



THIS PAGE Clad in timber shingles, this Hamptons house has been sensitively restored. OPPOSITE Much of the house's furniture was designed by James, including the wing-back chair and sofa in the den



TEXT **DOMINIC BRADBURY**
PHOTOGRAPHS **RICHARD POWERS**

Rustic polish

When interior designer James Huniford found this nineteenth-century house in the Hamptons, he stripped it back to reflect the area's agricultural past and decorated it using furniture of his own design



THIS PAGE Two rooms now form the sitting room – hence the different ceiling heights. A industrial metal belt cover hangs on the wall above the Huniford sofa (left). **OPPOSITE** A Belgian jeweller's table stands in the sitting room's bay window (above); the neutral colour scheme is enlivened by vintage Americana – in the shape of the giant pencil that hangs on the opposite wall (below)

There are times when the true character of a house only begins to shine after peeling back some of the superfluous layers that have been added over many years. It was just such a process of sensitive editing and paring down that ultimately allowed James Huniford to lay claim to his nineteenth-century house in the Hamptons and then impose his own personality and aesthetic upon his new home.

The house today is a very different animal to the one that James first discovered seven years ago. The creation of a family home that is soothing, calm and unassuming – yet also sophisticated and considered in its design approach – represents the result of a challenge successfully met.

‘The greatest challenge for me was to keep it simple and have it feel authentic and pure,’ says James, an interior designer who recently also launched his own furniture collection. ‘There is a bit of ruggedness to it and I love the country feel and the agricultural past of the Hamptons. It harks back to that rural history in some ways. I didn’t want it to be Beverly Hills on the beach.’

James’s main residence is in Manhattan, where his design studio is based. For many years, he also had a period home in upstate New York, which was restored and renovated over a number of years. But having moved on and also setting up on his own after a long design partnership in the form of Sills Huniford Associates, he started thinking about having a place by the beach for himself and his two young children.

‘About eight years ago I started renting a house in the Hamptons,’ says James. ‘There are a handful of residential projects for clients out here so it was also quite practical for me. I found this house when I was driving down this street in Bridgehampton one day with a friend and I saw a sign that said, “For sale by owner.” So I decided to go and take a look.’

Back then the house, which dates from 1865, was coated not in timber shingles but aluminium siding. The original floors were hidden under wall-to-wall carpet and false ceilings hid the timber beams. Yet James could see the potential and was drawn to the private location of the house – a walk away from the beach and the centre of town – and also the generously sized back garden, well suited to family living.

‘It’s very relaxed here,’ says James, ‘and more low key than some other towns out in the Hamptons. I love being able to walk, hike and cycle around and not have to jump back in the car all the time.’

James uncovered the original floorboards and beams in the main sitting room, including a large steel cross-beam that had been introduced at some point in the history of the building. A number of walls were removed downstairs to create a more free-flowing layout; structurally the house was found to be sound. A two-storey extension





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was added at the back of the house, doubling the number of bedrooms from three to six.

'The bedrooms are not big but they are comfortable,' James says. 'We wanted to be able to bring in some old bath tubs and sinks for the bathrooms. There are quite a lot of reclaimed and salvaged pieces in the house – I'd hunt for things on Long Island and also in upstate New York.'

James opted for one paint colour for the whole house, lending the interiors a strong degree of calm cohesion, despite some eclectic choices in furnishings and art. He began experimenting with his own colour mixes and finally opted for a custom colour that he christened 'foggy summer squall'.

'It was an overcast day when I was mixing colours and I came up with this particular blend. When the sun came out, you could see the celadon and pale blues within it and I thought it would be a great choice for the house. Sometimes, depending on the light and the proportions of the room, it reads like different colours even though the whole house is painted in this one choice.'

James designed some of the furniture specially for the house and selected other pieces from his own furniture line. These include the sofa in the sitting room and the rustic-looking table and benches in the dining room, as well as the bookcases, wing chair and settee in the den, plus bespoke lamps throughout. There are also many antiques, such as the Belgian jeweller's table at the sitting-room window – in the shape of a jigsaw piece – which is a particular favourite.

There are also many found pieces that add another layer of interest and resonate as much as artworks or sculptures: vintage nautical buoys, globes and oars. In the dining room, a series of French diagrams for light fixtures are framed and mounted on the wall, while in the kitchen and sitting room reclaimed wood and circular discs become wall sculptures. The house also includes pieces by Robert Rauschenberg and other artists such as Ingrid Pitzer and Jennifer Andrews.

It is this individual blend of pieces, set against a carefully restored and revived backdrop that helps to make the house so engaging. 'It was about uncovering the real character of the house,' says James. 'But it's also a kind of laboratory for me: a place of creativity and trying out new things' □

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THIS PAGE FROM ABOVE An assortment of old chairs surrounds the kitchen table. In the dining room, two cast-iron bowls stand on the Huniford dining table. OPPOSITE ALL PICTURES Although all the walls are painted a single colour – a 'foggy summer squall' – there is great tonal variation depending on the amount of natural light, as can be seen in the entrance hall, children's room, upstairs corridor and main bedroom

