



a house at ease

INSPIRED BY A NEWPORT ESTATE NOTED FOR ITS LOW-KEY SENSIBILITIES, A NEW FAMILY HOME MAKES THE LIVING COMFORTABLE, EASY, AND FUN

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THE HOUSE RESTS comfortably in its setting, which is defined by stone walls and terraces softened by the lush informal landscaping.



Asked to describe the architectural style of the house and outbuildings he designed for a young family on a choice 5-acre parcel in a leafy suburb close to Boston, architect Marcus Gleysteen takes a minute to contemplate. “These houses are so hard to pigeonhole,” he says. “Just call it today’s version of an English country house with character, notably in the way that its ancient Gothic forms and Shingle Style influences are as versatile, organic, and relevant as ever.”



A MORE DELECTABLE DESCRIPTION comes from architect Thomas Hastings (1860–1929), who said the appropriation for such a house should be divided into equal parts, “one-half for the house, the other for the gardens . . . or, as it might be termed, one-half for the pudding, the other for the sauce.” Indeed, the mini-estate Gleysteen modeled after the Stuart Duncan House in Newport, Rhode Island, is like a tasty dessert served on a platter of luscious green landscaping.

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As with the Duncan House, which was designed in 1914 by John Russell Pope, the Gleysteen-designed house lacks enormous rooms and grand staircases in order to, as Pope put it, make the house “essentially a home.”

The project got underway with clients, design professionals, builder, and artisans all on the same intriguing page. They were willing to be audacious, but also consciously pragmatic. “Common sense prevailed,” says Gleysteen, whose firm, Marcus Gleysteen Architects is in downtown Boston.

“Pitched roofs shed snow and water. Overhanging eaves shield the walls below, and porticos provide for dry doorways.” Form followed func-

STONE PILLARS AND AN IRON GATE AND FENCE (LEFT) MARK A PATHWAY JUST OUTSIDE THE TWO-STORY-TALL GABLE END OF THE FAMILY ROOM. INSIDE, THE ROOM (FACING PAGE) IS DEFINED BY ITS STURDY TIMBER FRAMING DONE BY NEW ENERGY WORKS AND STONE FIREPLACE, DONE BY O’HARA & COMPANY. THE FRONT DOOR, WITH ITS ART NOUVEAU-STYLE GRILLWORK, FABRICATED BY VALLE’S FORGE, OPENS TO THE FOYER (BELOW), WHICH HAS AN ANTIQUE LIMESTONE FLOOR. THROUGH THE WIDE ARCH IS THE LIVING ROOM, WHERE A GRAND PIANO AWAITS ITS STUDENT MUSICIAN.







tion, but it never forgot to be charming. As it rises from the land, it has the air and surety of a home that has been venerated for generations.

Gleysteen and his clients, an entrepreneurial couple with three children ages 9 to 15, agreed on the same historic ideal for their inspiration, “Bonniecrest,” as the Stuart Duncan House is fondly named. History aside, this project is in a class by itself, with its 9,000-square-foot stone-and-shingle main house, plus three outbuildings that offer a menu of amenities. The double-story porte-cochere, which acts as a bridge linking the house with its separate three-car garage, includes a second-floor exercise room and children’s art studio. The fanciful

barn out back holds a studio where one of the owners, a maker of fine jewelry, can work. The pool house acts as an entertainment center and two-bedroom guest quarters.

It took a cohesive plan to achieve such striking results. “Building a beautiful, exciting house is a journey that requires infinite creativity and discipline,” says Gleysteen. “We needed flawless cooperation between an utterly collaborative team of designers, builders, artisans, and, most important, the clients right from the start. During the six or more months of planning sessions, we got to know each other very well.”



THROUGHOUT THE FIRST floor, Venetian plaster walls are tinted in neutral tones. In the living room (ABOVE, LEFT), the fireplace grill mimics the design on the front door. A window seat is nestled in the wainscoted stairwell (ABOVE, RIGHT), accented by bronze metalwork. The dining room (RIGHT) also has antique limestone flooring. Interior designer Susanne Csongor's mother, also named Susanne Csongor, designed the floral arrangements.

“Working closely from the start gave the project its harmony of materials and flow, from flooring to fabrics,” says Susanne Csongor of SLC Interiors in Hamilton, Massachusetts, who handled the interior design. “We listened very closely to what the owners wanted and took every word to heart. The wife, in particular, is very understated. Her style is transitional rather than traditional, an easy mix of good bones, both in architecture and furnishings.”

The interior spaces are full of memorable architectural and decorative surprises, such as the Art Nouveau-style front door grills that Gleysteen designed after visiting the Musée d’Orsay in Paris. The fireplace mantel in the living room is his modern interpretation of Elizabethan style. “I like to think the interior spaces are sculptural,” he says, “a dialogue between beautiful surfaces and volume. The key to the house is livability. The rooms aren’t too big and imposing, but at the same time, they’re big enough.”

Landscape architect Gregory Lombardi of Gregory Lombardi Design in Cambridge, Massachusetts, says that being involved from the start not only unified the site but also offered an opportunity to consider the way people and cars would move around on the property. In the end, he created an organically integrated topography, layered with micro-elements, from a small apple orchard to a petite azalea garden to lawns and wooded areas with labeled specimen trees for posterity. “It is truly a personal landscape of exploration and possibility,” says Lombardi. “It was nothing short of inspirational to work with genuinely nice, smart, unpretentious, involved clients who made all the right decisions.”

Now piano lessons are taken in the living room, a violin and music stand are at the ready for a practice session in the dining room, the study hall off the kitchen awaits its scholars, and bedroom walls are lined with athletic trophies. Sounds like home. ■

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DESIGN DECISION *Teamwork*

From permitting to final finishes, says Brian Vona, a principal of Kenneth Vona Construction in Waltham, Massachusetts, general contractor for the project, the job was particularly challenging because it required siting and building three very different and separate major stone-and-steel structures on a property that had ledge and ground-water issues.

“In the end, the experience was executed smoothly because so many talented artisans participated,” says Vona. “But we did have another priceless ingredient — the passionate involvement of the client. Good communication on everyone’s part made the result as good as it is.”

In addition to Vona, architect Marcus Gleysteen, interior designer Susanne Csongor, and landscape architect Gregory Lombardi, some of the professionals who tended to the details such as those pictured on the facing page include landscape contractor R.P. Marzilli, stonemason and landscaper Doug DeWolfe of New View Inc., millwork specialist Mitch Greaves of Littleton Millwork, stonemason Nick O’Hara of O’Hara & Company, timber frame contractor Mike Beganyi of New Energy Works, and iron fabricator Steve Valle of Valle’s Forge.

FACING PAGE: The door to the barn/studio (1) is protected by a deep overhang supported by a granite column. There is a romantic agrarian quality to the stone-and-granite end of the barn (2) that belies the more contemporary design that defines the front of the building (3). Timber framing in the pool house (4) is Douglas fir with metal strapping that creates its own sculptural effect. The Art Nouveau-style grills on the front door (5) were inspired by a visit to the Musée d’Orsay in Paris. A view of the ceiling and cupola in the barn/studio (6) is a study in abstract geometry. The garage (7) reinforces Old World sensibility with its demure vine-covered arched window and cylindrical turret. One of many garden gates (8) designed by Gregory Lombardi. The porte-cochere (9) acts as a bridge between garage and house.



The Stuart Duncan House, also known as “Bonniecrist,” in Newport, Rhode Island, shown here in a vintage photograph, was the inspiration for the house architect Marcus Gleysteen (above with interior designer Susanne Csongor) designed in a Boston suburb.



FACING PAGE: PHOTOS 1, 3, 4, 5, 6 BY MARCUS GLEYTEEN

