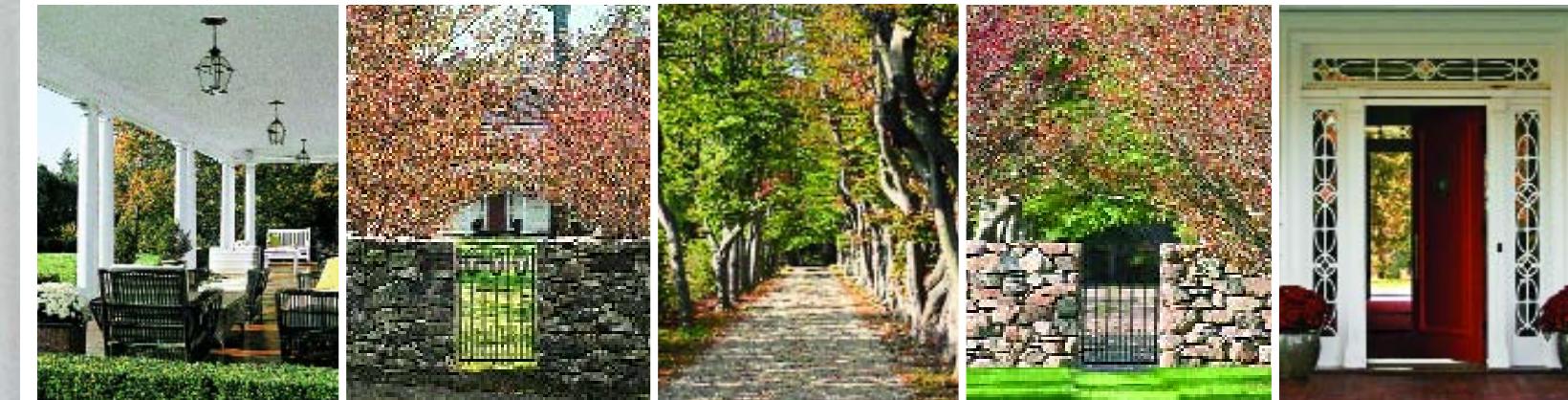


by SUZANNE GANNON photographs JOHN M. HALL

MODERNIST ARCHITECT AMANDA MARTOCCIO TREADS LIGHTLY IN HER RENOVATION OF A 1903 COLONIAL IN NEW CANAAN.



MODERN LOVE



The 1903 Colonial home boasts porches on both the front and rear sides of the home. **opposite page:** A tufted Harvey Probber leather bench sits in the entry hall beneath a piece by Joseph Albers in modernist architect Amanda Martoccio's New Canaan home. The rug is by Odegaard.





from left: Amanda widened the stair landing and removed part of a wall to permit natural light, while preserving original details such as this curved handrail; a cove-lit niche provides a tailor-made spot for a large canvas by Roberto Juarez, found at Robert Miller Gallery in New York City. **opposite page:** A gracious doorway frames an elegant dining room furnished with a table and chairs by Paul Frankl and upholstered in a fabric by Zimmer + Rhode. The Jean Royère pendant light fixture hangs near a drawing by David Smith. The contemporary rug is by Carini Lang.

Architect Amanda Martocchio recalls the first time she walked through this house on the top of a hill in New Canaan: She was struck by how much it reminded her of her grandparents' old farmhouse in Ohio where she had spent summers selling tractor ads for the family's newspaper.

"It had such good karma," she says. "I thought: History has unfolded here."

Broad in its bearings and well sited on a series of terraces planted with rounded boxwoods and copper and weeping beeches, the house inhabits what was once a parcel of 50 acres developed in the mid-nineteenth century by Dr. William Hanna Thompson. The civic-minded son of a missionary to Lebanon, Thompson built a local drinking well and welcomed his neighbors to use it by entering through a series of gates set in stone walls that still dot the perimeter. Ulti-

mately, he is believed to have named the site Mount Lebanon, planting it with cedars of Lebanon in tribute to his father. They still stand today.

Historical records show, however, that the house itself was not built until many years later, in 1903, and was inhabited by only two families in the roughly 100 years before Amanda and her husband purchased it. As a result, it had not been significantly upgraded, lacked modern showers, had converted gas-fired wall sconces and featured three large slop sinks on the first floor. To the couple who was making the move with their two children from the corner of 89th Street and Madison Avenue in Manhattan, the house was dark and tired and in need of a major update.

So Amanda, a Cornell and Harvard-educated modernist whose sleek glass-and-wood residential work is found in Fairfield County, embarked on an ambitious



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—AMANDA MARTOCCHIO



Architect and homeowner Amanda Martocchio takes a break.

opposite page: The upstairs playroom offers entertainment for the whole family, and is designed to evolve in tandem with the children's interests. Pops of red dot the room in the form of Eero Saarinen tulip chairs and pedestal table from Knoll, Robert Sonneman floor lamp and a throw pillow on the Florence Knoll settee. The side lamps were bought at Irwin Feld Design in Stamford.

plan to usher the white center-hall colonial into the 21st century, while respecting its structural integrity and preserving its architectural detail.

"I sought to give new life to this good, old house," she says. "I tried to keep the renovation clean and simple, and to create a home for our family that is warm, uncluttered, but full of books and art."

Amanda hired New Preston-based Shaw Builders, who began a complete overhaul of the building's infrastructure, including plumbing, mechanical and electrical systems.

"The flaw of the house was that the main stair hall was tight, dark and disproportionately scaled to the house," she explains.

To address the darkness, she conceived a plan to slice off the top of the bearing wall beside the staircase and create a series of transom windows that admit natural light from the adjacent second-floor study into the stairwell and filter it down to the level below. In addition, she installed a concealed light cove, which in the evening casts light that bounces off the ceiling and illuminates the space.

Marc Shaw, president of Shaw Builders, said the plan required that his team slide a 30-foot steel I-beam into the house from the outside. It now bears the load of the ceiling, attic and roof.





The master bedroom provides a serene escape. Bookcases flank a fireplace with ceramic tile surround, over which are mounted drawings by William Baziotes. A pastel drawing by Joan Mitchell hangs above a Paul McCobb dresser. The club chair and ottoman are both by T.H. Robsjohn-Gibbings for Widdicomb. **right:** An André Sornay cabinet does double duty as a display area for the small Jill Moser drawings that lean against it and hang on the wall.



Amanda also chose to widen the stair landing and reconfigure the upstairs hallway, which resembled a hotel, long and straight with a series of doors. To break it up, she reconfigured it with a jog, relegating the confined shallow service rooms, such as laundry, to one side and reserving the other side for deeper spaces such as bedrooms.

Throughout the house, she strove to preserve what she calls the “special qualities of age: vintage claw-foot tubs, oxidized-brass door hardware, three-inch-thick pocket doors and ceramic tile fireplace surrounds, which had a beautiful patina.”

Original plaster moldings, a rarity in new homes because they cost about four times as much as wood moldings, were cut and artfully patched with new plaster by craftsmen who practice a now dying art. Selecting materials that are warm and tactile, Amanda capitalized on natural light wherever possible. She also configured spaces that connect with each other as well as with the outdoors; the most significant outdoor space being the porch that runs the entire width of the back of the house.

As avid collectors of contemporary art who first began accumulating pieces during a trip to San Francisco early in their relationship, she and her husband opted to paint most of the interior walls in shades of white, creating a neutral backdrop for the bold colors of their collection. In addition, they installed trimless



An open limestone sink with metal legs and simple mirrors, both from Urban Archaeology, give the master bath a pared down look. The mosaic stone tile on the floor and ceramic tile on the walls are from Waterworks.



from left: Legend has it this curvaceous Italian Osvaldo Borsani bed was used by Madonna when she shot *Evita*. Built-in storage in the master bathroom, visible through the doorway, is a smart way to use up the dead space created by a set of stairs that lead to the third floor in the adjacent hallway; abundant natural light filters into a spacious yet spare master bath. The blinds are from HunterDouglas.

recessed light fixtures to illuminate individual pieces, a process she likens to surgery on a ceiling.

Much of the furniture consists of pieces by the mid-century innovators she loves. The living room features a curved sofa, wood-framed chairs and a glass-topped coffee table by Edward Wormley for Dunbar, all of them dating to the 1950s. A Richard Serra drawing hangs above the fireplace. In the opulently wide center hall, which runs from the front of the house to the back, a mod, tufted leather bench by Harvey Probber sits beneath a painting by Joseph Albers. »





Seating from Maine Cottage, purchased at Design Solutions in New Canaan, and a low, Janus et Cie table, found at Elise Landscapes & Nursery, mix on the rear porch.
opposite page: The family room occupies the former mudroom that featured three large slop sinks. A Caio Foseca painting hangs above a mid-century sofa, while a T. H. Robsjohn-Gibbings for Widdicomb side chair sits next to Edward Wormley's Sheath of Wheat table. The leather ottoman is from E. B. Home in Norwalk.

In the dining room, a double-peDESTaled table in a buttery hue is paired with curvaceous chairs designed by Paul Frankl; a chandelier by Jean Royere illuminates the layout. A large-scale contemporary canvas by Roberto Juarez hangs majestically in an alcove all its own, and above the fireplace a drawing by David Smith makes a quiet statement.

An upstairs playroom displays a modernist staple, tulip chairs and a pedestal table by Eero Saarinen for Knoll, accompanied by a foosball table and an indoor basketball hoop. The pièce de résistance, however, sits in the master bedroom: a 1930s bed with a butterfly-shaped headboard by Italian designer Osvaldo Borsani, said to have been used by Madonna when she filmed *Evita*.

Other touches include new cabinetry, such as the glass-fronted built-ins in the dining room Amanda redesigned to display a collection of glass vases, and the sleek wooden built-ins that store music and stereo equipment in the downstairs den.

To reestablish the grandeur of the setting—reduced to five acres when the 50-acre plot was subdivided

twenty or thirty years ago—Amanda enlisted the services of landscape architect Diane Devore of Devore Associates in Fairfield.

Diane's first task was to address the front approach to the house, originally an allée of beech trees that, in the subdivision, had been repurposed as the driveway for an adjacent house. To restore the drama, Diane collaborating with Amanda, designed a hedgerow along the Martocchios' new driveway, parallel to the original allée. She also added an orchard of Hawthorne trees in the front courtyard and designed a new front gate in a stone wall, which, in addition to being aligned on an axis with the front door and the original gate around back (visible through the center hall), also picks up on ironwork in the windows that flank the broad, red front door.

An ardent fan of architect Louis Kahn and more recently of Spanish architect Rafael Moneo, Amanda says, "There is something to be said for appropriate architectural responses that are quiet, that don't draw a lot of attention to themselves, that are spare yet elegant in their simplicity." »





A formal living room pays homage to mid-century furniture designers and contemporary artists: a curved sofa, pair of wood-framed chairs and glass-topped coffee table by Edward Wormley for Dunbar; a club chair and ottoman by T.H. Robsjohn-Gibbings and a 1950s French three-arm standing lamp, a Richard Serra drawing hangs over the fireplace and an Etienne Viard steel sculpture, found at Avant Garden in Pound Ridge, New York, sits on the mantel. The area rug is from Safavieh Carpets. **below:** A series of prints by Brice Marden dot the living room, which connects to a small den.

But did she find it difficult to resist etching a more pronounced contemporary mark upon the house? "What is new, looks new, unapologetically so," said Amanda. "I am not the architect to slavishly copy a colonial house for a client."

Indeed, amidst this seeming contradiction of old and new breathes a surprising and effortless complementarity.

"I was grappling—probably more than usual because it was our home," she admits. "Each design decision was about tempering a modern tendency in a respectful, balanced way."

What's next for this soft modernist? The poolhouse. A glass box with white side paneling, to be exact. **ah**

Resources

Amanda Martocchio Architecture + Design, New Canaan, 966-5707

Devore Associates, Fairfield, 256-8950; devoreassoc.com

Shaw Builders, New Preston, 860-868-1040; shawbuilder.com

