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A TIMELESS LONG ISLAND
Family Home

+

WOMEN AND
THEIR GARDENS WITH
CHARLOTTE MOSS

Memories in the Making

A home in Bellport, New York, gets a head-to-toe reboot to fit the current needs of the family as well as those of generations to come.

By **ALICE WELSH DOYLE** *Photography by* **MICHAEL MUNDY & AYDIN ARJOMAND**

Not many interior designers have known their clients since childhood, but Phillip Thomas had a history with one particular family in Bellport, New York. As a boy, he spent many summers just down the road from Janet and Michael Foster and played with their three girls. When the Foster family began to expand with sons-in-law and grandchildren in the mix, they knew their house had to grow with them. There was no thought of moving to another Bellport property as this house was teeming with so many precious memories.

Naturally, the Fosters looked to Phillip for help. The New York-based designer immediately partnered with local architect Mary Knowles to bring out the best in the reimagined

home in a way that speaks to the original architecture. “The Fosters wanted a similar house but bigger rooms, so we lifted up the roof to create soaring cathedral ceilings in the bedrooms,” says Mary. “We made sure to copy the roof pitches and shed dormers so that the exterior reads the same as before.” A more modern addition offers an open, family-focused floor plan with folding, floor-to-ceiling glass doors. “The doors allow the interiors to have a conversation with the garden and pool area,” Mary says. The space also has plenty of room for

PREVIOUS PAGES: Nestled in a grove, the house gives no indication of it former life as a garage that housed cars and chauffeurs. **THESE PAGES, LEFT:** The original screened porch remained intact structurally but received updates of fresh paint, pillows, and new flooring and rug. **BELOW:** Phillip used many of the owners’ existing furnishings, transforming them with fresh fabrics and colorful pillows and adding new lamps. “A little discord between patterns in a space is desirable because it gives energy and dynamism,” he says. **RIGHT:** As a whimsical nod to the area’s farming roots, Phillip reused tractor seats as places to perch in a mudroom. **BELOW RIGHT:** Raising the roof allowed for a soaring front entry with an elaborate light fixture Phillip designed from old farm equipment.

gatherings, which was a top priority in the planning. “We usually have 15 people for dinner—sometimes more—three times a week all summer long,” says Janet. “Now everyone can spread out yet still be together because of the open design.”

The Fosters also tasked Phillip and Mary with repurposing anything that could be saved and using local resources as much as possible. “We salvaged all the original pine wood flooring and used it for the millwork in a powder bath and the wine cellar,” says Phillip. The imaginative designer went so far as to take an original stall door with its inherent grooves from kicking horses and turn it into a powder bath vanity inside the revamped stable that now serves as an entertaining mecca.

With the architecture and materials in place, the decorating fun began. “We didn’t want to be too literal about the concept of a summer house with lots of

OPPOSITE: Folding glass doors make for a true indoor-outdoor connection to the pool area and beyond. Trumpet vines climb up the sides of the house to frame the new addition. **THIS PAGE, TOP:** The addition included a highly functional open kitchen. The light fixture is made from vintage egg baskets hung with a yoke sourced from the local farm museum. “It’s wonderful what you can create with found objects,” says Phillip. **ABOVE:** “I love red rooms,” says the designer. “There is something so timeless about them if they are done right. The library that Albert Hadley created for Brooke Astor is a good example. It still feels fresh today!”

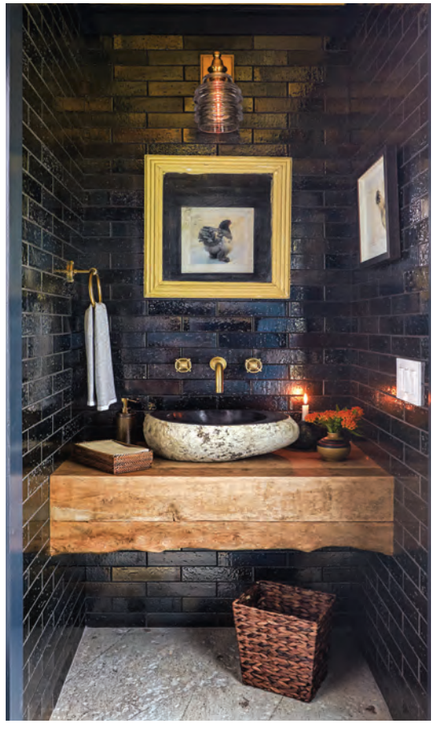
THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: Old sailing images that line the upper hallway speak to the seaside setting of Bellport. • An antique marble-topped bedroom dresser looks even prettier with an explosion of Black-eyed Susans fresh from the garden. • "That giant thing over the bed is the top from a grain silo, if you can believe it!" says Phillip. **OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:** A guest bedroom includes a decorative paint treatment for the wall that reflects light. "I see a room as a sheetrock box that needs depth, volume, and richness," says Phillip. • The green four-poster bed is from the estate of Elsie de Wolfe. The minute Phillip saw it, he knew it would be perfect for this daughter's bedroom. • Phillip used a collection of mirrors in different shapes and sizes to create an art installation in another daughter's bedroom.

"I want clients to look at every fabric in their home and say to themselves, 'I picked that. I remember when I fell in love with that fabric.' My task is to take the things that they love and create a coherent story."

—PHILLIP THOMAS

whites, blues, or pastels," says Phillip. "The family also didn't want to fill the house with too many new products. They wanted to reuse the furnishings they already had, as well as items they had acquired or that had been passed down to them."

Phillip reinvented many of their existing pieces, giving them whole new identities. In that vein, he took a set of Bar Harbor traditional white wicker furniture on the screened-in porch and painted the collection a lively red. "It's an unexpected color but it felt right given the coziness of this house," he says. "We used the same red for the front door and mudroom entrance and in the original sitting room." Janet also had family items that were touchstones, such as painted twin beds from her childhood. Phillip married



OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: An old stable morphed into what Phillip refers to as a party folly that is in constant use during the season. • The stable's powder bath vanity is made from former horse stalls. • A yellow lacquered ceiling casts a pleasing glow, as does the handcrafted light fixture made from bronze clamps and hand-blown glass created by Brooklyn-based artist Lindsey Adelman. **THIS PAGE, ABOVE:** Oversized chairs, hay bales, and gigantic photographs of Isabella Rossellini's prize heirloom chickens by local artist Patrice Casanova make for a lively atmosphere.

them together on a matching platform, transforming them into a king-size bed. And her Victorian dining table and chairs took on a new life with jaunty coral pink paint for the chairs and a faux bois finish for the lackluster wooden table.

With direction from Mary, the designer expertly rose to the challenge of using local resources by visiting a local farm museum created by preservationist Ron Bush. Among the inventory that includes over 6,000 vintage pieces of farm equipment, Phillip found some old cogs and wheels hung on pulleys from lace mills in Patchogue, New York. From these pieces, he fashioned a collection of pendant lights for the entry. "It's really fascinating to take something totally utilitarian and reinvent it with a whole new energy and meaning," he says.

The designer employed another large-scale cog to serve as décor in the same space. "It's just as beautiful as any piece of art you would find hanging in The Met," says Phillip. "It has character and tells a lot about the agricultural history of the community." He also rescued a charming wooden bucket scored from an antiques store in Hudson Valley and waterproofed the inside to serve as a vanity. "It's sort of like a wishing well for the grandchildren," says the designer. "They gather seashells and sea glass and toss them in after visits to the beach."

Nothing about the home's design hints to its past as an early 1900s garage that housed cars, chauffeurs, and other staff members, but there is still a story to tell. When the property was being excavated for the addition, a collection of old glass bottles was unearthed. "We realized that the staff had been throwing these into a pit in the yard, which had become buried over time," says Phillip. The innovative duo put the collection in a two-sided vitrine to show off the finds, which also serves a practical purpose as it casts light in the basement stairway.

With the house complete, it now speaks to a new chapter for the Foster clan. "Phillip took it to the next level, and I could not be happier," says Janet. "I hope it continues to bring joy and memories for generations to come."

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