Family Affair

Decorator Steven Gambrel heads a dream team that turns a 20-acre farm in the Hamptons into a stylish weekend home for multiple generations of an expanding East Coast clan.

TEXT BY BRAD GOLDFARB PHOTOGRAPHY BY ERIC PIASECKI
ne of the challenges of a long-held family vacation home is that as time passes and the number of occupants grows, it becomes increasingly difficult to squeeze everyone in. Such was the case for Bobbie and Lew Frankfort, who spent many summers with their three children in a much-loved house in Sagaponack, New York. “The family grew up,” explains Lew, the chairman emeritus of Coach. “Kids got married and had children of their own, Bobbie’s mother moved in with us, and the property just wasn’t sufficient anymore.”

So the couple set out to get something bigger—but they came to realize that would mean building something new. Learning that a 20-acre tract of the historic Topping farm in Bridgehampton had just come on the market sealed the deal. And it helped that the person who introduced them to the site was Michael Davis—a longtime friend and, as the head of Wainscott, New York–based Michael Davis Design & Construction, someone they’d worked with before.

The pair enlisted Davis to both erect the house and spearhead a collaborative design process (a master builder role he and his firm are known for). He suggested Steven Gambrel as the project’s creative engine—a designer with a sensitivity to the local vernacular, not to mention a talent for devising warm, richly layered interiors. “One of the first things we did after closing was to drive around the property with Steven,” Bobbie remembers. “He stood in the bed of our pickup truck, took in the landscape, and immediately saw where everything should go.”

Everyone agreed that the envisioned main residence—a kind of spacious family clubhouse—should sit atop a low rise in the land. It’s a move that allowed the house to maximize the view west toward, and beyond, an eight-acre parcel the Frankforts had set aside as an agricultural reserve—the sort of wide-open vista that’s increasingly rare in the Hamptons.

From this they were able to plot out the project’s various other buildings, including a “sports barn” with a lap pool and gym, an outdoor swimming pool and adjacent poolhouse, and a garage. “It’s essentially a village, with a number of structures dotting the landscape,” notes Gambrel. As such, it was the perfect assignment for Historical Concepts, an architecture and planning firm with expertise in fashioning communities.

Committed to creating something that would feel authentic to the area, the team took inspiration from the nearby Nathaniel Rogers house, a venerable Greek Revival beauty, as well as homes by English architect Edwin Lutyens. “We went with an alternative to Shingle Style. The house is still classic American country and very New York but uses elements like painted brick and lap siding,” explains Historical Concepts principal Kevin Clark. To make the vast structure less imposing, it was broken into individual sections that appear as if they were added on over time.

Inside, the team set about crafting spaces that can handle large, often impromptu get-togethers (“we entertain a lot,” Bobbie says) but still feel homey. “The house has a service kitchen designed solely for a chef,” Gambrel says. “But there’s also a family kitchen, which is used for more intimate meals and gatherings.” The dining room has a similar duality: Its four custom-made dining tables can be combined to accommodate big groups or separated for cozier occasions.

Despite its size, there is nothing cold or impersonal about the home—due in large part to a soothing color palette that takes its inspiration from local historic homes and Edwin Lutyens’s English houses when planning the painted-brick-and-cedar-clapboard dwelling, which features windows by Kolbe Windows & Doors.

A trio of sofas designed by Steven Gambrel and manufactured by Dune anchor the living room. The bronze lanterns are by Vaughan, and the stools are by Michael S. Smith for Jasper.
The Field Room’s chesterfield sectional sofa, designed by Steven Gambrel and manufactured by Dune, is clad in a Rose Tarlow Melrose House fabric. The copper lanterns are vintage, the window treatments are of a Schumacher linen-cotton, and the wool rug is a Gambrel design.

Opposite: Bobbie’s office includes a vintage brass-and-leather Mastercraft desk and Louis XVI side chairs with leather upholstery. The brass sconces are from Nicholas Antiques, and the silk rug was created by Gambrel.
cues from the surrounding views. “This house is all about fabric and layering,” Bobbie says. The living room, for instance, is a study in creamy neutrals—“the colors of sand, oysters, and peaches,” says Gambrel—from the plush upholstery to the walls (and piano) painted to evoke the hue and texture of driftwood.

In the family room, meanwhile, where the view was less of a dominant feature, Gambrel says he created a blue “cocoon,” with an abstract cobalt-brushstroke canvas by James Nares overseeing a cerulean sectional sofa and a pair of teal leather ottomans. That sense of tranquility suffuses the airy upstairs rooms as well, where the clean lines of 20th-century pieces—a brass chandelier in one of the guest rooms, a 1970s Mastercraft desk in Bobbie’s office—are offset by soft upholstered furnishings in shades of pale blue, lavender, and wheat.

New York City–based landscape architect Edmund Hollander, brought in to take the extensive grounds from their agricultural past to a more estately present, incorporated gardens, broad sweeps of lawn, and groves of fruit trees. Close to the dwelling, classic elements such as boxwood and hydrangea were called into play, while the home’s dramatic approach was lined with plane trees. “It’s a landscape designed for socializing,” says Hollander, pointing to the multitude of gardens and terraces where family and friends can congregate.

It’s fitting, then, that within days of moving into the house last August, the Frankforts hosted a party for 150 people in honor of their 40th wedding anniversary. That date was a target from the moment they broke ground. So, Lew says, “we had to finish on time.”
Above: Bluestone pavers surround the saltwater pool. The Munder-Skiles chaise longues are cushioned in a Perennials fabric.

Bottom row: A side porch (far left) and the poolhouse’s sitting room (near left) both feature brass lanterns from Circa Lighting and Munder-Skiles furniture with Perennials-fabric cushions.
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