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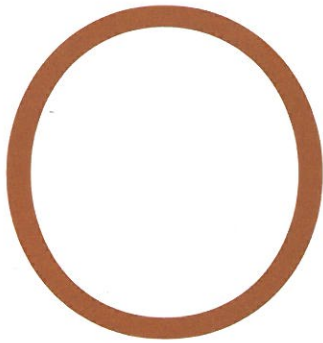
A lush forest scene with a stream, rocks, and a stone fire pit with wooden chairs. The scene is filled with green foliage, tall trees, and a small waterfall in the background. The foreground features a stone fire pit with two wooden Adirondack chairs. The overall atmosphere is serene and natural.

# Sitting Pretty

↳ RENOVATING A HOME ON A HISTORIC, AND MAGICAL, SITE

BY CAROLYN RUNDLE FIELD // PHOTOGRAPHS BY DOUGLAS FOULKE





nly looking.” That was Don and Eileen Allers’ plan when they decided to go to attend a few open houses in Wilton. They weren’t ready to buy. They were renting in Cos Cob at the time, but because they had friends who had seen over 100 houses before finding the right one, the Allers thought it wise to start their search early, expecting it to take awhile. But the moment they walked into their first open house, a small cottage bordering Comstock Brook and a waterfall on Lovers Lane, they knew they’d found their home.

“We saw this place in the fall of 2001. With the leaves at their peak, the brook and the waterfall, the setting was spectacular,” explains Don. “We spent three hours walking around the cottage, and absolutely fell in love with the property.” The fact that the house was only 1,400 square feet, and had just one bathroom, didn’t bother them. “We were coming from living in apartments so it felt like a lot of space,” says Eileen.

They also didn’t care that the structure was antiquated; they loved its charm and cozy wooded location, and knew they would eventually renovate and expand the space. And they loved the property’s history. The waterfall was once the site of a grist mill, built in the 1700s and one of the oldest structures in Wilton. The land was previously owned by the Merwin family. Augustus Merwin II lived in the cottage for many years, and expanded it in the 1940s, adding a new kitchen and living room.

When they moved first into the house in 2002, the Allers, who didn’t have children at the time, made just one



**SITE PRESERVATION**  
Don and Eileen Allers, with their daughters and dogs. Their house was carefully sited to work with and take advantage of the natural elements on the property. Opposite page: The master bedroom suite is located in the replica of the original cottage.













#### COOKING STYLE

The Allers chose slate for the kitchen counters and cherry wood for the kitchen island, for their beauty, lower maintenance and the patina they develop over time. Arts & Crafts style sofa, tables and lamps furnish the kitchen sitting area. Hand-painted Motawi tiles provide an Arts & Crafts accent behind the stove. A full-size eagle statue stands guard in the family room.

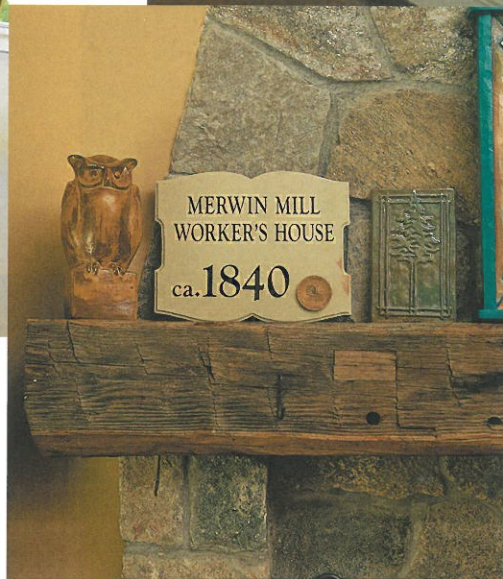
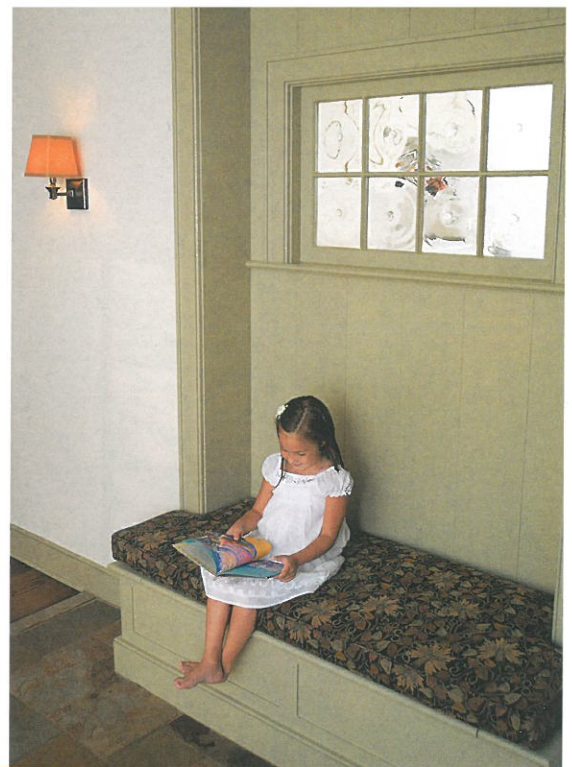






#### IN THE WOODS

The screened porch, located off of the kitchen, has a fireplace and provides a cozy spot for enjoying the views year round. The Allers' daughter sits on the front foyer window seat, one of the many built-ins throughout the house. The fireplace surround in the family room was built with stones from the original cottage's foundation. A view of the house, from the spa.



how we could expand," notes Rob. The Allers were not interested in building a massive structure. "We wanted to keep the house in scale with the site, and sustainable," Don explains. The final design increased the living space from 1,400 to roughly 3,700 square feet, but preserved the cozy ambiance and many of the historic details from the original cottage.

"We made a conscious decision to invest in materials and details—extensive built-ins, handmade tiles, slate floors and kitchen counters, period hardware, a historic paint palette for the walls, rather than in sheer size," explains Don. That attention to detail even included a trip to the Motawi factory in Michigan to pick out the handmade Arts & Craft accent tiles in their kitchen. They also repurposed as many original materials as possible, including using stones from the original foundation to create the fireplace surround in the living room, the outdoor patio and many of the walkways.

In melding the cottage with the new construction, the Allers and Sanders also decided to mark the transition from one space to another. "The idea was to celebrate the "oldness" of the cottage, but build something that was more contemporary in the new part of the house. We wanted these areas to complement each other, not necessarily match," says Don. Ceiling heights and room dimensions in the cottage are consistent with a house built in the 1700's. The master bedroom suite has a distinctly Shaker feel, with wrought iron door latches, beadboard details and simple moldings. In the new part of the house,









#### WATERFALL VIEW

Steps from the master bedroom sitting area lead up to the master bedroom itself. The dormer window, added during the construction process, provides a view of the waterfall from the master bedroom. The Allers selected California Paints historic colors for the trim and walls throughout the house.



design elements recall the Arts & Crafts movement. Admirers of this period even before they bought their house, the Allers have since acquired several Stickley and other Arts & Crafts-inspired pieces. "I have always loved the dimensions, clean, masculine lines and timelessness of that style," Don offers. He also collaborated with John Schnefke, owner of the New England Historical Connection, on the many handcrafted, custom pieces found throughout their home.

Construction took almost two years. The Allers moved out of the cottage when construction began in 2006, and moved back in just before their first child was born in December 2007. Since then, they have welcomed the birth of their second daughter. Their house and its setting are not only beautiful, but work beautifully for their expanded family. They love hanging out with their daughters in the playroom, which can be converted to a formal dining room or sitting area once the girls are older, and in the kitchen, which is flooded with natural light thanks to two skylights. They love the views, which change with the seasons, the soothing sound of the waterfall, and the location, so private and magical, yet just a stone's throw from Wilton Center. "I grew up in the city. I like hearing the trains come through, and being able to walk into town with the girls," says Eileen. "We feel incredibly grateful to live in such a special place." ■