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DESIGN

new england

VANITY FAIR

Materials shine
in understated baths
+ kitchens that work



Housewarmings • Smart building and clean design make for a healthy haven • A childhood home embraces past and present • A large house is defined by cozy comfort in coastal New Hampshire • Raw materials give a Martha's Vineyard retreat a natural confidence 



BRIGHT AND AIRY,
this nook off the
kitchen is made for
the morning routine.
Story, Page 76

PHOTO BY ERIC ROTH

WELL-BEING

A new house
delivers a healthy
dose of clean
air and green
technology while
keeping with
traditional
New England style



WRITTEN BY
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PHOTOGRAPHED BY
Eric Roth



THE DINING ROOM typifies the strong and simple character of the house. Sunlight from the full-height windows highlights the salvaged heart pine floors. The pine table is by Concord, Massachusetts, craftsman Norton DeAmorim. The carriage house lanterns hung above it with manila rope are by Vagabond Vintage.

THE YEAR AFTER THE 1917 REVOLUTION THAT UPENDED his country, Russian abstract artist Kazimir Malevich painted *White on White*, a radically austere work that challenged the status quo. A white square on a white square, it raised the question: Was this art? Over time, however, it has come to be celebrated for what it really is: a stripping back to essentials and a signal break with the past.

Lisa Tharp's new house in Concord, Massachusetts, is also white on white — its pure New England white exterior enveloping a warm white interior. It, too, represents a break with the past, both for her and for the way we usually build our homes.

Tharp, who runs her own eponymous interior design firm, and her husband, Sam, an Internet marketer, had been renting for years, looking for land on which to build their dream home. When a tired postwar ranch on a small lot within walking distance to Concord's center came along, they pounced.

Tharp had been suffering from mold and chemical sensitivities ever since working in a mold-infested office building in the 1990s, and she knew they'd need a not-your-average team to help design and construct a home where she could live free of airborne irritations. ZeroEnergy Design (ZED), a green-focused architecture and mechanical

design firm in Boston, used engineering rigor to devise a replacement structure without forced-air heating or cooling ("The ducts are where the bad stuff grows, and the air spreads it around," says Tharp) or off-gassing materials that was also highly energy efficient.

"The goal was to build with nature instead of against it," says ZED architect Stephanie Horowitz. "We took advantage of passive heating and cooling methods like big windows to the south and a 'thermal chimney' staircase that allows the house to ventilate itself."

Since ZED is known for its strong contemporary aesthetic, the Tharps asked Vermont's Connor Homes, whose motto is "Building the new old home since 1969," to provide the traditional details that would allow the house to fit comfortably into its historic neighborhood. Connor brought an extra, crucial component as well — not only does it ship its trim factory-cut and ready to attach, it also supplies fully assembled panelized walls. That meant the house's shell could be quickly erected and "dried in," minimizing the risk of rain-soaked wood framing and any subsequent mold growth, an approach embraced by Waltham, Massachusetts's Aedi Construction, which specializes in green building techniques.

Attention to detail, along with painstaking research to find the best nontoxic materials, paid off. As soon as

.....
ARCHITECTURE
ZEROENERGY
DESIGN WITH
CONNOR
HOMES
.....



A MODERN TAKE on the New England farmhouse (ABOVE), the building has no extraneous details and is built to last with a gray metal standing-seam roof and cementitious clapboards. Seen from the office, the dining room (RIGHT) is punctuated by a fresh take on Windsor chairs from Hudson Wellesley. The oil is *Two in the Dunes* by Jim Holland, from Powers Gallery in Acton, Massachusetts.



BATH

DESIGN DECISION

Old Style, Refreshed

The master bath (BELOW) comes close to fulfilling a bride's recipe for success: something old, something new, something borrowed ... and most things white. The soaking tub is from Signature Hardware, faucets from Porcher, and porcelain floor tiles from Atlas Concorde. The old pine-framed mirror is from Lisa Tharp's personal collection. The first-floor guest bath (RIGHT) is a European-style wet room, that is, there is a shower head, but no enclosure, so the entire room is something of a shower stall. Limestone and subway tile are on the walls, and a vitreous china vessel sink sits atop a shelf of remnant marble. Frosted interior windows let light in from the stairwell.





BATHED IN SOUTHERN
light, the kitchen sits
in a pavilion all its
own. At night, light
comes from pendants
with linen shades
edged with hemp
twine from Creations
by Carol, while the
glass cabinets are lit
by Boston library
lamps from
Visual Comfort.



KITCHEN



DESIGN DECISION

Recycled? Really?

"This kitchen is the center of the family's everyday life," says architect Stephanie Horowitz of ZeroEnergy Design, "so in the context of a rather restrained building, we devoted a lot of design emphasis to it." A dramatic cathedral ceiling, oversize pendant lights, and a white concrete-topped island flanked by a wall of French doors and a wall of white cabinets combine to make a definitive moment in the house. The cabinets are more than just beautiful, as several of them, as well as the Sub-Zero refrigerator and freezer, were salvaged from the discard pile at a nearby renovation. "That kitchen was only six years old," marvels homeowner Lisa Tharp (PICTURED ABOVE). "Recycling part of it fit into our overall approach here." Recycling is also in play underfoot: The entire ground floor of the house is heart pine fashioned from old mill timbers, quartersawn for dimensional stability over radiant heat.

Tharp moved in, her health began to improve. A whole-house HEPA air filter sealed the deal. “For me,” she says, “it’s been a healing house.”

The interior strikes just the right balance between tradition and modernity. “It’s got a kind of coastal loft atmosphere,” says Tharp, “which sounds odd until you experience it.” Indeed, Horowitz looked to Cape Cod and Nantucket for inspiration, substituting the open playing fields across the street from the house for ocean views. With its 10-foot ceilings and monochromatic white paint, the ground floor reads like an art gallery by the sea. Open beams and sliding barn doors give the dining room a distinctly down-to-earth sensibility, and the snug living room opens directly into the all-white kitchen, which occupies its own pavilion on the rear of the house.

The house is designed with flexibility in mind. The office off the dining room could easily serve as a bedroom. The nearby bathroom is equipped with a European-style open shower. Beautifully tiled and without a threshold, the room is handicap-accessible, ready for a ground-floor occupant. Upstairs, 12-year-old daughter Fia’s room is actually two rooms combined, but with a second strategically placed door, all it needs is a wall to become an additional bedroom. Similarly, the master suite has a bed nook that could become an office or a walk-in closet.

Standing in the luxurious yet simple master bath — glowing white, sun streaming in the shower’s window, with a deep cast-iron soaking tub (white, of course), and an antique vanity — it’s easy to see how this house, exactly as configured, exactly as built, is the dream and refuge. Tharp hoped for. Like *White on White*, it’s stripped down to the essentials. “This has been a dream come true on many levels,” she says. “We’re living in a town we love, we built in a way that’s safer for people and for the planet, and I have my health again.” That’s a break with the past worth celebrating. ■

FOR MORE
DETAILS,
SEE
RESOURCES

THARP
painted the master
bedroom (BELOW)
to be “a seamless
envelope of
whiteness” that
allows the
furnishings to stand
out. Teri Malo’s oil
*Poem for Nauset
Afternoon*, also
from the Powers
Gallery, graces the
living room (RIGHT).
The end table is a
vintage pie display
from Concord’s
Nesting on Main.



