



REDESIGNING A PHILIP JOHNSON HOUSE IN MADISON PROVES THAT EVEN GREAT IDEAS CAN BE IMPROVED UPON

# BUILDING ON A LEGACY

BY WOODY HOCHSWENDER | PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOHN M. HALL



**When you buy** a house with historic and architectural significance, the aesthetic challenges can be great. Artistic ghosts hover among the rafters. Preservationists peek over the fence. Gut jobs are a no-no. Such a house is Peyton Patterson's 17th-century home in Madison, which features a rehabilitated barn and various other rooms by the modern master Philip Johnson.

Though not nearly as well known or as radical in its purity as Johnson's one-story, flat-roofed New Canaan houses (his own "glass house," for instance), the Madison project, carried out by Johnson between 1952 and 1956, is notable because it shows the architect's work renovating existing historic structures. Johnson, who died this year, redid two rooms of the main house, a large saltbox, in addition to radically overhauling the ancient hay barn—retaining the original rafters and beams but replacing an entire wall with glass.

The property is also notable for Johnson's use of indoor and outdoor areas—visually linked by a series of stone and wood fences—to create an interconnected environment. So, even as Johnson was creating rigorous design statements of steel and cement in the Connecticut countryside, he was not averse to performing an elaborate facelift on a Colonial-era farm. His client was Burton Tremaine, an important art collector and president of the Miller Company, a lighting systems manufacturer.

The current owner, Patterson, chairman and CEO of the NewAlliance Bank based in New Haven, purchased



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**Evolution** | In the 1950's, Philip Johnson adapted the original barn by removing a wall and replacing it with glass (PREVIOUS SPREAD LEFT). Fast forward to the 21st century when architect Page Goolrick found a pair of massive Belgian doors, cut them to fit and installed them in the wall opposite the glass so it appears that the inside and outside are merged. **Boundaries** | In the barn, a vignette of collectibles sits on an Art Popular dining table from Amy Perlin Antiques in NYC (PREVIOUS SPREAD RIGHT) that overlooks the landscape and Johnson's eight-foot-high stone wall. **Up to Date** | Goolrick removed the old shelves in the living room (RIGHT) and replaced them with beaver lumber that maintains the horizontal line of the fireplace. A cherry table and 1930's side chairs provide an informal dining area. See Resources.



**Clinically Modern** | Improving a Modernist legend's work, Goolrick ripped out the old kitchenette and added a new kitchen (TOP) including lots of walnut with an oil finish to match the beams and an antique hospital-style cart from Laurin Copen Antiques in Bridgehampton, NY. **All Together** | A stone wall connects the poolbouse to owner Peyton Patterson's daughter's playhouse (ABOVE), a pyramid-shaped building that had previously been used as an art studio and an office. **Show of Hands** | A group of mounted wooden hands recovered from sculptures, mannequins and artists' modeling dummies (OPPOSITE) is artfully arranged on walnut cabinets. See Resources.

the property four years ago. She was certainly respectful of Johnson's accomplishments, but Patterson has traditional tastes and had to live in the house with her family.

"She's not into steel and leather, Breuer chairs and International style," says Patterson's interior designer, Susan Hager, of HCF in New York. "I tried to design a space to honor the original style of the buildings and have it work for the client and her life." To some extent, the clean lines of the rooms would have to rule. Hager adds: "When I saw the rooms by Philip Johnson, I knew we would not be doing chintz."

Patterson says she would never do anything to change the essence of the property.

"I work on preserving and modernizing it," she says. "I lean toward the traditional. But this property has given me my first appreciation of the modern. The house has traditional and modern rooms."

Architect Page Goolrick had the delicate task of tweaking a master's work. She confronted directly the issues of modernizing what was already a Modernist shrine. In the barn, she ripped out the old kitchenette and added a new kitchen and millwork. She found a pair of massive, 18th-century Belgian doors, cut them to fit and installed them opposite the glass wall. When they are open, you can see straight through the barn and it looks almost as if it is floating.

"The interior was very tired," Goolrick says. "It had never been winterized. They put in blowers for heat. We took out old shelves and put in heavier lumber—clear, finished walnut that ties in with the original rich brown timber of the barn." The floors were also refinished and stained a warm brown.

The window frames, which had been painted a dull battleship gray, were redone in chocolate.

"Between us, not everything Johnson did was right," Goolrick says. "He did some wonderful things and some strange things."

When it came to furnishing the barn, the approach was eclectic. A custom Donghia sofa upholstered in a stylized leaf pattern and custom "channel" chairs in oatmeal chenille flank the stone fireplace. A round cherry table and fluid 1930's side chairs provide an informal dining area. A series of mounted wooden hands, recovered from sculptures, mannequins or artists' modeling



dummies, are from the owner's private collection. The German twig table—split twigs in a star pattern—and the metal chandelier, cut in the shape of leaves, suit the rustic nature of the space. The drinks cart, which may have come from a hospital, is clinically modern.

A serious home theater was added to the barn, complete with a pull-down screen and a rear projector. Once used to house Tremaine's extensive art collection, the barn space is now used for entertaining.

Goolrick's architectural restructuring of the property included a complete redo of a smaller, pyramid-shaped building. It was razed, except for some of the original framing, and rebuilt on the same footprint. It is now a study/playroom. The chenille velvet sectional sofa is custom-made, as are the cut-velvet ottomans. The circular coffee table is a vintage production piece designed by T. H. Robsjohn-Gibbins. Goolrick added barn doors, which open to the landscape and reveal the Johnson fencing, one of his better ideas.

Johnson had two walls constructed—one eight-feet-high in stone and masonry; the other of white-painted horizontal boards—which connect all the structures. The stone walls lead around to a spectacular swimming pool that lies flush with the ground.

"The walls embrace the landscape, so you feel as if you are walking from one room to another," Goolrick says.

Her client is both pleased and proud of the work that has been done. "You always have to protect the history and the legacy," Patterson says. Meanwhile, she has gotten rave reviews from area residents and architecture buffs who occasionally sneak peeks at the property. One of them, a local retired IBM executive, was so enthusiastic about the evolution of the six-acre property that he repeatedly offered to garden there for free.

By late summer, Patterson says, he'd already been toiling in the garden non-stop for weeks. ☀



**Leveled Out** | The living room overlooks the swimming pool (OPPOSITE), which lies flush with the ground. The outdoor furniture is from Janus et Cie. **By the Water** | The chairs, upholstered in a fabric from Rogers & Goffigon (ABOVE RIGHT), were designed by interior designer Susan Hager. A wooden bench from Christian K. Andrews in Bridgehampton, N.Y., serves as a cocktail table. **Hitting a Wall** | Along with the stone wall, Johnson utilized walls of white-painted horizontal boards (RIGHT) to connect the indoor and outdoor environments and line the path from the playroom to the barn courtyard. See Resources.