

From its many windows, terraces
and decks, the stone and shingle house
takes in the pastoral scenery.

Remote Possibilities

*A rambling family home on a secluded property outside Boston
brings a new sophistication to the idea of the traditional farmhouse.*

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Depending on how you look at it, the residential architects of New England are either uniquely blessed or strangely cursed. Faced with home-site after beautiful homesite—from parcels of rocky ocean-front to seas of rolling meadow to pristine mountain slopes—they find themselves in an endless competition with gorgeous

landscapes. Don't they secretly long for a plot of land bereft of nature's gifts, a blank canvas waiting to be transformed by their art alone? Or are they happy to let their work play second fiddle to its natural surroundings?

Being an architect of the latter sort, Rob Bramhall didn't



The sweeping driveway ends in a courtyard formed by the house, garage and barn. ABOVE: The stone guest cottage, set slightly off axis from the main house, looks onto the pool area. FACING PAGE: Atop the garage wing, a golden retriever weathervane pays homage to the family's pets.

The seating arrangement in the living room changes with the seasons, the large sofa facing out toward the fields in the summer and in toward the fireplace in the winter.





mind at all when an outdoorsy family of five presented him with a fantastic site: the crest of a gently sloping ten-acre hayfield in the countryside north of Boston. Bounded by woods, the property is a world unto itself; there's not a neighbor in sight, unless you count the deer or wild turkeys.

"Ninety percent of what they like about the house is the site," Bramhall admits. "It's very remote, very private, and they wanted to take advantage of the views and the fields. They wanted the house to have some presence up there, but still be reserved and settled into the landscape."

With its many-gabled roofline, the 12,000-square-foot home cuts a striking figure against a backdrop of forest. Red cedar shingles and New England fieldstone ground the house to the site, while windows of varying sizes frame views of the property on all sides.

Through careful design, Bramhall saw to it that the house wouldn't overwhelm the landscape, or its inhabi-



Shades of blue, the homeowner's favorite color, appear throughout the house. Navy sets a formal tone in both the dining room and entry (facing page).

tants, with its size. "The main thing was addressing the views to the building so that you're not seeing a lot of mass in any one direction," he explains. "Also, the floor plan is really only one room deep, so that from every space in the building you have connections to the exterior on two or three sides of the room." Decks and terraces deepen the home's relationship with the outdoors and further break down the scale.

You might call the result a very elegant farmhouse or, maybe, a delightfully agrarian manor. "It started off as more of a farm building because the site is on old farming land," Bramhall says of the design, "and it became a little bit more refined and more detailed, less like a barn."

The house and grounds, it should be said, are clearly not embarrassed about the property's past life. A finished barn shelters the family's haying equipment and defines one side of the entry courtyard. A guest cottage, linked to the main house by a glass passageway, is clad completely

in fieldstone to resemble an old farm building. And the pool and pool house are surrounded by what looks like a paddock fence.

Intent on letting the site speak for itself, landscape architect Elliott Brundage lent nature the gentlest of hands, embellishing the perimeter of the house with low-maintenance plants and trees. He thoughtfully bordered the pool with low-lying shrubs, allowing swimmers a view to the meadow, and sent climbing roses up a large trellis to create a poolside bower. Brundage also catered to the family's outdoor interests with a bocce court, a vegetable patch and a woodland garden shaded by a grove of birches.

The duet of rustic and refined continues indoors, where interior designer Heather Wells worked with the lady of the house to furnish the space in an elegant country style. Her client wanted the decor to "read 'formal



A stone fireplace and woody palette make for a rustic, yet refined, family room. FACING PAGE: The cherry kitchen (top) and casual dining area (bottom) reflect the homeowners' love of unpainted wood.



and traditional' without going too far," Wells says. "The house is set in the country, and their lifestyle is a little more casual. Yet she has a formal side to her that she wanted to show. The challenge was going back and forth between casual spaces and formal spaces and having them feel comfortable."

One trick for making it work, Wells notes, was using glossy mahogany and fruitwood furniture in the formal rooms and less polished woods, like cherry, in the more functional spaces. The trim follows a similar strategy: a cherry-clad kitchen and family room offset the fancier white moldings in the living room, dining room and entryway. Floors of white oak connect the entire first floor, and arched doorways and coffered ceilings reappear in formal and casual spaces alike.

To find her color palette of sage, camel and blue, Wells didn't need to look far. She borrowed the hues from the fields and forest outside—and, in the case of the blue, the

owner's wardrobe. The more rustic family room and a casual dining area lend themselves to woody sage upholstery with burgundy accents, while the living room's white mantelpiece and wheat-colored sofas bask in the glow of warm camel walls. Atop the tailored living room sofas, dusky blue pillows gesture toward the adjacent dining room, very properly attired in navy.

Wells's favorite place in the house just might be the sitting nook tucked behind the main staircase. "The stair is really energized by the sitting area," she says. A blue-and-white checked carpet inside the front door plays off the cushions in the nearby nook and reflects the ribbed detailing in the arched entry ceiling. "We did a series of checked carpets throughout the house," Wells says. "The check pattern hearkens back to the traditional aesthetic."

Should all this seem a bit too fine for a family that



spends much of its time romping in the woods, note that a hard-working mudroom, complete with a dog shower for the resident golden retrievers, sees plenty of action.

"What's nice about the house is it's tied together really well. She likes details, but she doesn't want anything to stick out above everything else," Wells says of the home and its owner. "That's how the house feels—strong and nice and comfortable."

Bramhall couldn't agree more. In fact, the house neatly sums up his design philosophy. "The goal of our architecture is to not make more out of it than it is," he says. "I wanted it to be timeless, sophisticated and grounded. I didn't want it to make a big statement."

But listen closely: beneath the birdsong and rustling meadow grass, the house hums its own quiet tune, a little something about a family and their dogs, and the countless pleasures of country life. **NEH**

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