

Designer Steven Gambrel and architect Oliver Cope brought an Old Westbury, New York, estate back to life. The living room features a pair of vintage Dunbar armchairs, at left, and twin custom-made sofas, all clad in Sabina Fay Braxton fabrics; a bespoke tufted sofa, in the foreground, in a Kravet silk velvet; an Osvaldo Borsani desk from Center44; and curtains of a Clarence House satin. For details see Sources.





# SOCIAL STUDIES

A photograph of a sophisticated living room. The room features a large, patterned rug in shades of grey and white. In the foreground, a dark wood coffee table with a curved, modern design holds a vase of white and yellow flowers and a silver tray. Behind it, a grey tufted sofa and a patterned armchair are visible. To the right, a large, ornate wooden fireplace mantel is topped with a large mirror and several vases. A large, white, ribbed lamp stands to the right of the fireplace. The walls are light-colored with decorative paneling. A modern, geometric pendant light hangs from the ceiling.

On Long Island's Gold Coast, decorator Steven Gambrel pays homage to the patrician legacy of a grand estate while giving it a new lease on life for a modern family

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**Above:** In the family room, vintage capiz-shell globe lanterns hang from the newly vaulted ceiling. Among Gambrel's designs are a sofa dressed in a Lellèvre velvet from Stark and two sets of club chairs, one covered in a Pierre Frey fabric trimmed in red. A pair of Maureen McQuillan photograms flank the far window. **Opposite:** The dining room retains its original Gracie scenic wall covering, which was carefully removed before the remodel and reinstalled. A circa-1925 Beaux Arts-style pendant light is suspended above a bespoke table made of rosewood and silver-leaf églomisé panels; the custom-made chairs are backed with an Old World Weavers silk.





**E**ven as the Depression deepened in 1930, architects William Adams Delano and Chester Holmes Aldrich were putting the finishing touches on an elegant Georgian-style manor house destined for Ogden Phipps, the great horseman and financier, in Old Westbury, New York, on Long Island's Gold Coast. Nearby, heiress Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney amused herself in the sculpture studio/pleasure pavilion that the same architects had famously built for her in 1915. And down the road, Frederick and Amy Guest presided over Templeton, the 1917 neo-Federal estate designed by Carrère & Hastings for industrialist Alfred I. du Pont. It was quite a neighborhood.

But the 18,000-square-foot Phipps residence signaled the end of a luxurious era in American domestic design—a fastidious period, as the house attests, of limestone cornices, rich end-grain parquet, and moldings chiseled with cresting Vitruvian scrolls. Later in the decade and into the '40s, the firm founded by Delano and Aldrich—two of the most accomplished and prolific white-shoe architects of the first half of the 20th century—was building entire houses smaller than the service wings of mansions like Phipps's.

Fast-forward 80 years. In 2010 Manhattan interior designer Steven Gambrel found himself seated at a card table in a chilly

and rather tatty sitting room of the former Phipps pile, trying to puzzle out its future with the new owners, a couple who purchased the property from the estate of Ogden's daughter, Cynthia. Gambrel was exhilarated; this was his most ambitious project since going into business in 1995. Set on 26 acres encompassing wide-waisted copper beeches, woodland trails, and a grove of quince trees, the residence is composed of a two-story redbrick central bay flanked by gently curving single-story wings. One wing was originally conceived as a mammoth master bedroom suite; the other wing was a warren of back-of-house service areas. Nothing had been touched since the '30s. Even the heavy rep curtains, with their charming pennant pelmets, were still up.

"It was a daunting task," Gambrel remembers of the renovation challenge, which he shared with New York City architect Oliver Cope and Olivia Rowan, the design director at Cope's firm. "How do you preserve this historic gem and at the same time adapt it for a modern family with three teenage kids? The first owners would never have set foot in the kitchen. Now it's the heart of the revised plan. It was the clients' idea to give the kitchen a 16-foot ceiling, as the middle block has, by demolishing the staff quarters above. Today the kitchen, breakfast room, conservatory, mudroom, and butler's pantry support the public rooms, circulation-wise. There's action in every corner of the house." →



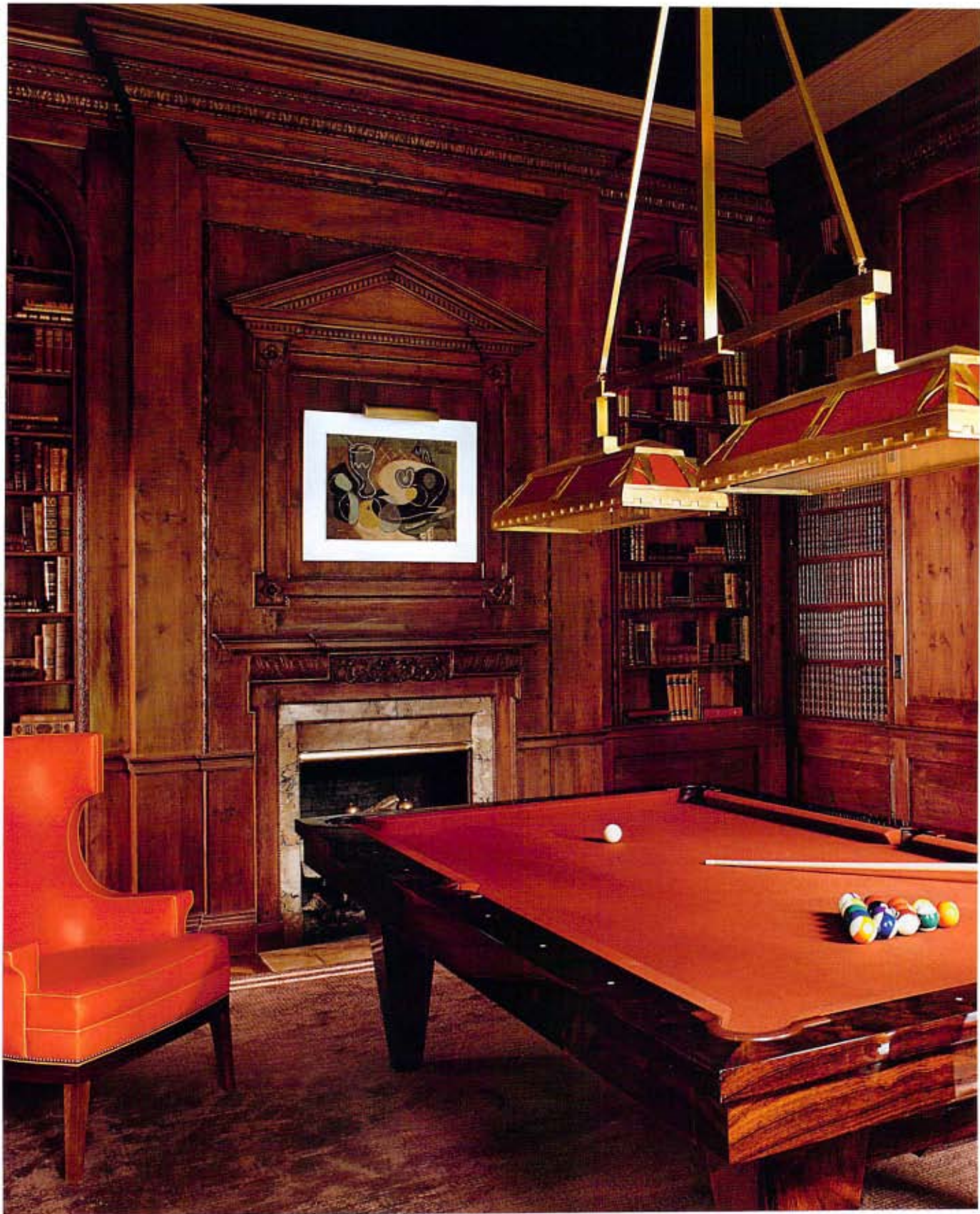


**Above:** Custom-glazed subway tiles wrap the kitchen walls. Along with 1930s aluminum pendant lamps and a Beaux Arts-style clock, the space boasts a Lacanche range, a RangeCraft hood, and barstools from Sundance Catalog; the sink fittings are by Michael S. Smith for Kallista. **Opposite:** In the breakfast room, a '50s Stilnovo chandelier floats above a mahogany table and custom-made klismos chairs. The sofa is dressed in an Osborne & Little fabric, the curtains are of a Clarence House print, and the vintage rug is from ABC Carpet & Home; the artwork is by James Lece.









**Above:** A pool table by Blatt Billiards, an Art Deco light fixture, and a 1930s French oil painting strike perfect period notes in the paneled billiard room. **Opposite, from top:** The office, painted in Benjamin Moore's Bittersweet Chocolate, features a slipper chair covered in a Schumacher silk next to a vintage mahogany desk; the paintings are by Clay Wagstaff, at left, and Eugene Brodsky. The cloakroom, finished in a Hollandac paint, is anchored by a '30s American lacquer table under a French light fixture of the same period; the swing-arm sconce is from Circa Lighting.





The master bedroom wing was reborn as a bar and a vast family room 42 feet long and 16 feet wide. “A big part of our mission was to devise a place where this huge multigenerational family could gather together, which they do all the time,” Cope says. “There’s a dinner for 30 to 40 people every week. To improve the room’s proportions I suggested we break through to the attic and add a ribbed barrel vault. I had Colefax and Fowler in my head—specifically, the legendary yellow drawing room John Fowler designed with Nancy Lancaster for her home on Avery Row in London.” Gambrel picked up the reference and riffed on it. The Lancaster room’s off-white ceiling was hung down the middle with luscious chandeliers in white Murano glass. Here, the ceiling is charcoal, with pearly capiz-shell pendant lights in the form of immense orbs.

Flexing his reputation for curve-ball color, Gambrel borrowed the scheme for the master bedroom—now located on the central bay’s second floor—from its purple, gray, and apricot marble fireplace. In another signature Gambrel treatment, pictures are stacked high and spread wide on the walls.

Though a full 75 percent of the furnishings—including all the rugs, upholstery, and a smashing reverse-silver-leaf glass-top dining table—were custom designed by Gambrel, the mix is leavened with trophy vintage pieces and the odd cherry-picked antique: a beefy refectory table by Jules Leleu; a pair of nickel-and-crystal wall lights rescued from one of the Dorothy Draper-decorated public rooms at the Hampshire House apartment building on







Central Park South; a ravishing rosewood-and-leather console from the '30s by the French cabinetmaker Baptistin Spade.

Sweeping light wells ingeniously ferry daylight to unexpected places in the building through decorative lenses in the ceiling, creating the kind of *lumière mystérieuse* pioneered by Sir John Soane. "The idea was so successful, we followed the same approach and placed another skylight in the vestibule roof between two bedrooms," Cope says.

It's tempting to think Gambrel was destined to reimagine the manor house (and possibly even save it from the wrecking ball), given its bloodlines and location as well as his background. As an architecture student at the University of Virginia, Gambrel took a special interest in the patrician legacy of Long Island's North Shore, decoding Slim Aarons's society portraits and combing through the works of F. Scott Fitzgerald, who found inspiration for the gilded settings of *The Great Gatsby* in Great Neck, Manhasset, and other towns close to Old Westbury. Gambrel even had a classmate who grew up in the area in a house nearly as splendid as his clients'. Years later, when he got the call to interview for the renovation assignment, he contacted his friend and described the property to see if she knew it. "You're kidding," she said. "That's my uncle's old place."

"Without being dismissive about all the wonderful opportunities I've had, this is my first *real* house, built at a time when there were no restrictions," Gambrel says. "It's the first time I've worked on truly architecturally important rooms by a renowned firm. My fantasy now is to live in a great blue-chip American house." □





Photographs of wilting flowers by Rachel Lévy animate the master suite; the Barovier & Toso chandelier is vintage, and Gambrel designed the upholstered bed. The bench, tufted chair, and sofa are covered in fabrics by Schumacher, Armani/Casa, and Pierre Frey, respectively; the curtain material is by Donghia, and the rug is by Beauvais Carpets. *Opposite:* The master bath is sheathed in Fior di Pesco Apuano marble; the sconce is from Circa Lighting, and the pendant lamp is a restored Art Deco piece.

