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JUNE/JULY 2006

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The SLOW REVEAL



Understatement is the key to a house in the Berkshires

ON THE DRIVE UP TO THE HOUSE, along the long, winding just-big-enough-for-one-car road, the American Shingle-style manor, set atop a verdant hill in the Berkshires, plays peek-a-boo. The emerald canopy of maples, oaks and evergreens allows a bit of red cedar shake here, a sliver of soaring roofline there—just enough to entice visitors.

BY NANCY A. RÜHLING > PHOTOS BY MARY E. NICHOLS





BUT THE WHOLE compound never reveals itself from the road, where the crisp crunch of tires on crushed stone is all that announces your arrival. It is only when you are right on top of it that you see it in all its grandeur, and that is just the way the owners planned their secluded weekend retreat. "This house definitely is off the beaten path," says interior designer Mark Christofi, who is based in North Reading, Mass. "And it fits in beautifully in this wonderful, picturesque old New England town. Nobody even knows that it is here—it really belongs in this wilderness."

That the 8,500-square-foot home, along with its guest-house, poolhouse and cabana, is all but invisible does not mean that it is solitary. "They are gracious people," Christofi says of the owners, who are retired and have two grown sons. "Their motto is, 'The more the merrier,' and this is where they come when they want to be with family and friends. This is definitely a house for entertaining. They are munificent benefactors of Tanglewood [Music Center], so they do everything from holding small, casual dinner parties for eight to black-tie cocktails for hundreds."





Previous pages, left: Hidden within the greenery of the Berkshires is a family's Shingle-style getaway built by Gorman Richardson Architects and designed by Mark Christofi. A side elevation features a screen porch that leads to the pool, surrounded by outdoor furniture from DelGreco & Co.

Previous pages, right: Vintage barn boards and antique rugs set the tone in the entrance hall, as does an 18th-century weathervane that reflects the owners' love of horses.

Opposite: A recess in the foyer leading to the master bedroom holds an antique oil painting and a 19th-century American Aesthetic Movement ebonized cabinet.

Left: In keeping with the house's Americana roots, the designer incorporated an 18th-century-style games table into an area of the living room, where the couple assembles their custom jigsaw puzzles. At rear is a dining area and built-in cabinetry.

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BUT WHAT THEY LIKE TO DO most is get away from it all. While they might take in a concert at Tanglewood, which is a stone's throw away, or meander through the town on a Sunday afternoon, they are happy sitting by the fireside putting together jigsaw puzzles, snuggling up in a window seat with a good book or lounging poolside. When they have company, after drinks at the bar, which overlooks the pool, the couple and their guests are likely to end up in the billiards room, which is appointed with an elaborate mid-19th-century pool table, or they may decide to take in a movie in their home theater, whose lounge chairs seat 14. "One of their favorite spots is the fountain behind the poolhouse," Christofi says. "It is so serene to hear the water trickling through the rocks that you can spend hours there."

Christofi translated his mandate—to make the three-story manor comfortable, practical and easy to live in—by designing spaces that have a "clean Arts and Crafts approach with touches of Americana and that speak to who the owners are."





Far left: Christofi designed the painted-pine, American-pinwheel-theme table in the breakfast room to complement a Richard Mulligan chandelier and new spindle-back chairs.

Left: Cedar shake walls and rattan furniture allow for a pared-down feel in the screened porch, used for dining and relaxation. Accents such as the fireplace's antique iron horse from a local shop reference the equestrian lifestyle that the owners enjoy at their other home outside Boston.

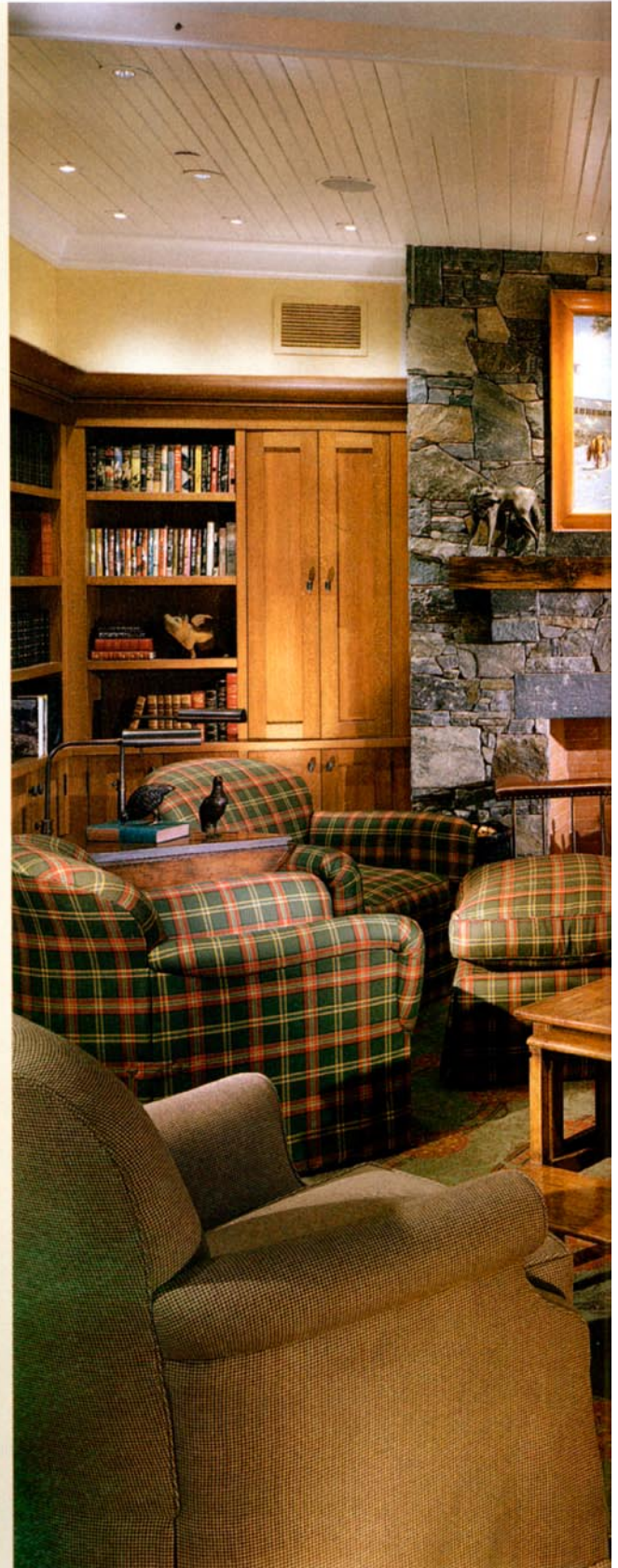
THE SLOW REVEAL



Above: Authentic billiards cloth envelops the billiards room, which plays host to a mid-19th-century carved pool table.

Below: The home theater seats 14. Adorning the reclining chairs is a cloth covered in stars—a common motif on American quilts.

Right: A casual yet luxurious theme runs through the living room, where a distressed leather sofa is paired with a Rose Tarlow coffee table that extends to hold books. Christofi, who designed the rug for Stark Carpet, added whimsical touches such as a wing chair and a seating group covered in a plaid.





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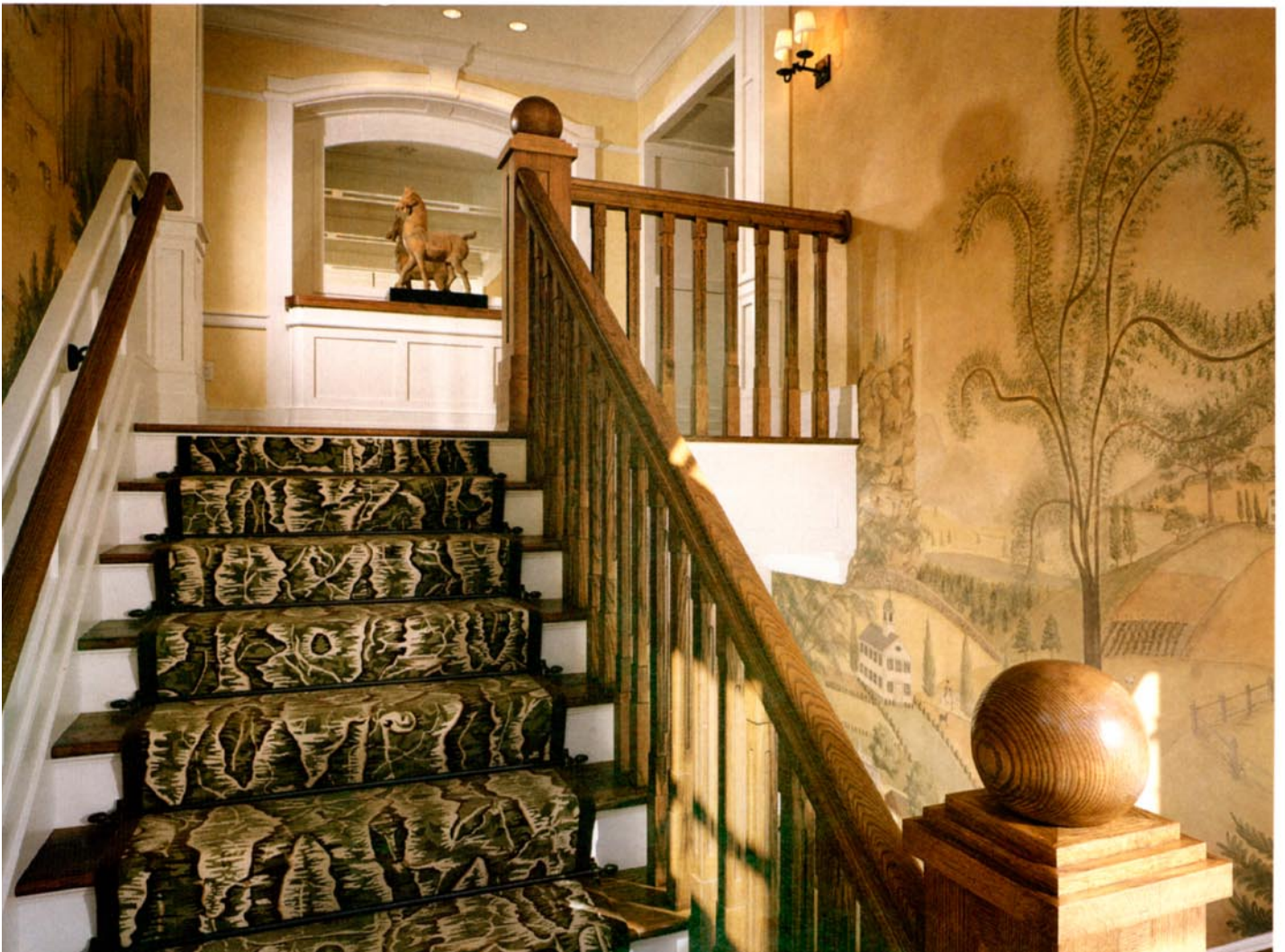
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THE WOODWORK IS quarter-sawn oak, the living room floors are made of vintage barn planks, complete with old nail and burn holes, and the two fireplaces are made of fieldstone. Stained-glass windows are themed around nature. Horse motifs—including the 18th-century weathervane in the entrance hall, the iron mare that prances across the sun-room's fireplace, on the fabric that covers the library footstool and window seat and the embroidery that decorates the terrycloth skirt of a bathroom slipper chair—pay homage to the stables the couple maintains on their more formal American Colonial estate in suburban Boston.

"I wanted to reinforce the architecture and bring the style that was being established into the home," Christofi says. "And I wanted to keep things lighthearted but in a serious, traditional tone. But I didn't want it to be brown Boston."





This page: In the wife's bathroom, her favorite color, green, was applied to the walls and tile. The equestrian theme continues with bits embroidered along the slipper chair ruffle.

Opposite, above: An upholstered sleigh bed anchors the master bedroom, which has French doors that open to a balcony overlooking the grounds.

Opposite, below: Painted by California artist Esther Carpenter, who drew upon the work of Rufus Porter, the stair hall mural depicts area landmarks.

TO DO THAT, he brought in green, the wife's favorite color, letting its rich tones play off the wood inside and the woods outside. The color, for example, shows up to great effect in her bathroom, where the wall tiles and marble surrounding the soaking tub are sage, and in the master bedroom, where it forms a backdrop for an extraordinary 19th-century American Aesthetic Movement ebonized cabinet. Another green, the color of leafy branches, grows in the panoramic oil mural—replete with old-fashioned shady trees and images of landmarks from the town that are significant to the couple—that climbs the central stairway.

The furnishings, new and old pieces that are steeped in tradition, reinforce Christofi's themes. Built-in cabinets, which were popular in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in America's grandest homes, abound, notably in the dining and living rooms. In the master bedroom, a sleigh bed becomes a cozy cocoon when it is upholstered head to footboard in

a paisley print. And in the living room, the drawers of the drum games table, a reproduction of an 18th-century piece, become the perfect place for storing the couple's collection of Stave jigsaw puzzles, including the one they commissioned that bears a picture of the home that they are so fond of.

"They absolutely love nature, and they designed the house to take advantage of all its glories, morning, noon and night," Christofi says. "There are no stables here yet, but there's a beautiful pasture at the bottom of the road that would be perfect for one."

When the day does wind down, the country retreat basks in the sun's rays. "There's nothing else around for miles," Christofi says wistfully. "You can see forever. And at night it gets pitch black. There are just layers and layers of shining silver stars. And that's what makes it such a sublime spot." 📷

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