



TRANSFORMING the EVERYDAY

A Weston couple creates a retreat in their own backyard

At the end of a cold season, the appearance of a robin is considered a harbinger of spring. Its red breast, dark head and white eye crescents tell us it is time for growth and renewal, and with this message comes a sense of excitement. To renew, after all, is a necessary act, bringing with it the chance to reinvent oneself.

Walking up to the Wagner-McGarry outbuilding, visitors may feel a similar anticipation as they reach for the door knocker. It is heavy bronze and forged in the shape of a robin, and it announces those visitors into a unique structure, one designed specifically for renewal and celebration. Robin McGarry and Jonathan Wagner call this building “the barn,” and it contains all the things they have collected and loved over the



BY ERIKA ALEXIA TSOUKANELIS | PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHI CHI UBINA

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years. The business phones never ring in the barn. It is a place to entertain, to exercise, to enjoy a casual meal after a dip in the pool, to nap or read a book, to play online or sketch in the artist's studio upstairs. On the ground floor, pet French Lop rabbits dwell in their own special room, which is connected to a screened-in porch.

Jonathan is an architect, and Robin is an interior designer. They both work out of their Weston home, a 1960s raised ranch that has been updated in the style of a traditional Colonial Revival (as featured in *Fairfield County Home* in September 2005). This remodeling took place around the time of their marriage seven years ago. At that time, the two-acre lot was full of half-dead cedars. Jonathan and Robin had the area cleared and a pool put in. They hired a landscape artist to plant a lush perennial garden that offers them a vibrant floral surprise every few weeks during the warmer months. Wishing to continue this beautification, they became inspired by traditional country estates. They

PREVIOUS PAGE LEFT: The barn is a short distance from the house so that Robin and Jonathan may look out the window during their workday and be reminded of the retreat they have built.

PREVIOUS PAGE RIGHT: The left side of the barn, with its vertical siding, is where entertaining and relaxing takes place. Horizontal siding on the right side of the barn indicates the storage area.

THIS PAGE ABOVE: A perennial garden borders the pool.

THIS PAGE BELOW: Finished after the remodeling on the main house and before the construction of the barn, the pool is a source of much enjoyment for Robin and Jonathan.

RIGHT: The dining room has a Zen-like feel in the simplicity of its furnishings. The blue sideboard on the left conceals a flat-screen TV. Six ink prints on the wall are called “Iberian Variations” by artist Cecil Toucher, from Ken Nahan, Jr. Fine Art in Ridgefield.



The remote-controlled, ventless fireplace built into the wall lends a cozy feel while being entirely modern in its presentation, one powerful piece of ceramic bordering the gas-lit flames.



wanted their home to include an element of retreat, although their motivation did not involve improving the property's market value.

As Robin explains, "We do not plan to move. The barn is a place of tranquility. It leads us to the type of life we would like to live."

There were practical considerations as well. The couple has no basement and only a small attic. They were in dire need of storage space, including a garage in which to keep extra cars. Jonathan's 1965 Chevy pickup is one such vehicle. Its seafoam shading is distinct parked outside the grayish-tan barn. The color of the barn has been matched to the main house in order to relate the two structures.

"The barn was an opportunity to bridge between the style of the house and some slightly more progressive architectural ideas," Jonathan says. "Robin and I both do very traditional and very contemporary work with our clients. We wanted to respect the old while at the same time producing something fun and adventurous."

In this vein, the exterior of the barn has two well-defined sections. The siding on one is vertical and the roof pitched like that of the main house. The fenestration, or window arrangement, is rigid. This delineates the storage area, including the garage whose front is covered in stone. There is an upper story, arch-shaped operable window above the garage doors. Horizontal siding and a shed roof on the second section of the barn indicate where entertaining and relaxing takes place. Ad hoc fenestration allows for windows to appear as needed. Thus, different elements reflect different functions, a modernistic architectural expression that incorporates bits of conventional design and contemporary, clean-lined materials. The barn has little trim and no crown moldings.

The front door, with its bronze robin knocker, enters into a vestibule in the section of the building with the horizontal siding. Flooded with light, the vestibule is a high-ceilinged column of space offering a view up to a second-story balcony that crosses from the living to the storage area above. The walls are painted a gentle yellow, there are hooks for coats

LEFT: Wrought iron and wood shelves hold collections of bird's nests and teapots, as well as art books.

RIGHT: The ventless, remote-controlled fireplace from Spark Modern Fires of Georgetown gives off significant heat while lending charm.





hung and a simple print of apples that was done by an old friend of Jonathan's. Dangling above are contemporary lighting fixtures made of iron. They have a bird's-nest quality, and were chosen for their whimsical nature. Below, a porcelain-tiled floor by AKDO of Bridgeport continues into the dining area.

Like the architectural design of the barn, the imported Italian tiles of the dining room floor assimilate the old and the new. They are rustic, big and chunky, but have a metallic sheen. This visually and emotionally stimulating dichotomy is echoed in the interior design. A tabletop made with distressed 14-inch-wide barn boards nearly a century old is supported by zinc pedestals. Three Italian amber-glow lighting fixtures are suspended above the table. The remote-controlled, ventless fireplace built into the wall lends a cozy feel while being entirely modern in its presentation, one powerful piece of ceramic bordering the gas-lit flames. This Fire Ribbon model was the first installment of its kind in Connecticut, done by Spark Modern Fires of Georgetown. On the opposite wall, a cobalt blue sideboard with flat, straight sides and mitered edges was designed by Robin and Jonathan, and constructed by the craftsman Robert Schwarz. It conceals compartments for serving pieces and silverware, as well as a wide-screen television the couple use to surf the Internet or play movies for guests. The television rises from the sideboard and disappears back inside at the click of a button.

Also in the dining room are twin standing shelves that Robin fell in love with at E.J. Victor in High Point, NC, before the barn was ever built. Made from wrought iron and wood, the shelves hold an assortment of items

LEFT: From the dining room, the blue-walled potting room is visible. The Peter Max print on the wall was a gift from the artist.

RIGHT: Stainless steel cables and a cold-rolled steel railing contrast with antique chestnut stair treads, blending contemporary and traditional sensibilities.





gathered over time. Several rescued bird's nests are arranged, a large one holding an ostrich egg. There are collectible books there, including a set of art books from Robin's father who was an industrial designer. Potted plants and a collection of teapots from around the globe may be admired on the shelves. One teapot comes from the faraway and exotic Machu Picchu.

An entire wall of the dining room is devoted to sliding glass doors that open onto a patio facing the pool. These doors keep the room bright and open. From this well-lit vantage point, a doorway into a potting room beckons, the walls of that space painted a delightful deep blue. Above the sink, there is a Peter Max print that was given as a gift from the artist to Robin's father. Its lively color encourages a sense of elation as that room funnels into the rabbits' play area.

Outside of the potting room a staircase once again blends the contemporary with the traditional. A cold-rolled steel railing

LEFT: Upstairs, this northwestern-facing room serves as study, exercise room and artist's studio. A vintage Le Corbusier Chaise Longue is visible in the corner.

ABOVE: This upstairs bathroom was built around Jonathan's silver art deco light fixture.



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LEFT: Openings in walls throughout the barn add a sense of continuity and breeziness. Above this brown leather chair in the study, one may see through to the upper half of the vestibule.
 RIGHT: Bird-of-Paradise (Strelitzia regina) in a simple vase adds a dramatic splash in the dining room.

is connected by stainless steel cables to antique chestnut stair treads. At the top of the stairs, one may peer down into the vestibule or walk forward into the large storage space with the arch-shaped window above the garage. There is a glowing gem of a powder room upstairs. Painted an inviting, rich orange, it was built around a silver art deco lighting fixture that Jonathan had held onto for years.

Across the hall from the powder room is the multi-faceted space that serves as study, artist’s studio and exercise room. The window in the northwest corner lets in afternoon sunlight. A classic 1928 Le Corbusier Chaise Longue, adjustable and ergonomically crafted, tempts a late-day slumber, as does the butter-soft white leather sofa from American Leather. State-of-the-art curved track lighting fixtures from Patdo Light Studio in Port Chester, NY, juxtapose old-fashioned metal oscillating fans tacked into the corners. Redding artist Robert Natkin’s print “Seize the Day” hangs on the wall kitty-corner to Jonathan’s own easel, a charcoal nude-in-progress proudly displayed. Exercise equipment and a laptop suggest activities for a rainy day. The overall feel is one of a tree house, floating above the responsibilities of daily life and nestled in comfort.

As Jonathan says, “Every house can be your vacation home. Fill it with things you love and enjoy. You don’t have to go away to find an environment where you can relax. Why not create a retreat in your own home?”

Indeed, there is no need to travel to find solace, and there is no need to wait for the arrival of the robins and spring-time to feel renewed. As Jonathan Wagner and Robin McGarry demonstrate with their lovely creation of the barn, inspiration can be found from within and home can afford an everyday transformation.

Erika Alexia Tsoukanelis holds an MFA from Sarah Lawrence College. She is a freelance writer based in Woodstock, NY, and can be reached at 845-679-6902 or erikats@gmail.com.



RESOURCES:
 Robin McGarry & Associates Interior Design
 11 Riverfield Drive, Weston, CT 06883
 Phone 203-454-4321 (ext. 10)
 E-mail robin@robinmcgarry.com
 www.robinmcgarry.com

 Jonathan Wagner, AIA
 11 Riverfield Drive, Weston, CT 06883
 Phone 203-454-1825
 E-mail info@jwaia.com,
 www.jwaia.com