entertaining rooms are fresh and fun with a leopard print wilton carpet setting the tone for the collection of framed insects, black forest trophies and the oil on board, "Pretty Birdie" by German painter Willem Vanden Berg. Even the wall paint color, Cat's Paw by Farrow & Ball, is keeping in the animal theme.

point upholstery all blend harmoniously.

Kencel's approach to decorating is based on classical principals. Harmony and balance command the plan, from the initial floor planning to the placement of final decorative accessories. Kencel tends to shy away from utilizing a lot of pattern as she prefers to have the architecture, furniture, decorative accessories and art claim the space.

By using luxurious fabrics in gorgeous

colors, layering rich textures, and paying great attention to detail, Kencel creates backdrops that let key elements take center stage.

"The living room curtains here have a hand pleated, knife-edge detail that took hundreds of hours to complete. The handwork has a certain subtle irregularity that was planned to offset what could have been a stiff edge to something that has fluidity and movement to it," Kencel

explains.

Working closely with antique dealer and design consultant Carlene Safdie has led to a deliberate collection of furniture and decorative objects in Kencel's own home that is wide ranging in period and style, from an 18th century French fauteuil to a John Dickinson African table.

"Nor Tor followed the same process that Carlene and I use in all of our decorating projects. Once the floor plans, color pal-





ette and general direction of style is established, we seek to understand the clients' interests and sensibilities and we respond to those," declares Kencel.

Kencel's approach is not just about "decorating;" rather, it is about putting together a collection of furniture, artwork

and decorative arts that is meaningful and special.

"At Nor Tor, there is an opportunity to showcase much of my own collection, each of which has a history and is meaningful to our family, from the collection of old master drawings to the doorknocker at

the front door which travels with us from house to house."

Any family fortunate enough to live in Nor Tor will delight in its special comforts.

The house is listed with Greenwich Fine Properties, Greenwich, CT. ■

RESOURCES

Nor Tor Team:

Principal: Robin Kencel of
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Landscape Architect: Daniel Sherman Landscape Architects

Valhalla, NY

Landscape Construction: Your Gardening Angel

Stamford, CT

Masons:

Alex Primiano & Sons, Katonah, NY

Construction Firms:

Mantz Construction, Bridgeport, CT
ABC Construction, White Plains, NY

Key Vendors:

Custom Cabinetry:
Custom Furniture & Design, Litchfield, CT

Marble Vendors:

New England Stone, Milford, CT
Connecticut Stone, Milford, CT

Upholestry and Draperies:

Custom Interiors, Stamford, CT

Fabrics:

**Include Bergamo, Jerry Pair and
Christopher Hyland**

Antiques:

Center 44, NYC
Harborview Center for Antiques,
Stamford, CT
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ABOVE LEFT

The original horse stalls of the carriage house were converted to a design studio and office spaces. Kencel and Grandberg created a two story space with suspended antique beam system that provided a backdrop for the modern furnishings of the design studio including the set of mid century Danish chairs surrounding a glass and plexiglass table designed by Kencel.

ABOVE RIGHT

Design studio showcases a mid-century Italian sideboard and a signed mid 20th century Jere brass lamp from CLS Antiques at Center 44, NYC.

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