

# NEW CANAAN DARIEN & ROWAYTON

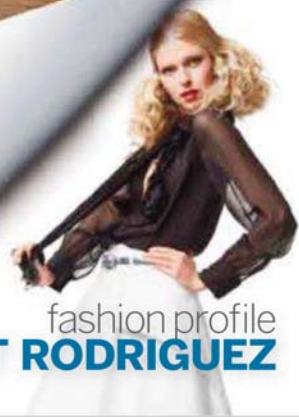
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## Refreshing

A NEW CANAAN COUPLE'S  
BREEZY STYLE

**GLASSMEYER  
& GENOVESE**  
The Dynamic Duo  
Behind Darien's Makeover

fashion profile  
**ROBERT RODRIGUEZ**





The Buschers' new shingle-style house bridges a wetland lot and an old and much-loved neighborhood. **opposite page** Maritime blue and nautical art objects welcome guests aboard. **far right** Native stone and earth tones keep the soaring great room well grounded.

# Dream Come True

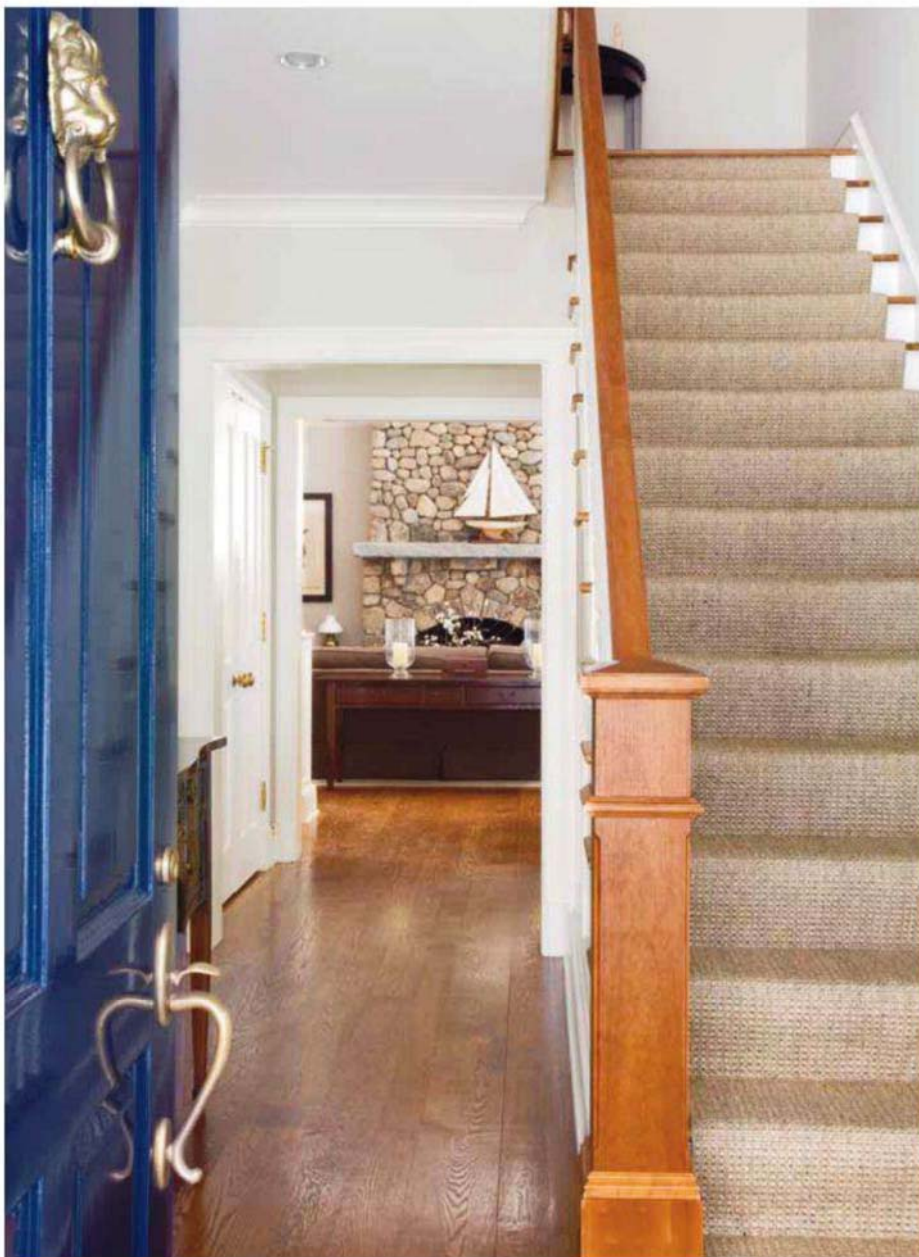
A New Canaan couple redefines “empty nesters” by staying put in town and building bigger

by **TOM CONNOR**

interior photographs by **HÜLYA KOLABAS**

exterior photograph by **DURSTON SAYLOR**

floral arrangements by **BON FLEUR**



**S**tay on the street where you’ve always lived. Build a new house that’s bigger and more luxurious than the old one but looks as if it belongs in the neighborhood. Build it for just the two of you but with room for grown children, future grandchildren, and overnight guests. This is about the heart of living.

Like most everywhere else in Fairfield County, native Colonials are in danger of becoming extinct in old New Canaan neighborhoods, replaced by larger, fancier houses. But not everywhere in town.

For twenty-four years Michelle and Michael Buscher lived and raised two children in a basic builder’s Colonial on a street of similar homes and families not far from downtown. Rather than leave once the kids were grown several years ago, the couple bought an old cape farther up the street with the intention of renovating, expanding, and staying where they had always been. »



**far left** Crisp in a framework of painted wainscoting, the dining room is rich in chocolate brown walls and softened by a cushioned window seat. **left** The cherrywood reproduction table was purchased when neighbors moved. The Boston side chairs are the real deal, circa 1815.

“This neighborhood means everything to us,” explains Michelle, who grew up in town. “It’s like something out of the fifties. All of our neighbors know one another, all of us are close.” Besides, Michael’s company, MB Sport LLC, is within walking distance. “Why would we move?”

At the start of the renovation, however, workers found water damage that made the project unfeasible. Instead of abandoning their dream street, the couple hired Darien architect Neil Hauck to design an empty-nester home for them on the site.

While Hauck’s firm has designed its share of mansions, most of its work is in the 5,000-square-foot range, the Buschers particularly admired his sense of scale and fondness for natural materials. What they wanted was a first-floor master bedroom, a large room for entertaining, and space for their grown children and overnight guests. But what they most needed was a house that would fit in with the neighboring houses on the street. “We didn’t want anyone to drive past and say, ‘Oh, not

another McMansion!’” Michelle recalls. “We wanted them to say, ‘Oh, how cute!’”

## SCALE AND STYLE

“Cute” is what the couple got, plus something substantially more. In designing a shingle-style house that suits the couple’s style and the site, Neil Hauck gave them—and their neighbors—a classic home that is at once new and timeless, casual and luxurious, and twice the size it appears to be. The new house could serve as a model for owners and developers on how to co-exist harmoniously with existing homes in old neighborhoods.

Using local craftspeople helped keep the integrity of the Buscher house. Hobbs Construction in New Canaan built the structure. Paul Winsor LLC of Southport, who has worked extensively on New Canaan landscapes, designed the garden. The staining and painting is the work of Painting and Renovation by Piotr Sernicki of New Canaan. William F. Verrill in Wilton crafted the kitchen cabinetry.

Kerry Lee of KL Designs picked the colors, fabrics, carpeting and a number of the pieces.

Although the house is three stories high, Hauck tucked the upper stories under a steep-pitched, dormered roof that comes down low over the front entrance, creating an open, columned porch across the front of the house and keeping the house in scale with others on the street. He also sited it in a way that minimizes its impact on the streetscape.

“I wanted the front of the house to look as if it was one of the original houses on the street that expanded in the back over time,” he says. “It’s only when you pass it and look back that you realize this is a much larger house.”

The lot’s limitations enhance the effect. The property is bisected by a steep-banked stream. Hauck took advantage of this fact by positioning the garage and overhead guest room on the far side of the water. In addition to breaking up the mass of the house, this gives guests privacy and the



“This NEIGHBORHOOD MEANS EVERYTHING to us. ... WHY WOULD WE MOVE?”

—Owner Michelle Buscher

**above** Master cabinetmaker William F. Verrill custom-made the cabinets and drawers in the new kitchen, giving this central space Shaker-like simplicity and integrity. **below, left** The eat-in area is warmly lit and cheerful. **below right** A Sub-Zero refrigerator and Wolf stove with grill almost steals the show from the handsome woodwork and flooring.

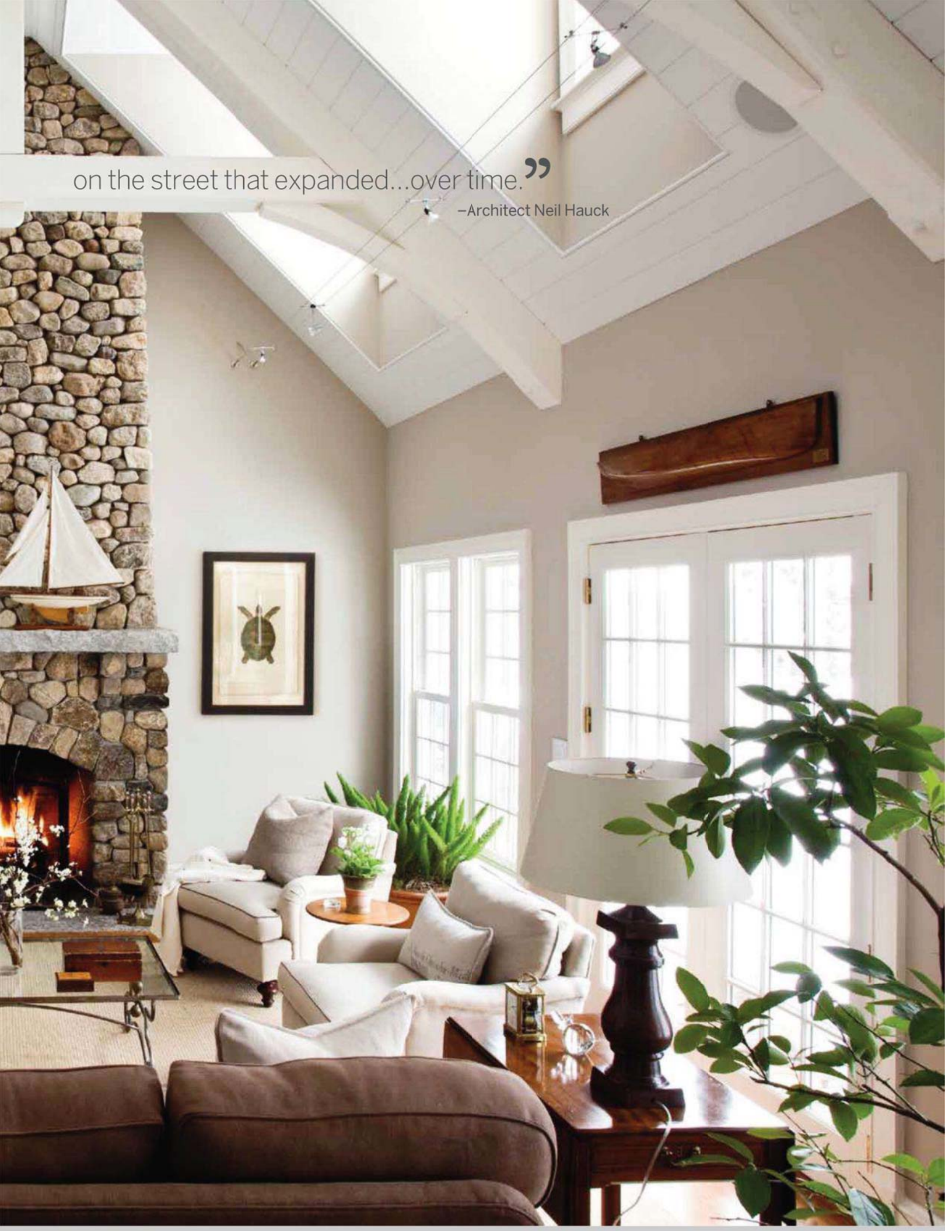


...AS IF IT WAS ONE OF THE ORIGINAL HOUSES



on the street that expanded...over time.”

—Architect Neil Hauck





Islandlike light filters into the first-floor master bedroom through French doors and the two-story gabled end of the porch outside. The pillow says it all: "And they lived happily ever after," below Deep blue and bright white, colors found throughout the home, invite a yachtlike feel to the master bath.

“The kind of room you might see if you're TRAVELING DOWN IN THE ISLANDS.

—Architect Neil Hauck

owners the “green” benefit of keeping exhaust fumes away from the main house. A mahogany bridge links the two “islands.”

## THE HEART OF LIVING

The downplayed scale and style extends into the interior: Just as the face the house presents to the street is small and unpretentious, so the rooms just inside the front door appear conventional, if elegant.

To the right of the entrance and simple staircase is a sitting room that's spare yet animated by gorgeous crown moldings. To the left is a formal dining room, gleaming with a reproduction cherry table and circa 1815 Boston side chairs. The formality of the room is softened by a padded window seat below wide-slatted louver shades. A handsome butler's pantry leads to the kitchen, which is where the house opens up to reveal the Buschers' style.

Although the low-ceilinged kitchen is relatively modest, it feels spacious and airy because of the low half-wall next to the two-story great room with a soaring fieldstone fireplace and a trio of dormered windows in the exterior wall. Again, Hauck

scaled down the grandness of the room. He vaulted the ceiling with white-pine beams and trusses for a rustic look. And rather than break the upper interior wall with a second-floor balcony, he kept the room cozy by installing a set of three windows. Lined up with the outer dormers, they give the room symmetry and bring light and views into the second floor hallway.

Off the great room, French doors open to a long side patio overlooking the stream, and the garage and outdoor pool on the other side. The open patio extends beyond the public areas to the back of the house and a semiprivate, gabled section off the first-floor master bedroom suite.

Siting the empty-nester master bedroom on the first floor and far from the public spaces makes perfect sense: At some point the couple might not want to climb stairs, but they can still get away to be by themselves. In fact, what distinguishes this bedroom is how romantic and carefree it feels. This ceiling is vaulted too, letting light in from the patio French doors and an upper window set in the porch gable. The couple's antique four-poster bed is set



against a striking backdrop of the lower rear wall, painted deep-sea blue, that turns to white above their heads.

“It's almost the kind of room you might see if you're traveling down in the islands,” Hauck says. “I have to admit, this is one of my favorite houses.” That's some endorsement, though not as important to Michelle and Michael as the neighbors': They love it.