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THE INTERNATIONAL MAGAZINE OF INTERIOR DESIGN

OCTOBER 2001

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Connecticut Collaboration

DISCIPLINED ELEGANCE DEFINES
A GREENWICH COLONIAL



OPPOSITE: Architect Oliver Cope and interior designer Mica Ertegun worked closely with Warren and Allison Kanders to transform the couple's house on Long Island Sound. The original façade was extended and Tuscan columns installed. Windows are by Marvin.

Architecture by Oliver Cope, AIA
Interior Design by MAC II
Text by Judith Thurman
Photography by Durston Saylor

The renovation, which Cope calls "meticulous and detailed," included rebuilding half the structure. ABOVE: In the entrance hall, a circa 1940 French table holds a 1985 bronze by Henri Laurens. The inset floor tiles were painted to resemble sandstone. Sotheby's Irish mirror.

Family planning usually proceeds according to the schedule outlined in the old ditty: First comes love, then comes marriage, then comes the lady with the baby carriage. Nothing about major real estate. Warren Kanders had his own sense of priorities. He was young and single—a private investor who loved to travel—when he bought a venerable estate on twenty acres in Greenwich, overlooking Long Island Sound. True, it didn't have the look of a bachelor pad, and when he showed it to Allison, the woman in his life, they shared a vision of two children cavorting on its lawns. But did they rush to consult a wedding planner? No, they hired an architect, New York-based Oliver Cope, and an interior designer, Mica Ertegun, of MAC II. The marriage and carriage would succeed each other in due course, well after the groundbreaking.

"We thought you were engaged!" exclaimed the MAC II team, which included project directors Mica Duffy and David Barritt, when the couple returned from a trip to London and announced their betrothal. In a sense, however, it was the house rather than the ring that had sealed their commitment—with the

A 1934 Raoul Dufy work highlights the living room. The Diego Giacometti low table is from Sotheby's. The circa 1890 French stool is from Lee Calicchio. Brunswick & Fils sofa fabric. Niemann Weeks drapery lining. Fire screen and tools from Danny Alessandro. Darius rug.





Ertegun chose a neutral palette for the dining room, as elsewhere. The Irish table, made for a Dublin children's hospital, and the 18th-century Scandinavian chandelier, from the Château de Groussay, are from Sotheby's. Baccarat clear goblets, Brunschwig & Fils chair toile.



promise of "an informal but civilized family life," as Ertegun puts it, "in a sophisticated but airy country place without clutter or affectation, furnished with an eclectic mix of comfortable contemporary pieces and exceptional antiques."

Seen from afar, the 1920s estate gives the impression of sprawling, Colonial grandeur. "That's deceptive," says Allison Kanders. "It isn't one of those suburban McMansions of forty thousand square feet. The scale of the rooms is intimate and gracious, which was important to us. We weren't interested in gated salons off-limits to the children. We love the porches Oliver added, and the seamless sense of continuity between indoor and outdoor spaces."

The principle of "seamlessness" between styles and periods also distinguishes the décor, and Ertegun's work in general. As one listens to the designer—who was born and educated in Romania and spent a great deal of time in France and Switzerland—describe her aesthetic, one can't help but note its resemblance to her accent: worldly, personal, syncretic, confident without brashness, rich without ostentation, decorous but not conventional, a complex distillation.

The house, however, wasn't as hard to label: *wreck* covered most of the bases. The quality of the interiors, remembers Cope, was "ersatz," and the grounds, despite magnificent centennial plantings and a sweeping water view, had been much neglected. When the architect began probing the structure, he opened "a Pandora's box" of rude surprises, according to Allison Kanders. They discovered, quite literally, that they had a sunken living room: It had no foundation. "Having jacked up the



"Working in a vacuum is not my ideal," says Ertegun (left). "It's more fun to collaborate with clients who bring their own ideas to the table."

BELOW: In the library, a 1990 photograph by Hiroshi Sugimoto is set against original pine paneling. The circa 1860 Portuguese specimen-inlaid table, foreground, is from Bernd Goeckler Antiques. The Louis XVI library table is from Christie's. Andirons from Danny Alessandro.





Cope reconfigured a series of small service rooms to create a spacious kitchen, whose white cabinetry is countered by antique terra-cotta-tile floors. Most family meals are taken there. "It's the heart and soul of the house," says Allison Kanders. Plaid from Brunswick & Fils.

floor," Ertegun says wryly, "we were quite relieved not to find any bodies."

Warren Kanders, nicknamed the Inspector by his design team and much appreciated by them for his grasp of technical detail, had studied with Peter Eisenman at the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies in New York. He didn't flinch at the prospect of a gut recon-

struction. "Our choice was to knock the house down and build from scratch or renovate. We actually did both: knocked down a third and rebuilt a half, retaining the core."

The boiserie in the library—elegant paneling of old pine—was "the only original feature left untouched," says Ertegun. In addition to a major overhaul of every system and surface, Cope,

working with project architect Olivia Rowan, reconfigured the floor plan, raised ceilings on the second story, replaced windows to make the most of the splendid shore light, upgraded the spindly facade with a classical Tuscan colonnade and added the porches, a solarium, a stone-columned pergola and a handsome mudroom whose painted woodwork and aus-



"Mica has a lucid, disciplined yet casual elegance," says Warren Kanders (left, with Allison and William). The painting is by Cynthia Knott.

BELOW: The bar contains comfortable pieces, including Austrian Biedermeier chairs. The Jean Pascaud scone is circa 1937. Made in the style of Jules Leleu, the circa 1926 circular tables are from Ritter Antik. Warren Kanders uses the screen porch as his "smoking room."



tere symmetries pay homage to the Arts and Crafts Movement. "I felt that this family entrance, used every day, should be a first-class space in its own right," the architect explains. "I like to vary the idiom of the detailing from room to room, relating old and new, so that the house seems to have evolved over time."

Cope also eliminated a decrepit service annex—"a

gloomy warren of pantries and servants' quarters"—and replaced it with a rationally luxurious family wing anchored by a luminous modern kitchen floored in antique terra-cotta. The palette there, as elsewhere, is northern European in its restraint. Tones of ivory, fruitwood, flax, biscuit and pearl are occasionally deepened—as in the dining room, where

the walls are kraft-paper brown—or relieved, as in the living room, by strokes of ebony and Chinese coral. But neither designer nor clients favored strong doses of color and pattern. "One tires too easily of them," comments Ertegun. "Our approach is always clean and unfussy," adds project director Duffy. "We don't like anything jarring. Overdecoration

shortens a room's life span."

The project took nearly four years—"considerably more time than any of us had anticipated," Ertegun admits. "But we had an easy understanding with the Kanderses from the beginning. She's what I would call a 'dresser,' classically put together in a very young way. They're both well traveled, with a keen eye and an urbane sen-



sibility. We did a considerable amount of shopping for them abroad and at auction, including the sale of furnishings from Charles de Beistegui's Château de Groussay, where we bought the remarkable eighteenth-century Scandinavian chandelier in the dining room." Almost as rare is the round Irish mahogany dining table purchased in London—one of the couple's favorite pieces. "Very few designers have an

eye for furniture and art as unerring as Mica's," Warren Kanders notes.

Ertegun is herself the quintessential "dresser." Her style is disciplined yet arresting. So is her approach to upholstery. As Duffy puts it: "The English country house look—chintz slipcovers a size too large—is not Mica's thing." The curved sofa in the living room, designed to fit the bow window, is covered in ocher-and-red toile.

For a pair of Austrian Biedermeier walnut chairs in the bar, a room illuminated by circa 1937 sconces by Jean Pascaud, Ertegun chose an oyster-gray silk velvet. A chair and ottoman in the master suite's sitting room are covered in a delft-blue fabric, and the windows are draped in bone-colored silk challis with an embroidered border.

By temperament, the Kanderses are parents first, collectors second and museum

guards not at all. Their approach to life is *laissez tout-aller*. They both proudly describe their house as "cozy." It is charming to think of their two little boys—an infant and a toddler—wheeling through these polished rooms, snuggling into the Empire, Biedermeier, Déco, Adam, Regency, Georgian, Louis XVI and modernist furniture and experiencing its texture as a deluxe extension of *Pat the Bunny*. □

ABOVE: The master bedroom, which Ertegun describes as "peaceful, intimate and sunny," overlooks the garden. A Regency penwork tilt-top table is joined by George III gilt-wood open-arm chairs. "Mica knows everything about furniture and placement," says Warren Kanders.

OPPOSITE: Landscape architects Peter Cummin and Claudia Levy, of Cummin Associates, reworked the grounds and regraded the land near the rear of the house to create a space for entertaining. Cope positioned the pergola between the screen porch and the breakfast room.