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Idea House 2005

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Salvation in the Hamptons

A TEMPORARY MAKEOVER BECAME A PERMANENT RENOVATION FOR A HOUSE HEADED FOR THE WRECKING BALL

BY ELLEN SHERMAN | PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANASTASIOS MENTIS





Edgy | The house boasts carefully placed pieces like this coffee table (PREVIOUS SPREAD LEFT) by artist Yves Klem, which fuses form and function. **Sun Drenched** | A sculptural lamp from Mecox Gardens (PREVIOUS SPREAD RIGHT) stands beside a Holly Hunt sofa decorated with pillows in fabric by Ralph Lauren Home. **Black and White** | The original fireplace (LEFT) got a clean makeover. A banana tree enjoys the light-filled space behind Mies van der Rohe chairs from Knoll. **Open Space** | The natural palette of the Janus et Cie furniture (OPPOSITE) blends with its setting, designed by landscape architect Joseph Tyree. See Resources.

First impressions mean everything, especially when it comes to buying a house. What one couple saw when surveying a potential East Hampton home was not good. Granted, the location couldn't be faulted. The lush sprawling property was a bike ride away from the sands of Georgica Beach, but the home itself was another story. The prospective buyers possessed a clean and spare sensibility, but it was instantly clear that the current owner did not. All manner of objects crammed every nook and cranny. Though one of the prospective buyers, herself an art collector, appreciated the owner's passion for possessions, it was hard to get past the claustrophobic feeling the collection had created.

"The owner had bought things all over the world, and she was displaying everything. That made the rooms seem very small," recalls decorator Mary Foley who, with partner Michael Cox, makes up the design team Foley & Cox. The more-is-more theme was even carried outside. "I remember she had what seemed like a thousand different species of trees," Foley says. "The result was that when you were inside, it felt very closed in, even with an abundance of windows. Just what my clients didn't want."

They cast a careful eye on the property and decided that while the property would work, the house had a date with a wrecking ball. But there was an enticing summer season just three months away. Not wanting to waste valuable beach time waiting for the renovation, the new owners decided to get a temporary interior "cosmetic lift" while the architect developed plans for their new home.

"Originally we were hired to do a temporary summer redecoration—just something to make it comfortable for them until the house could be demolished," Foley recounts. While the new owners had





Stripes and Squares | The geometric light fixture (OPPOSITE) complements the linear pattern of the windowed walls of the library. On the cocktail table, a curvaceous piece of coral from Amy Perlin Antiques contrasts with the graphic punch of striped pillow fabric by Ralph Lauren Home. **Framed** | A wall of existing shelving (RIGHT) in the library houses various pieces collected by the homeowners. A painting by April Gornick creates a serene backdrop for the dining room. The table is from Tucker Robins in NYC. See Resources.



doubts that the space could be sufficiently spruced up for the summer, Foley and Cox knew better. "I could see the house was actually very light and open," Foley says. "We knew we could make it work."

For starters, they addressed the overabundance of greenery. "We just cleared away lots and lots of trees," Foley states. "It was the only way to bring light inside." The pair also contemplated the oppressive burgundy and black walls and beams featured in almost every room.

"We decided the best way to make it instantly fresh and airy was to whitewash the whole house," Foley explains. Still, some areas needed a little more help than others. The bedrooms weren't graced with the high ceilings found in the living areas, so furniture was kept low to the ground, creating an illusion of space where it was at a premium.

It was also inevitable that some lovingly placed design elements from the home's former incarnation just had to go. A black fireplace surrounded by decorative stones was deemed "just too odd." Sheetrock, a white column and a glass enclosure turned an eyesore into a sleek sculptural element. Since the fix was meant to be temporary, the team recycled some of the couple's old furniture, updating pieces with crisp white canvas or linen slipcovers. Black and white awning-striped pillows serve as striking accents in the living room. Foley and Cox knew that the couple, collectors of contemporary art and photographs, had a discerning and untra-



Strike A Pose | A metal sculpture by Carroll Dunham (LEFT) is given center stage on the axis of a hallway. **Laying Low** | A low custom bed (OPPOSITE) by Richard Mukaan of Homer in NYC gives the impression of higher ceilings. Large works of art like the Elger-Eiser photograph fill the walls without cluttering the atmosphere. The bench was designed by Foley & Cox. See Resources.

ditional eye. A lamp in one room evokes the irregular skeleton of a tepee and a living room light fixture is a sleek labyrinth of boxes within boxes.

Having worked with the couple before, everyone was on the same wavelength when it came to color. "Muted tones, beiges and creams are all very much the owners' personalities," Foley says. "Their art is important to them, and it should be the focal point when you go through the house."

With only moments to spare, the couple and their two teenage daughters moved in just before the summer and revved into high gear. Soon after, Foley and Cox penciled in a future date when they would embark on the "real" decorating assignment. But not so fast: The "quick fix" was a huge hit. After a couple of months in residence, the owners had a change of heart. What had seemed like a cosmetic pit stop on the road to demolition turned out to be just what the house needed. In fact, the new homeowners used the money reserved for the teardown to purchase the property next door.

A year later, the house still stands and now has been joined by a pool house/game center/gym, which Foley and Cox have also decorated. The team also just wrapped up work on the couple's Manhattan apartment. The only problem is that the successful collaboration seems to have run out of projects. "We all keep joking that we need another house," Foley laughs. "Let's see what else we can save." 🌞

