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HOUSE TOUR: THE DRUM HILL BEAT  
TOYS THAT GROW KIDS' MINDS

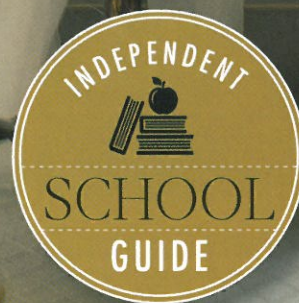
# wilton

MAGAZINE

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## Start Ups With Style

*Local Entrepreneurs Strut Their Stuff*



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# DRUM HILL GROOVE

A 19TH-CENTURY FARMHOUSE EVOLVES OVER TIME

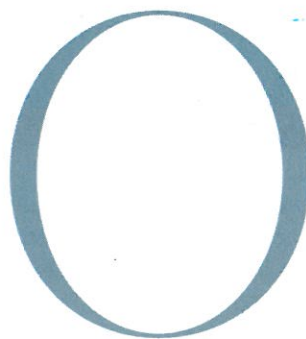
**WIDE OPEN** Natural floods the great room which features white-washed walls and beams, comfortable seating nooks, and bucolic views. An adjacent eating area is for casual dining.





**GETTING IN** A new entry was created in the back of the house to better enhance flow. The foyer features an elliptical ceiling echoed in the bluestone-tiled floor. Below the original Federal-style front entryway. To the right, a cozy living room with leather club chairs and a fireplace.





VER SEVERAL YEARS, Mary Pytko commuted from her rented home in Ridgefield through Wilton en route to her job in Stamford. During her daily drives she often admired the Eli Birchard house, a stately white antique circa 1822, situated on Drum Hill Road. One Saturday, she noticed a realtor's open-house in progress at the property and pulled over. It was time to discover if the interior was equal in charm to its exterior. It was. Pytko was smitten and experienced that fluttery feeling reserved for falling in love with people, puppies, and prospective homes. "I loved the light and soaring ceilings in the great room, I loved the wide-plank floors and the towering maple trees outside. You know how it is. You walk in and say, 'This is my house!'"

An executive vice president of Global Human Resources for Brooks Brothers, Pytko describes herself as "more impetuous," and characterizes her partner Mike Boswood, CEO of a private health care analytics company, as "more planful." Pytko was sold on the property. But would Mike feel the same way?

Immediately following the house tour, she e-mailed Boswood photos of this antique charmer and then called him in England. "I found the house we're going to buy," she told him. Having grown up in London, a city steeped in history with buildings dating back many centuries, Boswood was neither impressed nor won over by the idea of "living in an old farmhouse." But he felt Pytko's enthusiasm and readily agreed to view the property upon his return. "I didn't immediately fall in love with the place," he admits. "But I was intrigued. I liked the formal living room and appreciated the scale of the great room. Previous owners had removed the wide-plank floorboards from the attic and repurposed them in the formal living room, master bedroom, and on the stairs." Mike and Mary went ahead and bought the house in 2007 and began making it their own.

While they appreciated the august history of their new home, they didn't feel the need to be slavish to period details or to decorate entirely in a Colonial style. "I wouldn't last more than two hours in that kind of environment," says Mike with a smile. "I don't want to feel like I have to wear a frock coat or a farmers smock in my own home."



**KEEPING IT REAL** Modern pieces come along with antiques and original art in the great room. This eclectic design philosophy is utilized to great effect in the dining room at right, combining Louis Ghost chairs with a Persian carpet, a reproduction of an antique table, and vintage silver.



Unlike many couples, Pytko and Boswood are equally involved in all design decisions, and describe their combined style as eclectic. They don't always agree, but make it work, opting to mix antiques with contemporary pieces and statement art. The result is sophisticated and stylish, with an emphasis on comfort.

The great room has a soaring ceiling flanked by two walls of windows affording a pond view to the west and a pasture view to the east. The décor puts the emphasis on the views. The furniture is upholstered in neutral ecru linens, with subtle accents of amethyst and teal reflected in the throw pillows and in a large Old Norwalk pottery collection. The breakfast room has a simple round wooden pedestal table surrounded by parsons chairs with lavender grey slipcovers, all of it anchored by a wine-barrel chandelier.

The living room, an addition done in the 1940s, is used more during the fall and winter months when the wood-burning fireplace is put to frequent use. A charming library with floor-to-ceiling bookcases reminds one of the tactile pleasures of curling up on the sofa and reading a real book versus a virtual one. As with many antique houses situated close to the road, the front door of this Drum Hill home was rarely used. The owners solved this problem by completely reimagining the design and function of the back of their house, and now the flow both inside and out has been transformed by extensive renovation. The clever design by local architect Rob Sanders artfully blends the old with the new and was realized by contractor Ross Tiefen Thaler.

What was formerly a creaky metal Bilco door providing access to a dingy basement, is now an inviting entryway. A wide wooden staircase painted dove grey ushers visitors up from the gravel drive onto a covered porch. Entry through a dark green front door with subtle brass hardware leads to a small foyer. There an elliptical domed ceiling is echoed by an oval bluestone motif on the floor. The homeowners have added a modern console table and a striking photograph by Nantucket artist Terry Pommet for an overall effect that is welcoming and elegant.

**THE HOMEOWNERS** The couple embraces outdoor living whenever possible and frequently breakfast on the new porch, enjoy the back patio for dining al fresco, and use the private garden getaway at cocktail hour.



Before the renovation, there was no access to the south side of the house, which obliged the homeowners and guests to travel through the breakfast room, kitchen, and dining room to reach the other living spaces. Sanders resolved this issue by opening a wall to create access to both sides of the home. To unite the two spaces, he reprised the arched and fluted neo-classical doorways to match the ones that had been added in an earlier era. A powder room was gutted and re-situated near the foyer and the laundry room was moved upstairs.

A new staircase provides access to a downstairs mudroom, which connects the house to the garage, a built-in storage area, and to the mechanical room, making the overall design more logical. The infrastructure has been updated to accommodate modern amenities, central air-conditioning, and a 21st-century lifestyle, while preserving the home's pleasing eccentricity.

Improvements weren't limited to the interior. The couple enlisted the design services of the Glen Gate Company to redo the exterior landscaping. "A complete wilderness" was removed and replaced with a charming private garden enclosed by a wall of white hydrangeas. Cushioned Adirondack chairs, a small stone fountain, and grass pathways lined with purple salvia create an inviting refuge.

The split-rail fence on the east side, and the stone walls and pasture abutting the property attest to the fact that this was once a working farm. "You can easily imagine a time when there were goats, cows, horses and chickens," says Boswood.

"I see myself staying here for a long time, so we're in no rush to get the entire house 'done,'" says Pytko. "Maybe down the road we'll tackle the upstairs and the kitchen. It's an ongoing project." Boswood concurs. "I like the sense that our house is evolving over time. I like that we've put our personal stamp on it." ■



