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Made to Order

A Spanish Revival house in Connecticut gets the addition it deserves

WRITTEN BY LISA PREVOST • PHOTOGRAPHED BY STACY BASS

KITCHEN



LESLIE SUTTON INSISTED that the kitchen addition to her house reflect the 1930s Spanish Revival architecture. The ceiling beams, which were salvaged from old Connecticut barns, resemble those in the rest of the house. Other elements carried over from the original design include the arched windows (ABOVE AND PAGE 48), limestone floors, and dark oak trim.

Leslie Sutton was immediately drawn to the stone-trimmed Spanish Revival house in Darien, Connecticut, a decade ago. Built in the 1930s, it boasted an intriguing provenance as the summer residence for Frank La Forge, the respected pianist and composer who had it built. The cavernous living room still contained the pipe organ he installed. At the center of the house, the once-open courtyard had been converted to an airy, glass-roofed atrium. And the location, a perch on the banks of tranquil Gorham's Pond, was prime.

But the kitchen? The kitchen was a problem.

About the size of a butler's pantry, the small space had been designed as a service kitchen — house staff actually prepared food a level below, where there is now a garage, and brought it up by dumbwaiter, says Sutton.



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KITCHEN



THE KITCHEN ISLAND has a honed Carrara marble countertop by Stepping Stones Marble & Granite in New Canaan and Norwalk, Connecticut. In its center, Stepping Stones cut a custom slit so that Sutton, an avid cook, could safely keep a collection of favorite knives within easy reach.

Now, sitting in her new-old kitchen enjoying a long view of the pond, Sutton says she couldn't be more pleased with the outcome of what wound up being a three-year project. She went through several architects before Sarah Blank of Sarah A. Blank Design Studio in Darien put her in touch with Sheldon Richard Kostelecky Architect, a firm based in Lexington, Massachusetts. Sheldon Kostelecky, the firm's founder and principal, is passionate about classical architecture, and because of him, says Blank, "the home got an addition that it deserved."

Sutton's primary directive to Kostelecky was very clear: everything — the materials, colors, detailing, massing — was to match the rest of the house. "She wanted everything to look like it was always there," Kostelecky says. "Too many clients don't care, but she did care." Having never worked in the Spanish Revival genre before, Kostelecky was thrilled



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THE OLD KITCHEN, too cramped for Sutton's purposes, is now the pantry (ABOVE LEFT). The cast-iron and ceramic tiled cabinet doors are original. Sutton found a glass-front cabinet (ABOVE RIGHT), large enough to cover an entire wall and store an assortment of dinnerware and serving pieces, at Lillian August in Norwalk, Connecticut.

to learn that Sutton had the complete blueprints for the original house, including some 200 drawings. "It was an absolute gold mine of source material," he says, "so I could replicate the details."

The 1930s architect, Wesley Sherwood Bessell, was eclectic in his treatment of the Spanish Revival style. Such houses are usually mostly stucco, but Bessell incorporated lots of stone inside and out, including limestone detailing. He also used



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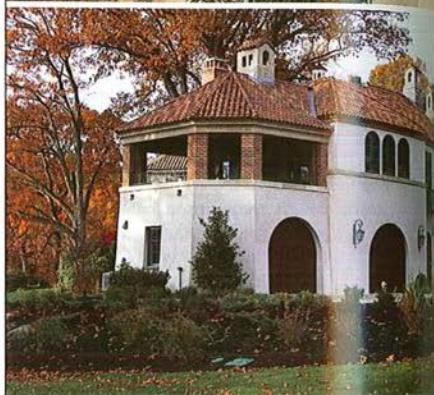
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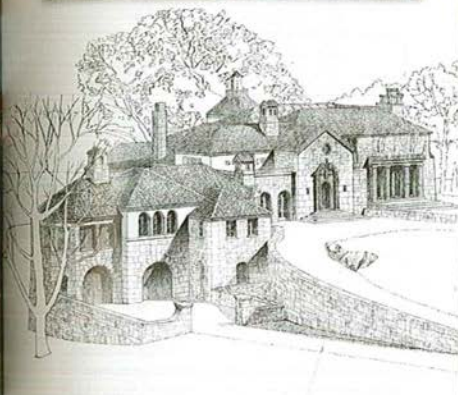


unusual room shapes and designed half the windows in wood and the other half in metal, elements Kostelecky incorporated into the addition.

Working in close consultation with Blank and Sutton, Kostelecky designed a two-story ell incorporating a large, open kitchen with an attached portico, and on the lower level, a two-car garage and entry hall. He made the addition defer to the main house by placing it at a lower elevation.

For the kitchen, Kostelecky designed large metal-and-glass French doors across the back wall, which allow a broad view of the pond. An attached metal balcony mimics the metalwork on the many balconies on the original house.

Inside, the walls are plain stucco. A Spanish-style corner fireplace is modeled after others in the house. The kitchen's high tray ceiling is lined with exposed beams salvaged from old Connecticut barns — as were the beams in the rest of the house. The floor is laid with large squares of limestone over radiant heat.



ARCHITECT SHELDON KOSTELECKY re-created the Spanish Revival sensibilities of the original house (ABOVE TOP) in the new wing (FACING PAGE, BOTTOM) with architectural elements such as arches, roof tiles, gabled chimney caps, and an iron balcony (FACING PAGE, TOP). His rendering of the project (ABOVE) illustrates how the lower elevation of the addition keeps it from visually overwhelming the site.

Sutton knew she wanted a four-oven AGA cooker, in a stunning deep red, or one wall. Above it, Kostelecky designed a stucco-covered hood trimmed with beams. Likewise, on the portico, he incorporated a decorative steel enclosure, made by Hammersmith Studios, an ironworks firm in Newton, Massachusetts, to hide the built-in barbecue and rotisserie. Three arched windows on the front wall recall the arches found throughout the house.

As for Blank, she says creating the kitchen was a pleasure in a room that is so “architecturally correct.” The large, high-ceilinged space has just a few big, bold elements that are pleasing to the eye and don’t detract from the feeling of openness. On the wall opposite the stove is a giant floor-



MORNING LIGHT POURS through the French doors and onto the breakfast table for which Sutton has a view of the pond. A custom-designed stucco hood (FACING PAGE) trimmed with wood from salvaged beams hangs above the massive AGA stove, which has four ovens and two hot plates and is positioned along side an AGA companion cooker, which has two ovens and a range top.

to-ceiling, glass-fronted cabinet that displays Sutton's dish collection. Between the two sits a generously sized marble-topped island positioned to give the cook a full view of the pond.

A breakfast table and chairs sit in front of French doors across from an expanse of dark oak cabinetry that runs the length of the wall. There, the house's original metal sink is centered beneath the arched windows.

"It feels good in there," says Blank, "and yet it's very functional."

More French doors flank the stove and provide access to the open portico, which is outfitted with wood-trimmed electric screens that descend at the flick of a switch and disappear when not in use.

Kostelecky had intended for the exterior of the addition to have a stone veneer similar to that on the rest of the house. But that option proved so expensive that Sutton reluctantly decided to leave the exterior in

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Hot Item

As stoves go, the AGA is in a class all by itself. Its heat source is its cast-iron core, which can be fueled by natural gas, propane, electricity, or oil. Once at operating temperature, the manufacturer says, it takes "just a trickle of energy" to keep it there. The heavily insulated stove gives off a constant gentle warmth and is always ready to cook. Thermostatic controls keep the steady transfer of heat to ovens and hot plates at consistent temperatures, and since heat comes from all surfaces simultaneously, food retains moisture and flavor often lost in conventional ranges. The traditional four-oven model bakes, roasts, slow cooks, and warms. Stove top, there is a boiling plate, a simmering plate that can also be used as a griddle, and a separate plate for warming.

AGA cookers, handcrafted in England, have an enamel finish in colors that range from the Claret red in Leslie Sutton's kitchen to Duck Egg Blue to traditional white. Cooking on an AGA differs from the standard methods, but those who have acclimated say the proof is in the delicious pudding.



stucco. The biggest challenge of all was finding someone to match the color of the 80-year-old Spanish roof tiles. The builder, Dave Brown, of Easton, Connecticut, managed to get near-matches made by a company in the Netherlands.

Having now spent a year cooking in her new kitchen, Sutton says she has yet to find something she doesn't like about it. In fact, she says, "there's really nothing I would change here." ■