

Architect Steve Schappacher and interior designer Rhea White layered a variety of pieces into each room to give their Shelter Island vacation home the feel of a space built over time. The glass dining room chandelier was one such addition; White painted it black to match the color scheme and added shades to dress it up.

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An Early Twentieth-Century Farmhouse Becomes More Than a Weekend Retreat



When architect Steve Schappacher and interior designer Rhea White purchased a neglected 1904 farmhouse on New York’s Shelter Island, they intended it to be a weekend retreat. But as the years passed and they started spending extended weekends at the house, they knew it needed to function as more than a vacation property for themselves and the family and friends who often visited.

The couple, who also founded the multidisciplinary design firm, SchappacherWhite Architecture D.P.C., recognized that the 1,150-square-foot home needed major structural changes and updates to serve them in its shifting role. So they made better use of the space and improved their ability to accommodate guests by gutting the first floor and adding a ground floor bathroom. (The additional bathroom eliminated the need for guests to travel upstairs to use the restroom; Schappacher and White also smartly added a door that leads from the bathroom to the pool so guests could easily access it from outside the house.)

In the home’s renovated kitchen, they considered every inch of the square footage, making the most of the small space with

smart design decisions. For example, a washer and dryer hides behind cabinet doors when not in use, and the custom soapstone counter and sink are easily accessible from both sides of the room. The couple also painted one wall of the kitchen with chalkboard paint to help the room feel larger and give it some storytelling potential. “Using the chalkboard paint allowed for an additional layer of history,” says Schappacher. “Guests would leave notes and a lot of creative friends did drawings, then every New Year’s Day we would start fresh.”

That chalkboard is just one element that highlights the focused black-and-white color scheme the couple selected for the ground floor of their home. They were drawn to the chic com-

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Seeing in Black and White

Sometimes what's notable about a home is not its bold use of color but rather a lack thereof. At their early twentieth-century farmhouse, Steve Schappacher and Rhea White used a graphic black-and-white color scheme to create atmosphere and tie the rooms together. "Overall it is a neutral palette but one with a lot of contrast so it is almost colorful," says Schappacher. Here, he shares three tips on pulling a similar look off.

1 Add a dark wall by using dark paint, chalkboard paint, or stained wood. A dark, contrasting wall will expand the room instead of limit the space.

2 Think big and seek out large-scale pieces such as an oversize black-and-white striped rug.

3 Create layers of interest by adding a subtle gradient to black-and-white shades or by using different types of white paint to create a sense of depth in a room.





Schappacher and White maximized their kitchen's square footage and functionality with smart additions, such as a small kitchen island outfitted with a deep sink and a dark chalkboard wall that makes the room feel bigger than its actual size.

bination because it offers a neutral palette without being boring. “It has a lot of contrast—it is almost colorful,” says Schappacher. Upstairs, he and White moved away from black and white, instead favoring sand tones to lend the bedrooms a calmer feel.

Beyond the main residence, the pool house showcases a similarly neutral color scheme, creating unity between the two spaces. The pool house also improved the couple's ability to accommodate and entertain overnight visitors. Today it provides sleeping quarters for four people and a minimalist patio and custom-built pool just beyond the door. Surrounding the pool, a series of inviting seating areas gives guests a place to unwind outdoors.

The addition of a wisteria-covered pergola and seventeen-foot fireplace built to replicate the fireplace of a former house also created new outdoor entertaining spaces. “We opened the dining room onto the pergola with new French doors,” says Schappacher. “The interior then flowed outside and the pool has a relationship to the pergola. A series of exterior rooms and spaces were created.”

But the new outdoor room does more than connect the inside of the house with the yard surrounding it. It also served an important purpose by helping Schappacher and White center their property on the lot. “The house was off-center on the lot, not

balanced,” says Schappacher. “The pergola and freestanding exterior fireplace balanced the overall composition of structures.”

The outdoor space also speaks to the couple's decision to decorate with fixtures and furnishings that reflect a home built over time. “Architecturally, we wanted to create a story where one is not sure when each item was built. For example, the fireplace is made of reclaimed bricks from a New York City factory,” says Schappacher. “[People might wonder], could it still be standing from a former house? And the pergola looks like the framing of a building”

Inside the home, the blend of reclaimed materials and modern pieces from various time periods continues. By layering furnishings from different eras, the couple freed themselves from sticking with one specific design throughout the home. Then they used the neutral color scheme (black and white downstairs and pale earth tones upstairs) to unify the design from one room to the next.

The renovated home has offered the couple everything they wanted, particularly the opportunity to enjoy the company of family and friends. Whether they're gathered around the tiny kitchen island laughing and cooking or sitting around the fire late in the evening after an alfresco dinner, the old farmhouse is part of a wonderful island life. ■