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HOLIDAY



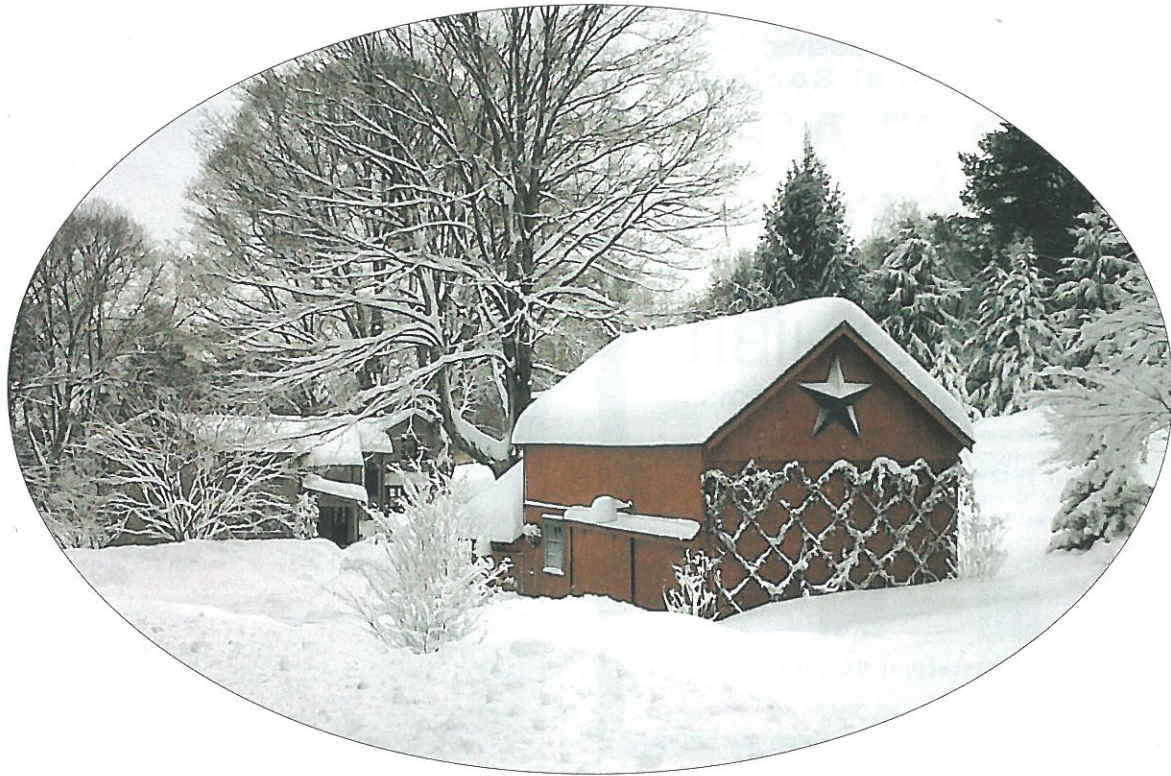
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# Respect *for the* Past

EXPANDING A HOME WHILE RETAINING ITS CHARACTER

**Now** a rambling 4,400 square feet, Michael and Janet Foster's antique home in North Wilton started out as a one room up-one room down structure, with a narrow angled staircase connecting the two floors. Dating from the early 1800's, its original owners would have used the first floor room as their living area and kitchen, and the space above for sleeping. As they needed more space, subsequent owners added to the footprint, and when the Fosters purchased the property in 1983, they too built additions to accommodate their growing family. Like the inhabitants before them, they did so with an appreciation for its pedigree.

In the first addition, completed in 1992, the Fosters added a master bedroom on the 2nd floor, and a breakfast area and larger kitchen on the 1st floor. In the kitchen, two islands topped with cherry wood—a long low one with a gas cook top and a higher one with a stainless steel sink—provide ample work space. Both islands overlook the new windowed breakfast area. A built-in cherry wood break-





**SITTING PRETTY** The Fosters, in the 2009 family room. The front door. The Vista Road addition, to the left, looks as though it was original to the house. The sitting room dates from the original one up-one down house. The mural, one of many, was painted by a Long Island artist.



front and adjacent open shelving hold many of the Foster's vintage and holiday plates. Exposed beam ceilings match the ceilings in the sitting rooms in the oldest part of the house.

Around the time the Fosters began thinking about a second addition, they learned that an antique house on Vista Road was slated for demolition. "We contacted the sellers and they agreed to let us dismantle the house," explains Janet. While the Fosters knew it would have been simpler to build the new addition from scratch, using new materials, the end result would never have as much character as it would if they used authentic old materials. "The chance to get old floor boards and beams doesn't come along every day," adds Michael.

The Vista Road house, originally a story-and-a-half, had been expanded over time to two full stories. The Fosters hired Wilton architect Rob Sanders to reconstruct it in its original story-and-a-half form; it became the new master bedroom, set on top of a new foundation and a new first floor family





JESSIE SMITH  
HOUSE  
c. 1815













**COOKING TIME** The refrigerator and pantries are located in a central spot in the kitchen. The Fosters' plate collection. Exposed beams in the kitchen match the ceilings in the original part of the house.

room. Pointing to the exposed cathedral ceiling in the new bedroom, Janet notes, "This is what the under side of the Vista Road house roof looked like. You can actually see the outline of the tree each board was cut from. And the floor boards are the original ones from that house."

While the family room below is a new space, most of the posts and beams came from the Vista Road house. The fireplaces in both the family room and the master bedroom look old, but are actually new construction. "The original house had a center fireplace, but when we reconstructed it, Rob located the fireplaces on the front wall," says Janet. "He also used stone for the exterior of the family room to replicate the foundation of the Vista Road house, so the addition looks like it has always been here."

Rob pushed the kitchen out several feet to meet the new family room, but kept and reused all of the islands and cabinets from the 1992 renovation. He designed a long, low cherry wood cabinet to visually separate the kitchen from the new family room. "When we enlarged the kitchen, we considered eliminating a second set of stairs installed adjacent to it by a previous owner, because like the ones in the front hall, they are steep and narrow. But our daughters refused to let us; they loved their quirkiness," says Janet. Instead, Rob designed a third staircase leading







**DECKED OUT** The dining room table, set for the holidays. Another sitting room in the front of the house, probably the first addition to the one up-one down structure. The wide-plank chestnut wood floors, original to the house, are uneven, but add charm. Inscriptions inside a cabinet door date back to 1883.



from the rear of the kitchen to an office and cozy light-filled guest room above it. “Before that staircase, we had to bring all the large pieces of furniture for the second floor through a window,” says Janet.

The stairways are just one of the many quirky features of the almost 200-year old house, features the Fosters appreciate and have been careful to preserve. The wide plank chestnut floors throughout the oldest part of the house are uneven; and in some places, have gaps wide enough to reveal the room below. The doorway between the kitchen and front sitting room is crooked, the 2nd floor banister is only about two feet high, hallways are narrow and ceilings are low in many rooms. “One of my favorite things about the house has always been the crooked doorway, and I told Rob and the builder that I did not want to make it level,” recalls Janet.

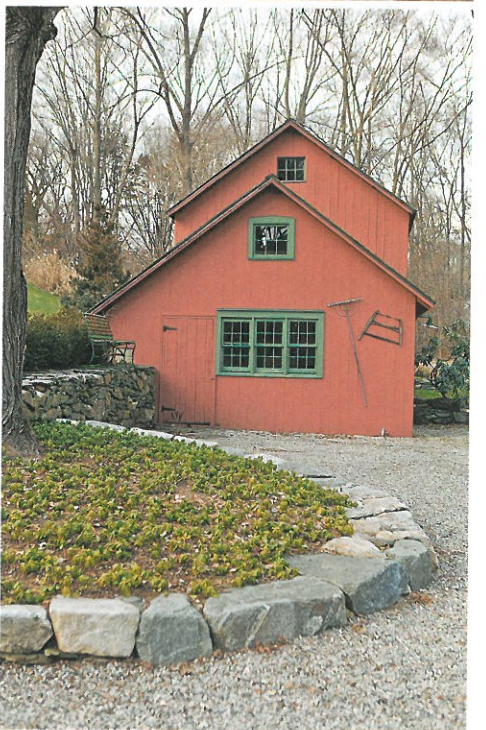
While the majority of the house relies on cast iron radiators for heat, the Fosters, with Rob’s encouragement, installed a geothermal system during the 2009 construction project to heat the new space. During the summer, the system provides air conditioning for the entire house. They have furnished their home with an eclectic mix of early American antique pieces passed down from their families or that they have collected together, original oil paintings, Oriental decorative objects, and many hand-painted murals.

Three outbuildings, a red barn, a chicken coop and what appears to be an old stone





**HONORING THE PAST** The formal dining room. The cathedral ceiling in the new master bedroom. The mural above the fireplace was painted by an artist from Long Island. The Fosters hired a different artist to paint the fireplace. The stone root cellar sits to the right of the side entrance. The red barn.



root cellar sit on the property. The root cellar was actually built in 2001 to house a new oil tank. The old in-ground tank leaked, and had to be dug up. “We had to install the new one above ground, but we didn’t want to look out and see it in the yard so we decided to recreate an old root cellar to hide it,” explains Janet. The chicken coop is the only one of three original sheds on the property; the other two collapsed and could not be salvaged. The Fosters use the barn for storage. One bay once served as a blacksmith shop; the other was used to house animals and farm machinery and has a ramp leading to sliding doors at the back of the barn.

“I love living in this house,” admits Janet. “When we renovated, we didn’t want to be able to tell the oldest spaces from the new construction. And we wanted to build the way people built houses a long time ago. They added on as they needed to as opposed to building a 7,000 foot house all at once.” ■