

DESIGN AT ITS BEST

HOUSE & GARDEN

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designer savvy White cedar shingles, cladding the exterior of the house, opposite page, were chosen because they weather to a silvery gray patina. A linden espaliered on a trellis inscribes the west elevation of the Shaker-like structure.

trade secrets FURNITURE Bittersweet vines clipped from local woods create a wall sculpture above a daybed, this page, covered in old French linen, with a pillow in a vintage checked linen. LAMPS Bracket wall lamps, made with segments from Grand Brass Lamp Parts, NYC.



taking her boughs

Garden designer Deborah Nevins builds an airy live-in orangery and fills it with bold botanical cuttings



designer savvy

Nine-foot-high triple-hung windows help achieve the feeling of being outdoors and indoors at the same time.

trade secrets

FURNITURE Nevins designed the dining table and Knole settee.
ACCENTS Anthracite fern fossil, opposite page, from Youngblood, Sag Harbor, NY, propped atop an early-19th-century American pine chimneypiece. Flanking it, cuttings of an ornamental raspberry. Vase and glassware by Pottery Barn.
FABRICS Antique French linen on the tables and couch.
LAMP Tolomeo table lamps by Artemide.

None of the properties that her friends had brought to her attention caught her fancy, so they were relieved when she finally announced that she had bought a wooded two-acre parcel on which she would create the year-round house she couldn't get out of her head.

"I've always wanted to live in an orangery," says Nevins, who was trained as an architectural historian before turning to the vocation that has brought her international acclaim. "The whole idea was to be able to sit inside and feel as though I were physically outside." To realize that vision, she turned to architect Peter de Bretteville to design the house. She knew just what she

wanted: a design that would reflect her respect for the classic simplicity of the local Shingle-style vernacular as well as her ardent love of all things French.

Not surprisingly, the cross-cultural result of that pairing evokes the Francophile spirit of Thomas Jefferson, especially in the nine-foot-high triple-hung windows straight out of Monticello that give the spacious living room the lofty, sun-flooded feeling of the citrus conservatory that Nevins imagined. Indeed, during the cold months of the year, the 20-by-28-foot space is home to fragrant Meyer lemon trees that spend the summer outdoors in

Against the off-white backdrops, the cuttings make the house seem like a three-dimensional botanical album



for years,

garden designer Deborah Nevins—renowned for a starry client list aglitter with business, entertainment, and society figures too fabulous to mention, as well as this writer—was the horticultural equivalent of the cobbler whose children went barefoot. Because spring and summer are her busiest seasons, she had long rented a small, unwinterized weekend retreat near New York, where she tended a modest herbaceous border and nurtured fantasies of putting down permanent roots with the country house and garden of her dreams.

designer savvy

The generous scale of the rooms makes the small building seem quite luxurious.

trade secrets

FURNITURE Dominating one wall of the living room is an early-20th-century, 32-drawer French apothecary cabinet, from Rooms & Gardens, NYC. **TABLEWARE** On the cabinet's shelves are early-19th-century French Creil creamware plates and cuttings of fig leaves.

huge terra-cotta tubs. At the opposite end of the ground floor is an actual greenhouse in which Nevins overwinters the many other non-hardy potted trees—including fig, bay laurel, and myrtle—that punctuate the areas surrounding the shingle-clad building.

AS GEOMETRICALLY severe as a Shaker barn, the compact form of the structure was dictated less by philosophy than economy. To keep costs down, Nevins asked for a footprint so small—a mere 20 by 45 feet—that when the foundation was poured, a neighbor asked why she was building her swimming pool first. And because complex gables can add significantly to a budget, the simple pitched roof makes the structure seem like a full-scale version of a Monopoly house (albeit a very elegant one, since the Parker Brothers game pieces do not come with a perfectly trained linden espalier on one narrow end). But there is not the slightest hint of cost cutting here, thanks to the generous scale of the rooms, which makes the building seem vastly larger and quietly luxurious once you step into it.

Nevins's approach to the interiors was much influenced by the taste of her good friend Rose Tarlow. Monochromatic off-white walls and linen upholstery throughout, antique wood floors and chimneypiece, and well-burnished antiques chosen more for patina than pedigree all give the high-ceilinged rooms a timeless aura



“The whole idea was to be able to sit inside and feel as though I were physically outside”—Deborah Nevins

not unlike that of Tarlow's much published Bel-Air home, though Nevins's relaxed version is more appropriate to this rustic setting.

Window treatments are minimal to nonexistent. Nevins wanted to maintain a strong interconnection between interior and exterior, and on the ground floor eschewed curtains altogether, so that the eight great living room windows could be opened to the surrounding gardens unimpeded by fabric. For some privacy at night, she hangs an antique lacquer kimono stand with vintage textiles and places it in front of the window closest to where she is sitting. Yet there are some contemporary surprises, too, such as a concealed neon light installation by her friend the artist Stephen Antonakos that casts a serene blue glow in her second-floor bedroom and welcomes guests as they arrive up the curving driveway for one of her frequent dinner parties.

ON THOSE OCCASIONS, and every other day that Nevins is in residence, for that matter, the rooms are enlivened with the bold cuttings she prefers to conventional flower arrangements. Against the off-white backdrops, these striking specimens make the house seem like a three-dimensional botanical album. In winter, it might mean massive flowering branches that she cuts and forces in the greenhouse; in summer, a huge fig leaf or acanthus frond placed like a sculptural fragment to emphasize the incomparable design skills of Mother Nature. Oldest of all is a fern fossil embedded in a huge chunk of anthracite propped on the living room mantel. “That’s the piece I’d run for if the house caught on fire,” Nevins says, “though because it’s coal, it wouldn’t burn right away.” □



designer savvy In Nevins's bedroom, a delicately outlined 19th-century French iron tester bed encapsulates the elegant restraint of the house. A pair of myrtle trees flank the bed.

trade secrets FURNITURE American 19th-century table and turn-of-the-century chair. FABRICS French 19th-century linens cover the bed. PAINTINGS Portrait of Nevins at 14, by Nancy Ranson.