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Creatively Inclined

A series of gracefully sloping gables helps bring cottage coziness to an expansive coastal Greenwich home.

WRITTEN AND PRODUCED BY STACY KUNSTEL
PHOTOGRAPHY BY ROBERT BENSON PHOTOGRAPHY



Layers of gables and a strong
roofline give this coastal Connecticut
home the illusion of being smaller
than it actually is.

F

rom an egret's-eye view, this home along the twisting Connecticut coastline presents itself as a sprawling mansion. The long roofline parallels the waterfront, hinging at one point to change direction, as if blown by the wind to follow the meandering edge of Greenwich Cove. Another wing juts off at an angle, ignoring the ocean views completely.

But an approach through the low iron gates, past the sweeping lawn and along the hydrangea- and rhododendron-lined driveway, yields a distinctly different picture. Low and grounded by swooping granite fieldstone columns, the house seems smaller than the bird's-eye view would have it. The impression of a water's-edge manse shifts quietly to one of a coastal cottage, complete with shingled gables and dormers dotting the roofline.

It's a trick of the eye deftly played by architect Michael McClung of Shope Reno Wharton, employing scale to make sure that this 12,000-square-foot dwelling appears as intimate and inviting as any

bungalow. "There are no two-story walls on the outside," he says. "The roofline rests on the first floor on the exterior. In doing this, the house doesn't end up looking like a box."

The curved stone columns, he explains, act as anchors. "They give the sense that the home grew there instead of being placed on the site."

Shingle-clad gables appear as tented sails across the front of the house, which rests on a base of colored granite fieldstone. The gables drape gracefully, trailing long edges that overhang a porch that wraps around to the waterside.

For architect McClung and contractors Jim Hoffman and Doron Sabag of Sound Beach Partners, the biggest challenge to creating an outdoor environment was a steep drop-off into the cove. Completing the landscape plan himself, McClung envisioned a trio of terraced levels so that the homeowners could enjoy their views and the building wouldn't appear to be sitting at the edge of a cliff.

Across the back runs a long porch that sits under the roof overhang. A stone terrace off the kitchen





Defined by sleek interior architecture and a simple palette of black and white, the foyer sets a sophisticated tone. FACING PAGE: Tailored furnishings in quiet hues predominate in the tranquil living room.

and family room has a view across Greenwich Point and leads to a lawn area large enough for a party tent. Stairs to the next level lead to an infinity-edge pool, with the downstairs TV room and bar serving as the de facto pool house. The final flight of stairs takes you to water's edge.

"The curved stone columns weren't that difficult," says Sabag, "but they aren't typical. This is a very distinct home and the detailing is very specific. There

was a lot of blasting to create the levels. That rock was used to build the seawall."

Another challenge was how to capture two gor-

PROJECT TEAM

ARCHITECTURE: Michael McClung, Shope Reno Wharton

INTERIOR DESIGN: Victoria Hagan

BUILDER: Jim Hoffman and Doron Sabag, Sound Beach Partners

geous views in one dwelling. Dividing the structure into two wings set at a twenty-degree angle to one another proved the best solution. "There is a shorter foreground view to the cove and a peninsula and a longer view to Long Island Sound," says McClung. "The stair tower at the front is the pivot point."

The more formal areas, such as the entry, living room, dining room, and master bedroom have the long view, while the kitchen, family room, and children's rooms have the shorter view.

If you imagine the interiors as the icing on a decorative cake, the crown, base moldings, wainscoting, and beams have been spread smooth. "The focus was on creating an axis from one space to another in the

"The architecture of the rooms is substantial around the ceiling and base, but isn't overworked," says McClung.

open floor plan," says McClung. "The architectural details, such as the beams and fireplace mantels, were kept really clean."

The simplification leaves no sense of emptiness, though. The weight of the interior architecture and decor is quietly present, from the swooping lines around the main staircase to arched openings between rooms and over spaces such as the breakfast area.



"We've tried to give a hierarchy to the spaces," says McClung. "They are very clean, restrained, more streamlined, and the interior is a bit transitional. The architecture of the rooms is substantial around the ceiling and base, but isn't overworked.

The same goes for the decorating. Simple linen or





A window-lined tower holds the secondary stairway. **FACING PAGE, TOP:** The dining room area bridges the space between the living room and the kitchen. **FACING PAGE, BOTTOM:** Large pendant lights loom over the vast kitchen island. The floors throughout the house are white oak with an ebony stain.

Sheers separate the master bath's mosaic standing tub from the views of Greenwich cove and Long Island Sound. **FACING PAGE, TOP:** The water-facing rear of the house cuts an impressive figure with its sloping lawn, stone walls, and multiple rooflines. **FACING PAGE, BOTTOM:** Water streams to the edge of the pool, blending in with the natural scenery beyond.



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wool fabrics won out over ornate patterns, and tailored chairs stripped of skirts or extra frills are all part of the signature look of designer Victoria Hagan, who custom-designed a number of furniture pieces and chose all the finishes and lighting fixtures.

The living room is a wash of white, with matching sofas centered in front of a columned fireplace and white sheers softening the water view. Black and white dominate throughout (save for an electric-pink little girl's bedroom), repeating in the lighting and furniture and in the photography and paintings on the walls. The absence of color is a striking contrast with the masses of green grass and blue water and sky outside, but sets a serene tone.

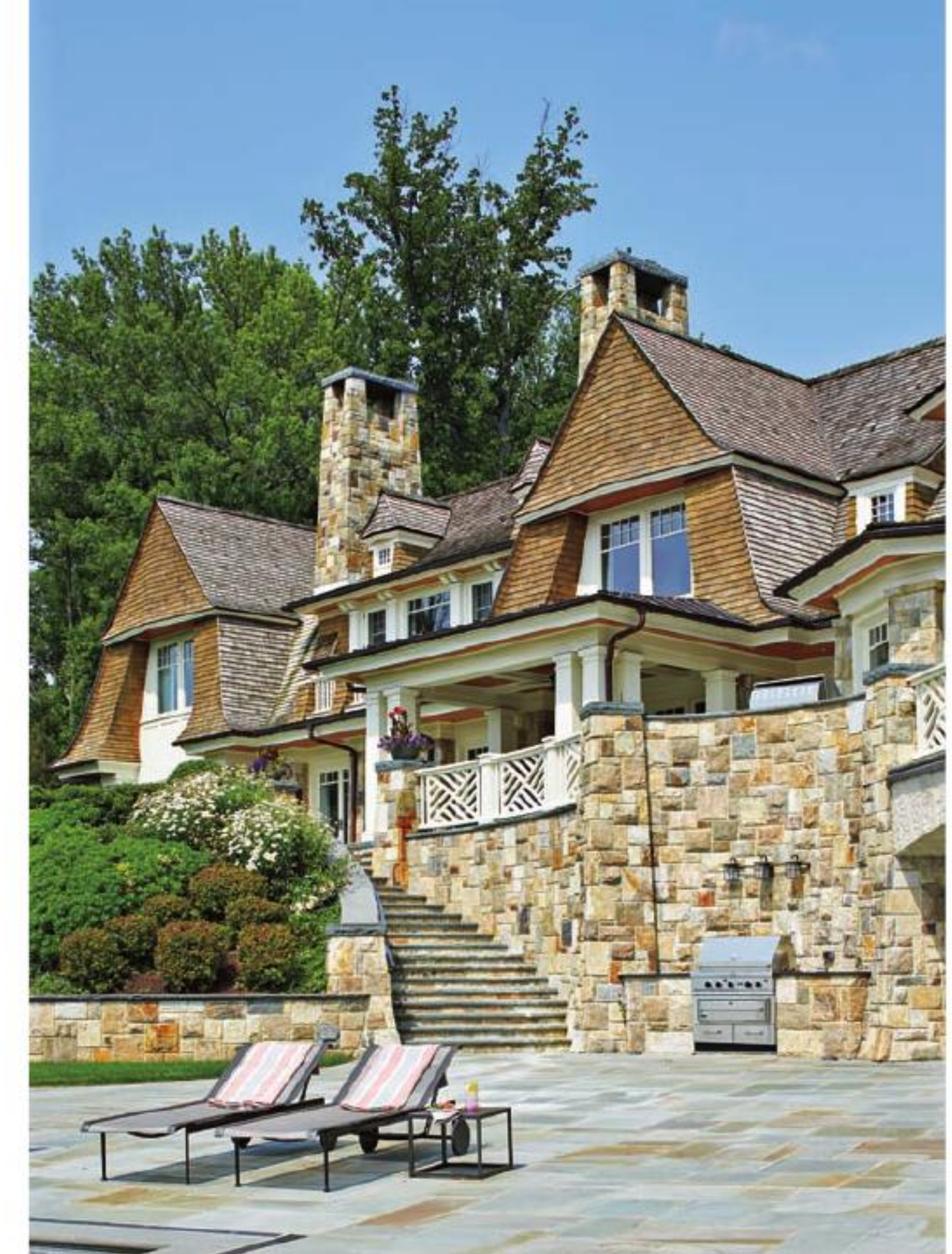
From the master bedroom spreads a broad view of the cove and sound. Draperies in the softest lilac

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match sunset hues and complement a custom blue-and-white rug. In the regal master bath, the softest white sheers hang from floor to ceiling behind a mosaic-covered standing tub.

Just off the secondary stairs inside the stair tower, the less formal wing includes a large kitchen with a center island that seats six. Simple white backsplash tile covers the wall behind the range, and refrigerators and freezers hide behind painted cabinetry. An L-shaped butler's pantry holds a wine bar and joins the spaces between the kitchen and the dining room.

The kitchen, breakfast area, and family room all act



as one open space defined by architecture and dictated by use. The family room is the hang-out place for kids and the dog, with bookshelves across one wall and views out the other.

The views may play the starring role, but the house is a worthy supporting actor. Says McClung: "It's actually a very playful building with a strong sense of character." •

RESOURCES For more information about this home, see page 146.

