

RURAL RETREAT

ELENETTO SURPRISE

Referencing the architectural heritage of the Hamptons, the exterior of this new-build home hides a contemporary interior of pared-back simplicity and understated elegance

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hen tenor David Frye and his husband, theatre director, Walter Bobbie, decided to create a rural retreat for themselves on Long Island, the choice of designer was obvious. David, who is a company member with New York's Metropolitan Opera, went to high school in Syracuse with interior and furniture designer James Huniford, known as Ford, and the two have stayed in touch ever since. Ford has a weekend house in the Hamptons, which David and Walter - director of Broadway hits such as Chicago, Footloose and Bright Star - have long admired. Putting any reservations about working with good friends to one side, they enlisted Ford's help after finding the perfect spot to build a house on the edge of the picturesque village of Water Mill.

"We didn't think about any other designers because Ford is such a good friend of ours and offered advice all along the way, which we trusted," says David. "We knew his house very well and it's so beautiful. He has a talent for knowing the difference between making something look too fancy and creating something functional, real and natural."

MODERN VERNACULAR

David and Walter have been coming to the Hamptons for many years, to escape busy working lives in Manhattan. The couple had a place in the town of East Hampton, but wanted something more tranquil, with a greater sense of connection to the landscape. When they came across a parcel of land bordered by a 30 acre nursery and arboretum, with a horse ranch nearby, they fell in love with the setting, but not with the tired early-20th-century farmhouse, which was too far gone to justify renovation.

"We talked a lot about what Walter and David wanted from the new house," says Ford. "Then one day, David and I were driving down the street, just around the corner, and I saw

KITCHEN

This space (above left) is one of David and Walter's favourite rooms in the house, with informal meals taken at the antique English table (left), which was found at a garage sale in Long Island.

Banquette in Fame 15 in Light Blue, Kravet, kravet.com.

this old barn. I pulled over and said 'That's a great inspiration for the new house'. They wanted something clean and functional, but that also referenced the old potato barns out here – something quiet and unassuming."

FRIENDS AND FAMILY

Another local friend, architect James McChesney, was brought on board to work on the structure. The centre of the home is a double-height sitting room, with a feature fireplace, while the kitchen and dining room are positioned close to the main entrance and the main bedroom and bathroom are at the far end of the house, also on the ground floor. Upstairs are two guest bedrooms and a study for Walter, who occasionally works from home when developing a new production.

Ford used oak floors along with a bespoke calming grey-green paint colour throughout. Furniture is a mix of family heirlooms, along with custom designs, contemporary pieces from Ford's furniture collection and antiques and rustic treasures sourced locally.

"One of the things that is so gratifying about working with Ford is that there are still things in this house that have been with us since we left college," says Walter. "He has this way of combining gorgeous materials with handmade, crafted and surprising elements. The result is that we don't feel as if our house has been designed; it really feels like our home."

NATURAL SELECTION

The modern rustic quality of the house is complemented by its indoor-outdoor spaces, particularly the large verandah that looks out onto the garden. The vista connects with the arboretum beyond, forming a green backdrop to this seductive escape from New York.

"We wanted to build something that would age well with the landscape and feel as though it belongs here," says Walter. "Although we're in the Hamptons, this is a really peaceful spot. We have landed on a piece of heaven."

DINING ROOM

Inspired by the work of early modernist Josef Hoffmann, this inviting room (above right and right) is generally used for more formal entertaining. The round mirror is a jet engine casing that was repurposed by interior designer Ford.











MAIN BATHROOM AND BEDROOM

Walter and David requested that the main bathroom (left) and bedroom (right) be on the ground floor, offering the convenience of living on one level, while providing privacy from guests, who are accommodated upstairs. Bespoke vanity by James Huniford, Huniford Design Studio, huniford.com.

GUEST BEDROOM

The linear pattern of the blankets, pillows and rug creates a textural look, which is complemented by the circular wall art (above). Linocut artwork by Paul Edmunds, pauledmunds.co.za.

