

ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

THE INTERNATIONAL MAGAZINE OF DESIGN

DECEMBER 2007

An Exclusive Look
Inside Private Homes

40 Discoveries
by Designers
Children's Bedrooms

U.S. \$5.95
CANADA/FOREIGN \$6.50

12 >



0190

0 357075 3



MODERN ELEGANCE

LUXURIOUS AND SERENE, A NEW BREED OF COUNTRY HOUSE TAKES ROOT ON LONG ISLAND'S NORTH SHORE



Architecture by Shope Reno Wharton
Interior Design by Sills Huniford
Text by Gerald Clarke
Photography by Scott Frances

"The clients wanted an elegant country house into which we could weave their contemporary paintings," says designer Stephen Sills, of Sills Huniford, which collaborated with the architectural firm Shope Reno Wharton on a Long Island house. ABOVE: The living room has paintings by Gerhard Richter, left, and Robert Ryman. Armchair fabrics from Scalamandré. Stark floral on sofa and pillows.

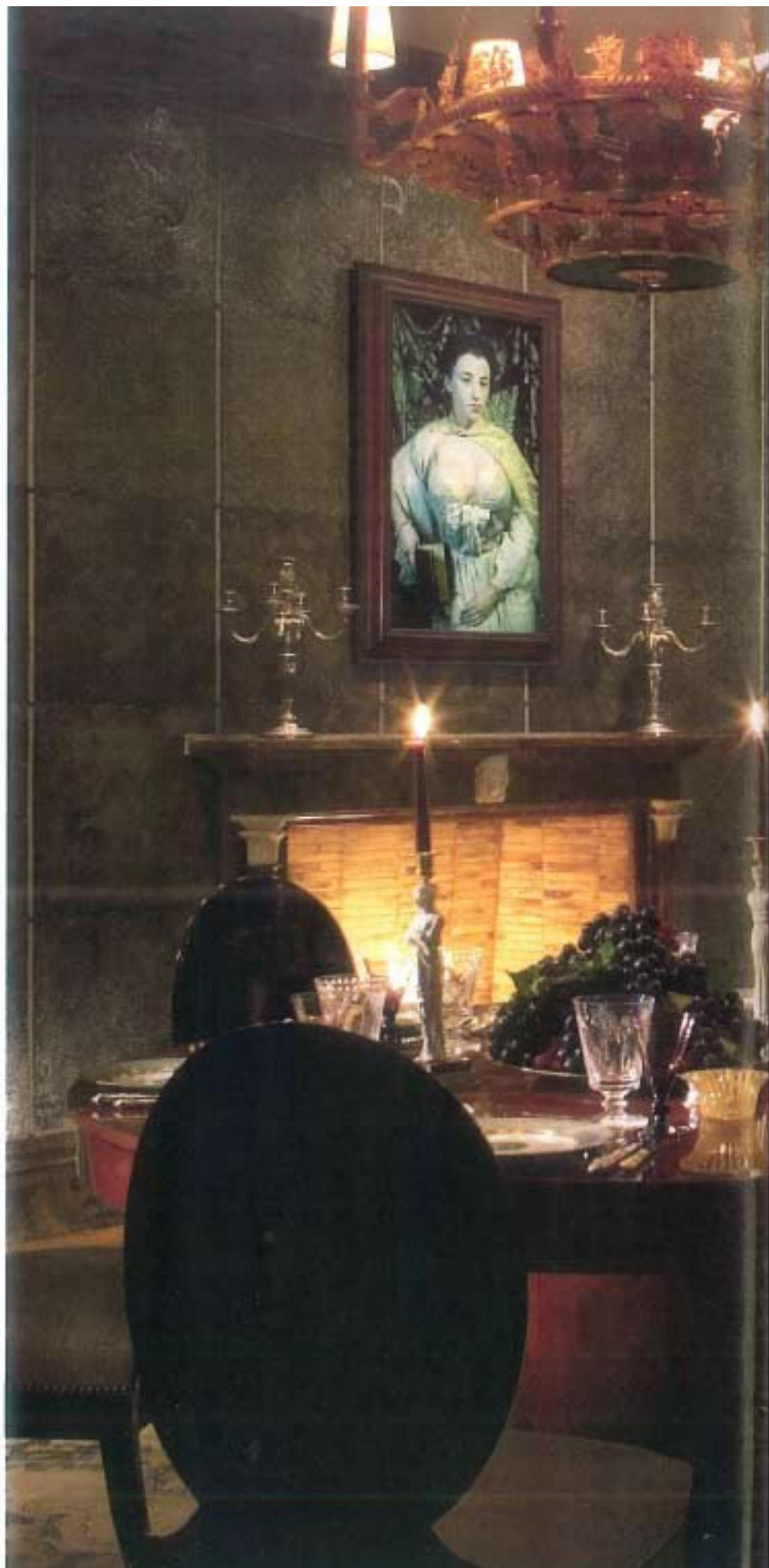
People talk inside their houses, and they talk outside. Some people talk to their houses. But very rarely do their houses talk back. An exception is a large and loquacious stone-and-slate house on Long Island's North Shore—*Great Gatsby* country. "The secret of this house is that it carries on a dialogue," says Stephen Sills, of the interior design firm Sills Huniford. "It's a dialogue between classical timelessness and the owners' modern art—the way they live today. It's about giving the past a nod yet respecting the present."

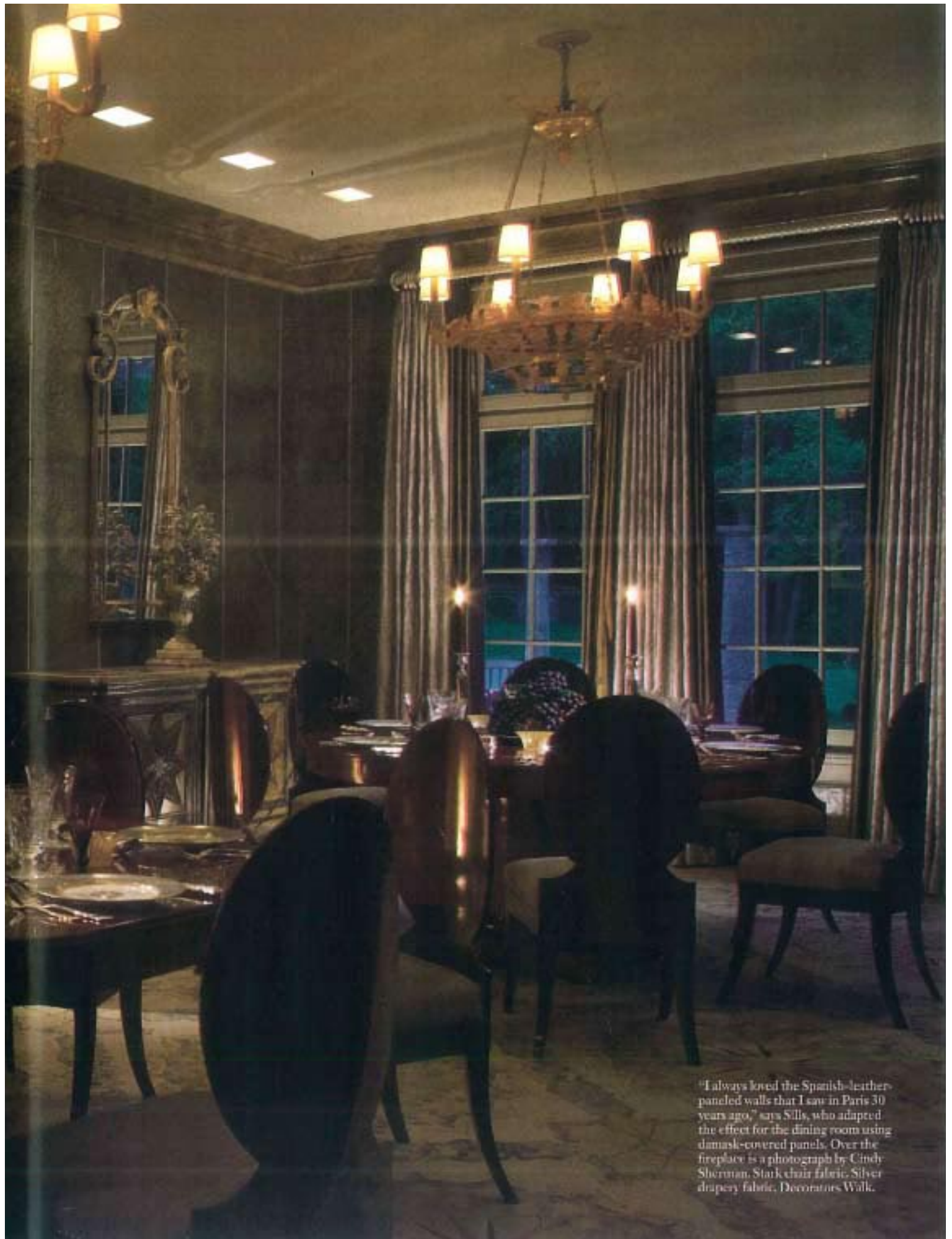
The owners, both active philanthropists in art and medicine, had lived nearby for many years. But they found their old house too confining when their four grown children, accompanied by spouses and children of their own, returned for visits. "It didn't have everything we wanted, a big enough dining room or family room," says the husband. "When this beautiful piece of property—22 acres—came on the market, we had a chance to do what we always wanted. We had a blank canvas."

Big rooms were not the only thing on their wish list, however. "We wanted a house that looked as if it had been there forever," says the wife. For her and her husband, that meant an English manor house, with a stone exterior and sloping slate roofs. They sat down with the architects—partners in the Greenwich, Connecticut, firm Shope Reno Wharton—and explained their needs and desires. When the firm's team returned with drawings, the couple made two small changes and said yes—what they saw on paper was exactly what they wanted. "We don't hem and haw," says the husband.

For the architects, the challenge was to create a house that was as large as the couple specified—it is 240 feet long, two-thirds the length of a football field—but not overwhelming. "We didn't want it to read like some giant massive block," explains principal architect Bernard Wharton. "The success of a house like this is to break it down into pieces that you can digest, pieces that relate to one another." Dormers are artfully placed, for instance, and there is not one roof but several, cascading gracefully like a series of waterfalls. "The overall reading tends to be symmetrical," says Wharton, "but there's a lot of subtle asymmetry that creates excitement and visual interest."

To make the inside as exciting as the outside, the couple called in Sills Huniford, which had designed their Park Av-





"I always loved the Spanish-leather-paneled walls that I saw in Paris 30 years ago," says Sills, who adapted the effect for the dining room using damask-covered panels. Over the fireplace is a photograph by Cindy Sherman. Stark chair fabric. Silver drapery fabric. Decorative Walk.

A 19th-century Russian mirror hangs over the mantel in the library, which holds a collection of African art and rare books. "All the furniture was selected because of its purity and because it goes well with a modern backdrop," Brunschwig & Fils chair and pillow fabric.



enue apartment (see *Architectural Digest*, March 2001). "Ford and Stephen can do anything," says the husband. "They're exceptionally creative." For the designers, inspiration came from several sources. They made a slight bow to the houses of Sir Edwin Lutyens, the great English architect of the early part of the last century, and they said hello to nearby estates of the Gatsby era. But they made their real obeisance to the country houses of the Low Countries—Belgium and Holland. "We wanted a more relaxed feeling," says Sills, "and we steered our clients away from the English and toward Northern Europe."

Passionate art collectors—Picasso, Matisse and Rothko are just three of the artists whose works hang on their walls—the couple welcomed the slight change in direction. The entrance hall floor is patterned after one in a Belgian castle. With its interlocking black keys in Belgian black stone, it is as arresting as it is intricate. "The Dutch and the Belgians have more fanciful floor patterns than the English," Sills notes.

Designers often travel long distances to search out just the right lamp or table, and Sills and Huniford crossed the Atlantic several times, often with their clients, to find what they needed. "We would go into a small shop on the Left Bank in Paris," says the husband, "where things were stuffed so tightly that you could hardly see them. We would spot a Dutch light fixture and look at one another and say, 'Yup, that's for the breakfast room.' Finding things like that was fun."

"Everything in our lives takes place within a space that surrounds us," wrote the late Renzo Mongiardino, a designer whose work Sills and Huniford particularly admire. One of Mongiardino's signature effects was to sometimes cover walls with what looked like embossed antique leather—to make a wall as much a work of art as a painting or a sculpture. It was an effect the partners had long wanted to duplicate. "Until this house we had never had the opportunity to do it, at least on this level," says Sills. "But these clients were so special that we finally could."

The result, in the dining room, is more than an homage to Mongiardino. Placing custom-designed damask imposed on canvas, the designers made walls that look as if they are covered with silver-leafed leather panels. When light is reflected from that sumptuous faux leather at night, the room becomes seductive and supremely glamorous. The owners wanted



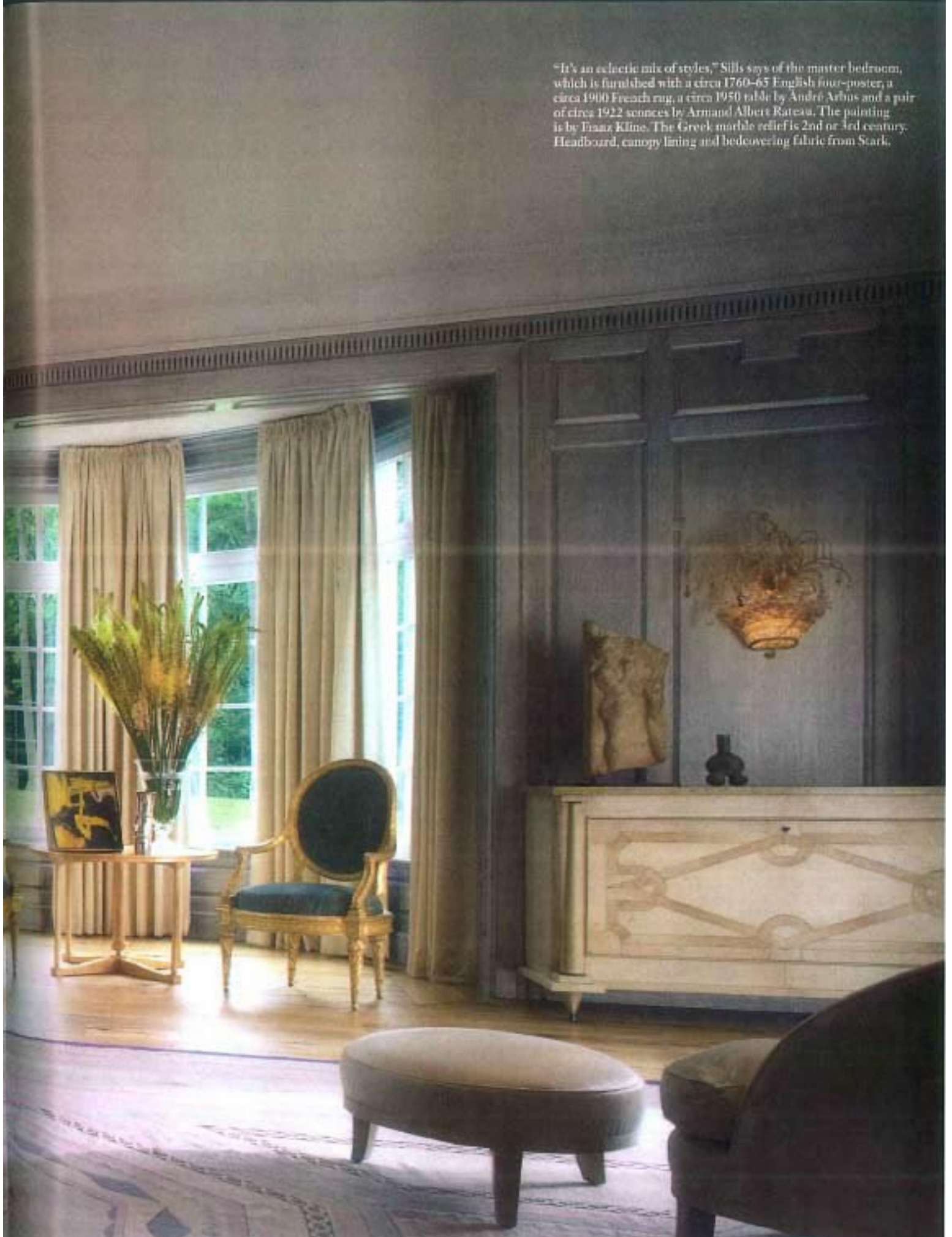
what the husband calls "a special feeling," and in the dining room—and all the other rooms—that is what they got. "Every time we walk into the house," says the wife, "we say to ourselves, 'Oh, this belongs to us! Amazing!'"

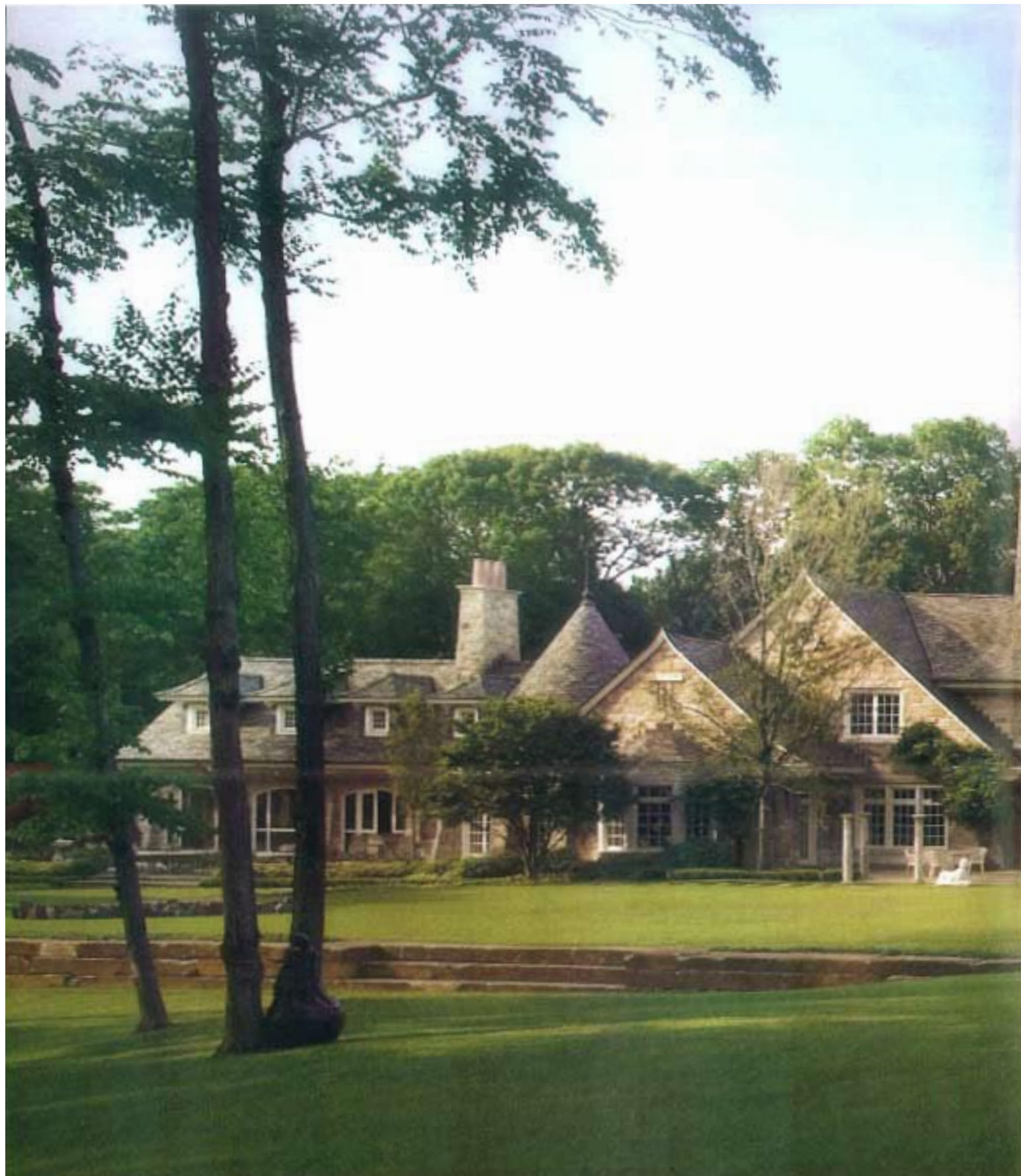
The rest of their family—three generations—is amazed as well. Sills and Huniford have not only designed an apartment for the wife's mother, but they are also doing a house for one of the clients' three sons. The couple's grandchildren, who, when they visit, spend most of their time in the basement recreation rooms, are still some years away from setting up their own households. But who knows? In 15 or 20 years Sills and Huniford may get calls from members of the fourth generation who also want houses with a special feeling. □

"The staircase has a Hollywood Regency-style handrail," Sills observes, "like something Billy Haines would design." A painting by Brice Marden hangs above a circa 1730 bouille marquetry table. The sculpture, *L'Oiseau Solitaire*, 1966, is by Joan Miró. The lantern is circa 1790.



"It's an eclectic mix of styles," Sills says of the master bedroom, which is furnished with a circa 1760-65 English four-poster, a circa 1900 French rug, a circa 1950 table by André Arbus and a pair of circa 1922 sconces by Armand Albert Bateau. The painting is by Tinnaz Kline. The Greek marble relief is 2nd or 3rd century. Headboard, canopy lining and bedcovering fabric from Stark.





The rear facade. "Conceptually, the scale of the house is constantly being broken down," says project architect Arthur Hanlon, who worked with principal architect Bernard Wharton. "Different roof shapes create a house that's exciting to look at. Multiple gables and dormers give it a very human scale."

“When this beautiful piece of property—
22 acres—came on the market, we had a chance to do
what we’d always wanted. We had a blank canvas.”

