



better with age

DPD Builders transforms a village gem

BY ANDREA RAISFELD | PHOTOGRAPHS BY TIM LEE



TRADING PLACES The dining room, in the space once occupied by the kitchen, benefits from floor-to-ceiling windows of hand-blown glass, which had been covered for many years by a long counter. Kirtley designed the oversized lights. The cow painting is by Woody Jackson (of Ben & Jerry's fame), a gift to Seth upon his Middlebury graduation. The Camerons got a new old look with pine flooring in the spacious, light-filled front hall, a perfect place for their girls to ride their trikes. With two acres stretching into a nine-acre preserve, the Camerons orient their life toward the southern-facing backyard.



“I love old houses.

I just don't want to live in one,” says Seth Cameron. And so, when he and his wife, Kirtley, reluctantly took a look at the Nehemiah Bates house, on Pound Ridge Road just outside Bedford Village, making the sale seemed like a long shot to the realtor. The house, which had remained in the same family for two centuries until just ten years ago, and had been on the market for two, was, to put it kindly, in need of some attention. But Kirtley, a grad of the Columbia School of Architecture, had that unique ability to see past the wallpaper, behind the walls, and through the layout. She and Seth fell in love with the gorgeous moldings, high ceilings, wide-plank floors, and village location. Two weeks later, they closed on the house. Six months later, the Camerons' second baby was due, and Kirtley's plans for their new home had to become reality—pronto.

“You had a vision,” says Daniel Divitto to Kirtley, reminiscing about their first walk-through. Divitto, founder of DPD Builders, based in Bedford Hills for almost 20 years, got what Kirtley had in mind. Never mind the mismatched doors, the sloped floors, and the holes in the eaves—Kirtley and Divitto both understood at the threshold

of their collaboration that their mandate was to give Seth, the client, the sleek modern house he wanted, tucked neatly and efficiently inside the envelope of an antique. Kirtley laughs, recalling how many of her Monday meetings with Dan began with the words, “You’re going to think I’m crazy ...”

If he did, he never let on, until later when the project was over, and all three major subcontractors—electrician, plumber, and HVAC—visited for a walk-through of the finished house. Divitto admits to Kirtley that all three thought she was, indeed, crazy. And yet, says Divitto, “In the end, they all said it was their favorite job.”

When the “before” is a structure from 1793, later mashed up with an addition in 1856, getting to the 2007 “after” can be the stuff of construction nightmares. All of the major mechanical systems had to be replaced, which is easier said than done when you’re renovating half, and restoring the other half. Wires and pipes had to be snaked through some pretty gnarly paths, old plaster insulation had to be painstakingly scraped off metal mesh, inside walls, and contemporary fixtures had to fit into non-geometric spaces. So, much of the work was a process of stripping down. The number of layers of



SUPPER TIME Large pendant lights, a classic school clock, and hand-built cabinetry with plenty of glass lend a vintage feel to a modern kitchen. High ceilings, wide-plank floors of old growth oak, polished cement countertops, and a fireplace are details that make this kitchen the natural center of family life. What is now one open space with kitchen, home office, and family TV room, was once a warren of five small rooms.



GOOD FUN A zebra-print rug underscores the sleek yet natural feel of the study with its palate drawn from earthy colors. The Camerons restored the mantel—believed to be the 1790s original—as well as window moldings still bearing the original glass. The Cameron girls love the side-by-side, double-length, vivid-orange utility sink.



shingles on the roof alone was staggering. Divitto had a strong sense throughout the project that “the house was thanking us.”

Many of the original doors and windows, put aside during some of the demolition, says Kirtley, “were not as original as we thought.” The big splurges of the project were, in fact, the windows and doors. Some of the original single-pane windows, like the ones facing the road, were restored with pricey hand-blown glass, “so insulation everywhere else was important,” says Kirtley. Considering that the original house was known as Marshall Oil’s best customer, the Camerons were determined to gain warmth and efficiency.

A close look down reveals a variety of wood floors, from the original softly worn wide-plank pine, believed to have been floated down to Bedford on the Mianus River, to the old growth, reclaimed-pine flooring Kirtley chose to use in adjoining rooms. “This is a house for us and our kids to live in,” she says. “Nothing is treated as museum-quality.”



What had been a maze of five rooms is now a big, airy kitchen and family room with all the fixings of a contemporary kitchen, like an espresso machine, Sub-Zero fridge, and poured concrete countertops, still somehow pulling off an old-house vibe.

With Divitto, Kirtley never had to go beyond the original plans she drew in order to get her permits and to get his estimate. From there on in, sketches were done on scraps of paper or drawn right onto a bare wall. The amazing thing, considering the improvisational and organic aspect of the project, is how close to budget they were in the end. Experience helped Divitto build a budget based on what-ifs. “You never know what you’re going to find when you open up an old house,” he says. “Our weekly meetings were fun,” says Kirtley. “It was a creative process from start to finish.”

The one system Kirtley and Divitto agreed not to replace in their overhaul was the well pump, so imagine the Cameron’s surprise, when six hours after moving in, it drew its last breath. Who says houses aren’t living things? Not Divitto. “You can feel the energy in this house.” ■

SUPPORTING ROLE When asked the biggest challenge of an overall challenging project, Daniel Divitto of DPD Builders didn’t hesitate: “The concrete bathtub.” The unique round tub, from Get Real Concrete of NYC and manufactured in Poughkeepsie, required his reinforcing the floor of the bathroom and the ceiling of the dining room, and a crane to install through the second-floor window.