

NOW SHOWING: THE BEST GOODS IN NEW YORK CITY

at home gardens!

IN FAIRFIELD COUNTY

A NEW LEAF
FRESH PERSPECTIVES HAVE
HISTORIC GARDENS +
HOMES FLOURISHING



NEW!
FASHION HOUSE
[runway trends come home!]

\$5.95

MARCH / APRIL 2015
WWW.ATHOMEFC.COM





The homeowner in her kitchen. The painting is by Tracy Chadwell. **opposite:** Bergstein gave the original interior modern touches while staying true to its simplistic roots; the view to the conservation land surrounding the home; the front door bears the year the home was built.

nature, nurtured

Greenwich resident Alex Bergstein embraces the simple life at her New Milford getaway.

by ANN KAISER photographs AMY VISCHIO



In a way, Alex Bergstein was prepping for this project her whole life: When she was just eight years old, someone asked her what she wanted to be when she grew up, "and I said, 'an environmental conservationist.' Nobody even knew what that meant!" she laughs. That long-held interest and passionate concern for nature led her to pursue a Ph.D. in Chemical Safety Policy at Yale, and to become the Director of Greenwich's Greening Our Children, an organization

Uncluttered space allows the viewer to take in the sleek marble countertop and oak floors. **opposite:** Even the mudroom is a study in simplicity; flowers from Bowers Family Farm; each of the two kitchen sinks sit under a street-facing window.





that focuses on reducing children's exposure to chemicals and toxins. It also led her to this historic home in New Milford, in a section called Merryall, known for its connection to and stewardship of the land.

The 1775 home had undergone several renovations since it was built by hand by its original owner, Joseph Wheadon, but had been almost untouched since the 1940s, and it was in desperate need of a new helping hand. Luckily, it was Bergstein who came to the rescue, with a renovation that stayed true to both the structure itself and the spirit of the home. "I care very much about preserving our architectural history, and that's what attracted me to the house in the first place," she says. With permission from the zoning board, and a background in historical preservation, Bergstein transformed the interior into an open, modern living space with a focus on bringing the outside in, but kept the street-facing

sides of the home historically accurate. Using all the same materials they would have used originally, including stone, wood, and metal, it was made to look as it would have had it been properly maintained over the last 200 years. But although the home was reimagined for today, its respect for its surroundings is true to the original.

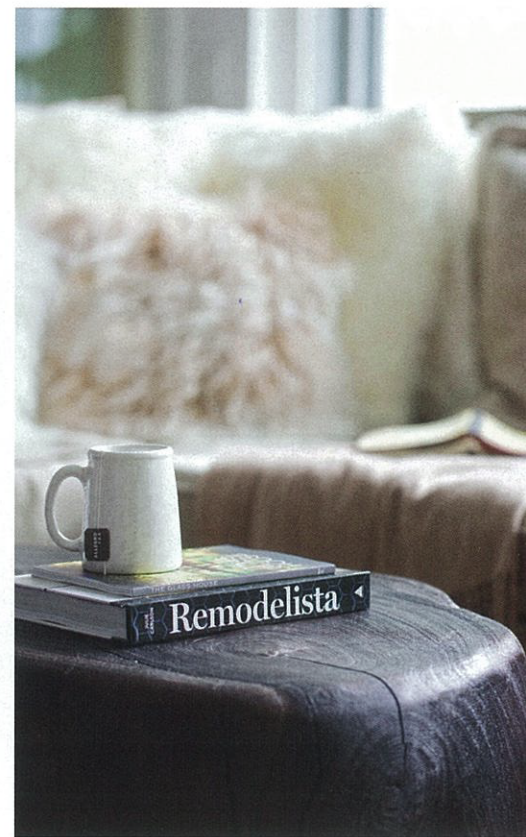
The renovation uncovered another piece of the home's history as well: during construction, the team found Wheadon's tombstone totally intact under the concrete patio—a testament to how important the home was to him. "These people were the first generation who came here from England, for the sole purpose to own land and call it their own," says Bergstein. To honor his legacy, and the beginning of the home's story, Wheadon's tombstone is now held in a special cabinet in the utility room over where it was found.

Bergstein designed much of the home's furniture, including the sofas, dining table and benches. An area craftsman constructed the pieces from locally sourced White Oak.









this spread: Another original beam was repurposed as a fireplace mantel. The interior renovation completely opened up the house for modern living, but Bergstein showcased wooden beams from the original home in the new design. "I didn't want to throw anything away that was original," she says.

Bergstein's story with the house began in 2009, when she purchased the home and undertook a "green" renovation in two senses of the word. She made as many environmentally conscious building decisions as she could, using non-toxic materials, no synthetics or chemicals, and made energy efficiency a big focus of the design. The renovation was also structured to take in as much of the live landscape outside as possible.

Architect Mark Goodwin of Beinfield Architecture helped her create a completely open interior layout, with a U-shaped floor plan in the back that includes two wings of floor-to-ceiling glass wrapped around a patio. One could imagine Wheadon giving his approval: the updated space has the same simplicity in design and focus on natural elements as his original structure—just fast-forwarded two centuries.

"The whole concept was to be as connected to nature as possible," says Bergstein, who decorated the interiors without color or pattern, so there was "nothing to distract from

the natural scenery, which is what I want the focus to be." She designed much of the furniture and had it made by a local craftsman, but kept furnishings very spare. "To me the perfect room is one with no furniture, where you're surrounded by nature, and you're just totally at peace," she says. This home is perfect for her—it's surrounded on all three sides by conservation land, so the family can enjoy the changing colors of the meadow outside in every season.

She wakes up to the view each morning, thanks to the master bedroom's floor-to-ceiling glass wall overlooking the meadow. Behind the bed is a feature wall created with the floorboards from the original home. The yoga room, with windows on all three sides, faces the meadow and can be used for anything Bergstein wants. It is perhaps the space that best reflects the home's greater purpose—to revel in slowing down, taking it all in, and appreciating the natural beauty right in front of you. It has been the site of morning meditations, a yoga-and-hiking retreat with friends, and even a farm-to-harvest dinner for sixteen people. "I like

Neutral bedding keeps the focus on the natural scenery. **opposite:** Behind the bed, Bergstein created a feature wall using the home's original floorboards.





"The whole concept was to be
as **CONNECTED TO NATURE** as possible."

—ALEX BERGSTEIN



*The master bedroom's glass walls frame an unbeatable view.
opposite: The master bath vanity showcases more beams from the 1775 structure.*





"I feel so **REFRESHED**
and **CLEANSED** when I
go up there."

—ALEX B.



Bergstein added on a new
utility/garden room as part
of the renovation. opposite:
The yoga room takes full
advantage of the gorgeous
meadow view.



having it empty, and then I can imagine it however I want," says Bergstein.

The way she imagined her family using the home, as a place for outdoor recreation—hiking, biking, and enjoying nature—is now a reality. "The whole concept is to get away from stuff, because stuff takes over our lives. And it shouldn't be that way. So I just wanted to get back to basics and back to the essence of what I love, which is being in nature, being outside, being with my family and friends, in a kind of contemplative, calming, soothing space," says Bergstein. "I feel so refreshed and cleansed when I go up there."

Bergstein has found a home in the larger Merryall com-

munity as well. "It's a very special place, because the people are so dedicated to preserving the land and cultivating sustainably. It's just a great community and I'm really happy to be a part of it," she says. Though much has changed in the last two centuries, there is a reason why Merryall—and its houses—have endured. There, a connection to the land and a passion for preserving it, have remained evergreen.

RESOURCES:

Architect, Mark Goodwin, Beinfield Architecture, beinfield.com

Styling, Bonnie Paige, bonniepaige.com

Food, Green Granary, greengranary.com

Flowers, Bowers Family Farm