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BOHEMIAN by the SEA

OLD FABRICS AND QUIRKY FURNISHINGS EMBELLISH
A SHINGLE STYLE HOUSE ON LONG ISLAND

Architecture by Francis Fleetwood, AIA/Interior Design by Alexa Hampton
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Interior designer Alexa Hampton was commissioned to re-decorate a 4,500-square-foot Francis Fleetwood-designed Shingle Style residence on Long Island's South Fork. Situated atop a ridge with sweeping views of the Atlantic, the house, built in 1992, is a short stroll from its own beach.



As a decorator," explains Alexa Hampton, "I wanted to do something that diverged from the strength and linearity of the house itself—the loose shapes and silhouettes of some of the furniture I used were in response to the architecture, consciously or subconsciously."

This was a house very much worth bearing in mind. Sited atop a craggy ocean-sloshed bluff on Long Island's South Fork, it had been designed in 1992 by Francis Fleetwood in the Shingle Style to echo but not slavishly ape the seven circa 1882 Stanford White cottages that looked approvingly down on it from knolls of their own on a ridge farther back. It remains one of only two houses to have been built since the late 19th century in the heart

of a historic moorland preserve originally laid out by the great landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted.

Fleetwood, who for the past three decades has been building roughly four substantial Shingle Style houses a year in the region ("I only work outside the Hamptons if I've done a house for you *in* the Hamptons"), maintains that he always looks to White for inspiration but that, with this house, he "looked even more closely." It can certainly be seen to accord with White's masterworks in its asymmetrical dormers (hipped, gabled, and turreted), entrance portico, and eclectic mix of win-

dows. The sheer number, not to say size, of these windows, however, is the dead giveaway that the house wasn't actually built around the turn of the last century. And while White used natural wood finishes in *his* houses to keep things dark and cool in those days before air-conditioning, Fleetwood employed painted surfaces to reflect the natural light (and Hampton for her part would go easy on curtains throughout, installing Roman blinds, which in the event are never even drawn).

The house is declaratively Stanford White-like in its generous embrace of porches:

OPPOSITE: Columns provide subtle visual distinction between the living room and the entrance hall. The hall's console table, from Newel, displays accessories from Amy Perlin Antiques. The clover end table is from John Rosselli. RIGHT: The living room. Faux-bamboo center table in foreground, Newel. Paisley on sofas, Travers. Stark carpet.



Fleetwood's generous use of large windows, a modern feature of the house's otherwise historical design, gives the living room plenty of sunlight. For times when the sun is overbearing, however, Hampton installed Roman shades. Shade and bobbin-chair fabrics, Lee Jofa. Shade trim, Cowtan & Tout. Armchair floral, Brunswick & Fils. Area rug from Christie's.





To furnish the house, they consulted online sources, attended auctions, and negotiated with English and Scandinavian dealers.



OPPOSITE: At the stair landing, Hampton created a casual space for stretching out—"an intimate setting where family members can put their feet up on the ottoman." Stark carpet.
ABOVE: In the dining room, where the walls are covered in grass cloth and the richly patinated plank floor is left unadorned, the eclectic mix of objects includes a pair of wood columns, from Amy Perlin. The lamps on the sideboard are from Sentiments.

On the side where the illimitable Atlantic breaks upon the eye, the first floor has a multi-columned porch 14 feet wide and as long as the house itself (56 feet), and the second floor features a square open deck off the master bedroom and, off the guest room, a turreted covered porch (the only place Fleetwood used the turned elements that White favored). Where the house is most unlike a White is in its easy flow. Fleetwood has you coming right into the living room, which is open to both stair hall and kitchen. "Even though a

lot of my clients say they want informal," he observes, "when it comes down to it they want the grand entrance hall." Here, for a wonder, is a modestly proportioned one—distinguished from the living room merely by a colonnade-like element, an idea that Fleetwood borrowed from White and then greatly simplified. The only self-contained room downstairs is the rather formal dining room.

The clients—the husband is a private-equity investor and the wife a former public official now in the private sector

herself—have a strict six-story brick town house on Manhattan's Upper East Side, dominated by Russian and Swedish Biedermeier pieces and Italian Renaissance art, and they envisioned their summer house as a counterpoint to it: "a place to run around barefoot in and just throw the towel down anywhere," as Hampton puts it. And indeed, when the couple entertain, it's usually margaritas on the back porch followed by a clambake on their private beach (achieved via a grassy walkway scythed out of the otherwise untortured terrain

and then by a flight of weathered wooden steps).

The palette for the most part is cool tones—the living room a bluish-gray glaze; the library a warmer-blue stripe; the master bedroom, in the wife's word, "oceanic" (there, particularly, one has the sense of the sea pressing near). The dining room, on the other hand, is the color of earth newly turned. And as for the younger daughter's room, it is unblushingly pink. "She was seven at the time, and she picked not only the color but all her fabrics herself—we laid them out



OPPOSITE: "It was important for this room to be blue," Hampton says of the master bedroom, "as every window in it looks out to the Atlantic." The floral fabric is from Cowtan & Tout. The floor lamp is from Vaughan. Carpet, Elizabeth Ekkins. ABOVE: The rear elevation faces the ocean, making the two-story's three porches the frequent settings of outdoor dining and relaxing. Weatherend outdoor furniture.

for her and she just said, 'That! That! That! That! That!' her mother recalls.

The couple aspired to "the kind of collected interior that would have pieces that looked like they could have come from the Paris flea market, bohemian but clearly not peasant—bohemian, rather, in the sense of Madeleine Castaing," Hampton says, referencing a decorator to whom anything conventional was anathema. "Alexa and I kept coming back to that word—not that my husband and I are particularly bohemian," the wife laughs.

"I guess what we meant was nothing too serious or too perfect-looking."

Bohemia, Hampton believes, lies in the details—such as upholstering club chairs and sofas with one kind of fabric on the front and another on the back, a pouf with one kind of fabric on the base and another on the cushion, and slipper chairs with one kind of fabric down the center like a runner and a different one on the left and right ("and then we used different fun trims to gussy them up even more"). The dining room chairs the couple already

owned, "so we simply put cushions and little skirts on them to dress them up, though not too much, because we didn't want them looking shiny and new—we wanted the cushions sort of lumpy and charming." In the library, where a less detail-obsessed decorator might have used maybe two fabrics, Hampton, layering and layering and layering and layering, used four different printed linens. The wife had collected a lot of the antique textiles ("The history of those fabrics! I mean, when you think about all the places they must have

been and the stories they could tell"), and some of them were lavished on pillows and throws. "We decorators," Hampton confesses, "are always doing, you know, pairs of pillows in the corners of sofas, and this client helped break me of that habit. And she also said, 'No, we're not doing squares, we're doing rectangles, we're doing all kinds of shapes.'"

To furnish the house with objects fervidly individual, they consulted online sources such as 1stdibs.com, attended auctions, and negotiated with

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English and Scandinavian dealers. “We were drawing from a very large pool, which was fun,” Hampton says. “It wasn’t just the antiques stores in one area.” There’s a wonderful old Belgian linen press on the second-floor landing, under a cluster of antique mirrors that the couple had picked up in such exotic locales as Turkey and Morocco, and there’s a French Victorian faux-bamboo center table in the living room, as well as an iridescent inlaid Anglo-Indian low table, of which Hampton says, “Mother-of-pearl by the seaside makes a certain sense.”

One of the wife’s most cherished artifacts is the 19th-century eagle on its own stand in the living room—“It’s America, it’s democracy, it’s what we’re about.” (The couple’s dog, it turns out, is named Liberty, and the yacht—a rare 95-foot all-mahogany 1928 so-called commuter boat, which Hampton also decorated—is named *Justice*. And yes, Liberty has the run of *Justice*.) Hampton, a great proponent of proportion, seized on the wife’s eagle to lend the room height, as she did the birdcage across from it, which works the same way an architectural model would have. And the way that the two antique reeded-wood half columns in the dining room do—“I saw them in a shop and thought how interesting they could be

“Alexa can put disparate things together and make it all look timeless,” the wife remarks.

compositionally, adding height to a corner, and that it would be neat to have the reeded wood in a grass-cloth room.”

“Alexa can put disparate things together and make it all look timeless, neither traditional nor contemporary,” the wife remarks. “And she has the most wonderful way of listening—and she understands.” Hampton chimes in that “it was very easy to get very excited by what the client herself was drawn to,” then confides that she recently named a table in her furniture line after her—“a little Anglo-Indian affair with inlaid spindles that’s kind of Castaingian-bohemian and therefore very much my client’s sensibility.” □