

# New England Home's Connecticut

CELEBRATING FINE DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURE

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**Premiere Issue!**

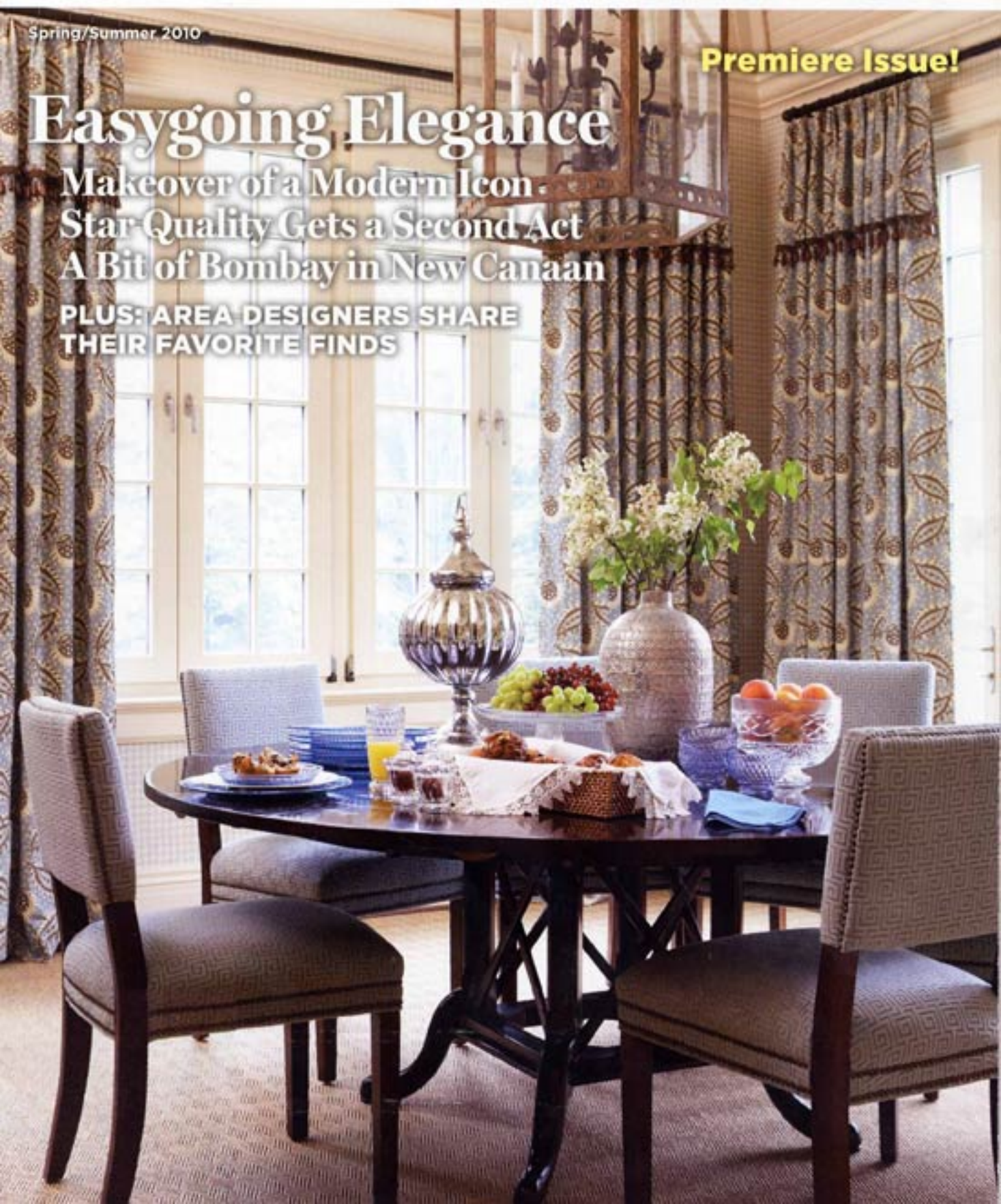
## Easygoing Elegance

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THEIR FAVORITE FINDS**





# An Epic Undertaking

*A New Canaan architect lovingly renovates an old English-style cottage, using as inspiration the words of a favorite poem by a literary superstar from his native*

*India.* TEXT BY PAULA M. BODAH • PHOTOGRAPHY BY MICHAEL PARTENIO • ARCHITECTURE: DINYAR WADIA AND ROBERT BUTSCHER, WADIA ASSOCIATES • INTERIOR DESIGN: DINYAR WADIA • BUILDER: WADIA ASSOCIATES • PRODUCED BY STACY KUNSTEL • STYLING BY RONNY CARROLL

The new kitchen wing includes this cozy sitting room, where Chinese porcelain collected by the architect/homeowner's grandfather adorns the Indiana limestone mantel. The homeowners bought much of their furniture on buying trips to England.





The upstairs hallway, outfitted with quarter-sawn white oak and moss-green paint, was moved from the center of the house to bring in light and garden views. Facing page top left: The breakfast room has sunny, turmeric-colored walls. Facing page top right: A see-through curio cabinet separates the mudroom and kitchen.



Back in the early part of the twentieth century, the Nobel Prize-winning author, playwright and poet Rabindranath Tagore published a poem called *Gitanjali*. Tagore, who was born and raised in Calcutta, India, wrote *Gitanjali* in his native Bengali, but even translated into our less melodious English, the piece—an epic, lyrical poem of devotion and praise whose title means, more or less, “an offering of song”—has inspired poets ever since. In the introduction to the first English translation, William Butler Yeats wrote that the poem has “stirred my blood as nothing has for years. . . .”

Nearly a century later, architect Dinyar Wadia, a native of Bombay (now Mumbai), India, who lives and practices in Connecticut, bought a broken-down old house in New Canaan. The 1870 structure, once the guest cottage for a large estate, sat on ten bucolic acres that, like the house, had been neglected for years. The gardens were overgrown and the noble old trees were slowly succumbing to suffocation by poison ivy.

Nevertheless, the place spoke to Wadia and his wife, Gool, on a deep level. Inspired by the poem written so long ago by his fellow countryman, he named his new home *Gitanjali*, and vowed to return the house and gardens to their former beauty.

Initially, Wadia thought he would need to tear down the house, but to do so would have meant cutting down two enormous ash trees that flanked the building. Unwilling to kill the beautiful old trees, Wadia instead set about to salvage what he could of the house.

The extensive renovations included moving the upstairs hall from its position in the center of the house, where it was flanked by a series of small bedrooms, to the side of the







house. The new hallway is painted an earthy moss green and outfitted with floors, built-in glass-front cabinets and moldings of quarter-sawn white oak. "Now as I go from the staircase to my bedroom I see a nice view of my gardens," says Wadia. "It's as pretty on a snowy day as it is on a summer day."

The master bedroom occupies the second floor of an addition, above the airy new kitchen with its informal dining area and sitting room looking out onto the loggia where the Wadias enjoy summer lunches.

Still, were the original owners to happen by, they would hardly notice the changes. Wadia was careful to keep the home's essential look—that of a rambling English cottage—intact. He even saved the climbing hydrangeas at the front door, peeling them off the house and holding them up with scaffolding until the rotting crossbeams were replaced and the facade given a new coat of stucco. The front door itself, a two-and-a-half-inch-thick slab of carved wood that came from a Spanish monastery, is original to the house, too, as is the brick trim on either side and the lamp that hangs above it. "It's a gas fixture," Wadia says. "It has a real flame."

At 5,500 square feet on two levels, the house is intimate, but not cramped. On the first floor, ceilings are kept to the lower height typical of an English cottage. "It's exactly the kind of house I like to live in," Wadia says. "It's a very cozy house."

Upstairs, however, the new hallway rises high, and Wadia bowed to his wife's wish for a tall ceiling in the master bedroom. "After forty-five years," he says with a laugh, "I've learned that the key to a good marriage is compromise on the part of the husband."

The guestrooms, though larger than the tiny rooms that had flanked the old hallway, are still snug, and rather than adding closets that would make the rooms even smaller, the Wadias opted for antique armoires, which are, the architect notes, more in keeping with the character of an old English cottage.

The new kitchen has cabinetry of quarter-sawn white oak and floors and counters of French limestone. A hood of copper and brass hangs above the stove-top, which sits conveniently in the kitchen island. "My wife is a fantastic cook," Wadia says, and the kitchen



The formal dining room glows with persimmon-hued walls. Facing page top left: Informal dining takes place in the breakfast nook, tucked into an alcove in the kitchen suite. Facing page top right: French limestone floors and counters and oak woodwork give the kitchen a country ambience.



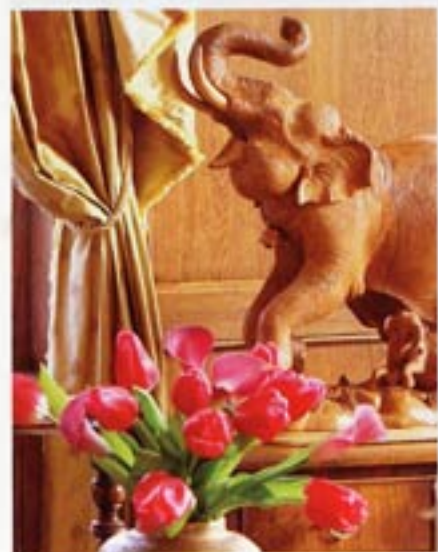


Clockwise from top left: Architect Wadla replicated many details, such as the carved roof fascia. Much of the original lush landscaping and hardscape was preserved. A greenhouse holds tropical specimens including dischidia, cycad and a tree fern. Among the things salvaged from the original house are the door, from a Spanish monastery, the brickwork and the glass lamp above the door.



*The larger success lies in how perfectly house and gardens coexist; it's hard to imagine one without the other.*





was designed for maximum efficiency. The walls here, as well as in the nearby breakfast area and sitting room, are painted the warm, golden color of turmeric, a favorite spice in Indian cooking.

In the sitting room, the golden paint is an accent for the oak paneling. A wide brick fireplace with an Indiana limestone surround and mantel takes center stage. On the mantel and in niches in the paneling above sit Chinese porcelain pieces collected by Wadia's grandfather as well as antique Indian dolls of ivory and gold leaf.

"We love bright color," Wadia declares, pointing out the persimmon hue of the formal dining room's walls. The Chippendale dining chairs and the table, like much of the furniture in the house, were purchased on trips to England from Lady Pamela Pidgeon who was, until her recent retirement, renowned for her combination home/shop in an eighteenth-century manor house in Herefordshire.

Wadia rebuilt the living room, replacing the old paneling with new, adding glass-front cabinets and removing the wooden beams that crossed the ceiling. The couple's love of color shows up here in the ruby-red oriental rug, the saffron-colored toss pillows on the sofa and the bittersweet-hued leather stools in front of the fireplace.

Outside, Wadia has worked to preserve as many of the land's trees, bushes and flowers as he could. "We have beautiful old maples, Atlantic cedar and beech trees," he notes, as well as Japanese cut-leaf maples, ivies that cascade over walls and down stone steps and the hydrangeas that once again creep above and around the front door.

Wadia succeeded in restoring the house to its original charm and the landscape to its original lush beauty. The larger success, though, lies in how perfectly house and gardens coexist; it's hard to imagine one without the other.

Early on in Rabindranath Tagore's epic poem are these words: "All that is harsh and dissonant in my life melts into one sweet harmony..."

*Gitanjali*, it would seem, is the perfect name for the Wadias' piece of heaven. •

**Resources** For more information about this home, see page 114.



Wadia replaced the paneling in the living room and removed wooden ceiling beams to give the room a less rustic look. Accents of saffron, ruby and bittersweet reflect the owners' love of bright color.