



the **Soul** of

a **house**

BY SUSAN FAREWELL

PHOTOGRAPHY BY
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Westport-based architect
George Dumitru, AIA, prides
himself on tapping into the
real spirit of a home





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“I’ve been lucky not to fall into the big-house trend,” says George Dumitru, who designs residential properties throughout Fairfield and Westchester Counties as well as farther afield. “A 10,000 square foot house can’t compete with a beautifully designed home half the size. In the end, the smaller one will survive [stylistically] much better.”

Driven by an unflagging desire to create homes of exquisite quality, Dumitru searches for the “soul” of each and every home he designs. Much of this comes from the owners themselves. “I focus on the people and their nests.” This ongoing mission is apparent in each and every project he chooses.

Dumitru feels strongly about sticking with the language of a particular style. Born and raised in Europe, he credits his childhood surroundings for influencing him. “I grew up with classic European architecture,” he says, “so I know my stuff.”

PREVIOUS PAGE LEFT: Stone was used throughout the construction, recreating the look of the gardener’s cottage. This shows the garage door, custom-made mahogany with glass panels to let the light in.

PREVIOUS PAGE RIGHT: The black and white “before” shot was taken by O. Wentworth Huckel in the 1920s. It was the inspiration for the house that stands today (below).

ABOVE: Here you see the rear deck and staircase. The chocolate brown trim and barn red windows very elegantly work with the dark stain.

RIGHT: This oak-topped island was painted ebony on the side to recreate the idea of having a piece of furniture in the kitchen.





This Riverside house, which is set on one acre about 200 yards from the Sound, is an excellent example of his adherence to a particular vernacular. The house that originally stood here in the 1920s was a stone gardener's cottage surrounded by farmland. Over the years, it had several additions put on and when he came on the scene a couple of years ago, it had all sorts of odd hallways and stairwells. "It looked like two or three families lived here," he says. "It was very disunited."

That original stone cottage, however, was the inspiration for the house that stands there today—an updated English country house that's every inch attractive with a dark stain shingled exterior with deep brown trim accented with barn-red windows.

"When we started [the project], stylistically we weren't married to anything," admits the owner, who prefers to remain anonymous. "But we did want to maintain the character of the house." He and his wife had clear thoughts on the general layout of what they wanted, but "George is the one who pulled it all together," he says.

Indeed, working with the owners' and their desires, Dumitru kept the size modest and at the same time, effectively captured the essence of the stone gardener's

LEFT: One original wall of the house stands in the wide, fireplaced foyer.

ABOVE: The windows throughout the stairwell let ample light into the house.

RIGHT: A wet bar is right off the foyer, where a window used to be in the original stone house.





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cottage. “We [collaboratively] wanted it to be unassuming, not overstated or overwhelming,” he explains.

In reconstructing it, Dumitru had it taken down to the footprint, keeping much of the original stone in tact. The

ABOVE: Paneling and wide oak flooring help recreate the historic look of the house in the family room.
RIGHT: The living room has simple, clean architectural lines.

property is on the edge of wetlands so he was bound by many constraints and challenges.

Some of the original stone is used in the new construction greatly contributing to its charm and authenticity. As you enter, you step into a wide, fireplaced foyer with one of the original walls. A small wet bar is off to the side, a pleasant welcoming detail. Straight ahead is an artfully designed stairwell with great windows letting natural light pour in, and white paneled walls from top to bottom.

The kitchen is reminiscent of an English cottage with exposed truss framing for the ceiling, antique wood cabinets, deep white porcelain farmhouse sinks, and an oak-topped island painted an

ebony color on the sides. “This is the classic language,” Dumitru explains. “In the past, it [the island] would have been a piece of furniture.”

Though not pictured, the dining room of the home is a low-ceilinged, very cozy English-country room. It includes the stone cottage’s original fireplace. “It had been paneled over,” Dumitru says. “We took everything off and restored it. We wanted to keep it intact.”

The living room, family room, as well as bedrooms, bathrooms and home office are in the same language of the classic English house—simple, yet elegant on a comfortable scale.

It is this purity of style Dumitru strives for that shows in all of his work.

