

A CAPTAIN'S LEGACY

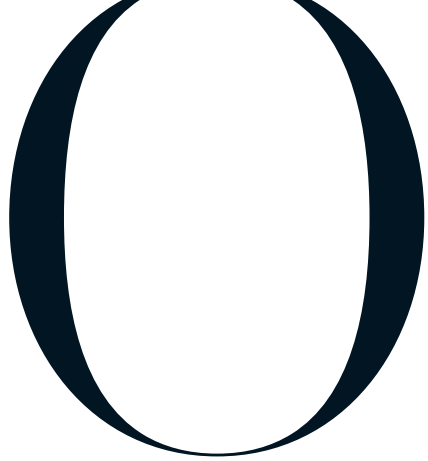


Along the Connecticut River, an 18th-century ferryman's cottage invokes the spirit of its original inhabitant with the deftest of course corrections and the quiet elegance of another era.

INTERIOR DESIGN BY **CATHY KINCAID** ARCHITECTURE BY **BROOKE GIRTY** LANDSCAPE DESIGN BY **DREW KENNY**
PHOTOGRAPHY BY **TRIA GIOVAN** WRITTEN BY **CELIA BARBOUR**



Cozy seating nooks appear at every turn, including this conversational arrangement in the **dining room**, which is part of the original house. Wall color, French Gray by Farrow & Ball. Sofa and drapery fabric, Sister Parish



OWNING A HOUSE ON THE WATER is a familiar fantasy. But the man who built River Knoll wasn't seeking breathtaking views or recreational diversions. He was a ferry captain, and the site he chose in 1748, on a rise overlooking the Connecticut River, was his lifeblood.

Fast forward 272 years, and River Knoll still occupies its idyllic perch, despite dramatic changes to the world around it. The surrounding village has gone from thriving hub to quiet oasis, and the original cottage now anchors a welcoming summer house that pays tribute to history while residing gracefully in the present. "When people visit," says the owner, "they can't tell where the old part ends and the new begins."

Given its diminutive proportions and historical quirks (low, beamed ceilings; shallow paneling; wide-plank floors; a front door oriented to the river), the original, 1,500-square-foot Cape-style cottage could easily have become a vestigial wing—a moth-balled museum piece—in the shadow of later, larger additions. In particular, an outsize 1980s wing built by previous owners "overwhelmed the old house,"



△ An early-19th-century Provençal painted screen (Wolf Hall Antique Collective) and a rustic antique table age the newly constructed **entry**, along with wide-plank chestnut flooring and painted wall paneling. Bench upholstery fabric, Penny Morrison

▽ Ferris, the owners' Westie, putters in the fenced **vegetable garden**, where a peastone path bordered by boxwood, veggies, and herbs leads to a shingled potting shed. Climbing the fence is Sweet Autumn clematis.



▽ The earthy palette in the **master bedroom** (part of the 1980s addition) was led by a taupe bed canopy fabric (Claremont) reminiscent of Colonial stenciling. Bed, Louis J. Soloman. Bed linens, Julia B. Rug, Madeline Weinrib



"If we're not reading, we're boating, and vice versa," says the owner, who was drawn to Old Lyme for its proximity to other watery havens like the Hamptons and even Nantucket. "It's a great jumping-off point." The chairs on their **Vicem motor yacht** are upholstered in a Moroccan-inspired print by Brunswick & Fils. Carpet, Stark

says local architect Brooke Girty, who specializes in historic properties. Yet rather than tearing it down, Girty designed another addition that mimics the proportions of the 1748 original. By sandwiching the oversize portion between two smaller ones, the house's volumes feel balanced rather than lopsided.

Girty also replaced columns on the 1980s addition with latticework to help visually dissolve its mass and merge house with garden. She echoed the home's old beams on new ceilings and extended its paneled walls and wide-plank floors. The mudroom was clad in reclaimed barn wood. And wherever she introduced a contemporary gesture, such as the new double-height entry hall, she created compatibility. The giant window, for example, is composed of multiple historically proportioned panes of glass and summons the meadow indoors.

Today, the earliest structure remains a vital part of the daily life and flow of the house. The dining room and library are situated within, as well as an upstairs bedroom. In the more spacious late-20th-century living room and master bedroom, Girty and Dallas-based decorator Cathy Kincaid worked together to create snug enclosures like daybeds, window seats, and banquettes that feel harmonious with the home's original scale. "We nodded to that cozy New England look," says Kincaid, who also used color to cast a unifying mood. A nuanced palette of browns and grays, forest greens, and persimmony oranges suits the woodland setting. Large prints offset dainty ones, while the smaller-scale patterns introduce soothing rhythms to petite spaces such as the library and guest bedroom, where fabrics clad the walls. Draperies and canopies play important supporting roles. "They can



The **butler's pantry** is covered in a recolored historic Parisian pattern (Adelphi Paper Hangings) "that would have been developed around the time the house was built," says designer Cathy Kincaid. Bracketed shelving, John Rosselli Antiques



"Everyone likes to sit in a window," says the designer, who softened the **family room** banquette with French blue cushions (George Spencer Designs). Rug, Elizabeth Eakins. Drapery fabric, Lee Jofa. Shades, Conrad



▽
The newly built double-height **entry hall** is brightened by multipaned, floor-to-ceiling windows “that help the addition feel integrated with the garden,” says architect Brooke Girty. Walls and stairway color, Clunch by Farrow & Ball. Rug, Dash & Albert



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make a room feel softer and more layered and help distract from awkward architectural angles,” says Kincaid.

Integrating house and landscape was a fundamental goal for everyone involved, especially the homeowners. Having lived in California for 20 years, they relished the indoor/outdoor lifestyle, and outdoor entertaining spaces—a “bird house” for poolside gatherings and several porches and terraces, for example—allow River Knoll to accommodate this predilection. Landscape designer Drew Kenny’s vision for the property consists of a carefully orchestrated series of landscapes that evolve from refined to increasingly wild the farther you get from the house, ending with a stone path traversing a meadow to the riverbank.

As for the river, it remains a vital part of life at River Knoll. No longer an obstacle needing assistance to be crossed, it provides the current owners a gateway to the Atlantic seaboard. Avid boaters, they frequently travel by water to visit friends—“We’re 20 minutes from the Hamptons and just a few hours to Newport or Nantucket”—or simply enjoy a day on the Sound.

Despite all the changes, River Knoll still exudes a spirit of simpler times. “Everywhere else, I feel like I should stay busy,” says the owner. “But here, for whatever reason, I don’t feel guilty curling up with a book.” Her favorite spot to get engrossed in a story? A window seat overlooking the river. “It epitomizes the best of the house: the views, the charm, the scale, the comfort. It’s divine and totally unplugged.” ♦



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The **guest room** walls are covered in a 19th-century Italian pattern reimagined by Robert Kime. Headboard upholstery and drapery fabric, Michael S. Smith. Luggage rack, Colefax and Fowler

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A cedar **pool pavilion** was inspired by the owners’ antique birdhouse and is used for afternoon tea and evening cocktails. Banquette fabric, Lisa Fine Textiles. Striped pillow fabric, Nicole Fabre Designs

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A **parterre garden** is planted with crab apple trees, dwarf boxwood, and New Guinea impatiens. “It’s inspired by older European and New England gardens and not too formal,” notes landscape designer Drew Kenny.

