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Victorian

OLD ROOTS FOR A NEW GUEST COTTAGE

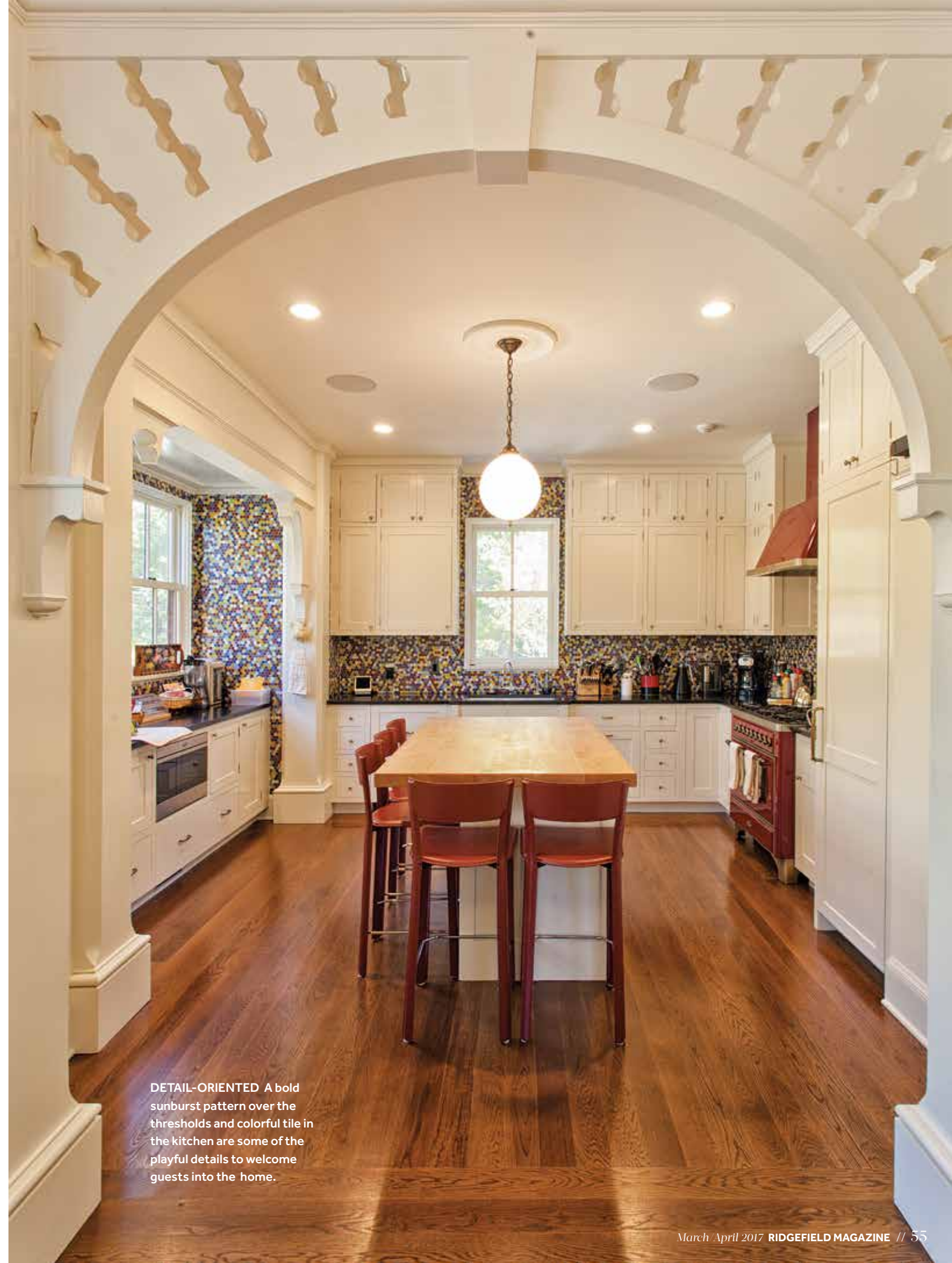


PERIOD CHIC There's nothing straight-laced about this new cottage even though the architect's thorough research into Victorian architecture informed every design decision.



**O**CCASIONALLY IN AN ARCHITECT'S CAREER, a project comes along that pushes him to take a fresh look at a familiar subject. A client's request for a Victorian guest cottage on the grounds of an historic Ridgefield estate stretched John Doyle to immerse himself in the study of Victorian architecture. "Because this was a guest cottage, not a main house, it could be more playful," explains Doyle, a principal at Doyle Coffin Architecture.

Doyle's research into the Victorian period was quite extensive. During a vacation in Martha's Vineyard, he toured the Victorian architecture of Oak Bluffs, a town on the island known for its mid-to-late-19th-century cottages and houses. In particular, Union Chapel with its striking roof and ornamentation gave the architect ideas for the design. Victorian residences and the Lounsbury house on Ridgefield's Main Street also inspired him. Says Doyle: "Architecture from this period is very expressive and displays the skills of the carpenter." Indeed, this cottage is a showcase for master woodworking.



**DETAIL-ORIENTED** A bold sunburst pattern over the thresholds and colorful tile in the kitchen are some of the playful details to welcome guests into the home.



**REAL DEAL** All paint colors, wallpaper, and furniture are true to the Victorian period while still being comfortable for today's living.



Doyle notes that his firm had to know the history of the period but had to draw its own conclusions and interpretation. The center atrium of the four-bedroom guesthouse exemplifies this contemporary take on an old idea. The skylight lets light flood into the entire house. Romeo and Juliet windows open into the main atrium from interior spaces.

The exterior of the house is sculptural with turrets, bay windows, and a custom-designed shingled roof. Doyle points out that the stone and brick foundation form horizontal stripes that are continued with the clapboard siding. The tower over the front door has its own roof and vertical stripes, giving the design a different rhythm. "There's attention to detail inside and out," Doyle explains, citing the interior columns with their square bases that twist into octagonal capitals as one of his favorite touches. "We designed all the details." Sunburst ornamentation above the thresholds is another wonderful aspect to the house.

Doyle says his collaboration with Thomas Jayne, a New York interior designer, was fundamental to the project. Jayne is a leading expert in the field of Victorian design, and a chapter author in the book *Elements of Style: American Victorian*, one of Doyle's guideposts. "Jayne had a deep knowledge of style but



**LIGHT AND WAVE** The skylight that centers the atrium invites light to flood throughout the house. A wave pattern on balcony spindles is one of the architect's favorite touches, offering rhythm to the design and displaying the carpenter's craft.



also the ability to help design something for today. We needed to harness the Victorian influence but be aware of how the house will be used now." Jayne selected the period paint colors that are bold, and all the wallpaper and furniture in the house.

The kitchen has a colorful tile backsplash that tips its hat to the Victorian period but is not at all conservative. Contemporary white cabinets and high-end appliances show that this house is as much about today as the past.

Hobbs, Inc., constructed the house and subcontracted carpenters to realize Doyle's architectural vision. Another detail Doyle highlights is the spindles on the stairs: "They are arranged in a wave pattern, which implies rhythm and movement," he says. "It all comes down to an interplay between the details," he says. "That's what makes the house so successful."

The Connecticut branch of the AIA awarded an Alice Washburn award to Doyle's design, "recognizing the thoughtful and delightful adaptation of tradition to address 21st-century needs in residential form."

Any guest lucky enough to spend the night in this fun Victorian gem might have a hard time leaving when the visit is up. ■