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SPECTACULAR ON THE SOUND

Thompson-Raissis Architects' Shingle-style residence honors the past while embracing modern technology

Story by Meryl Siegman | Photography by Steve Rossi

A couple wanting to live on the waterfront found the ideal location on which to build their dream home—a place that would serve as a permanent residence for themselves and their children for years to come. Built in 2016, this exquisitely appointed house is situated in one of the most desirable and exclusive neighborhoods in Darien, CT. Though it is the smallest town on Connecticut's Gold Coast, Darien boasts 17 miles of coastline along the Long Island Sound, with views of Manhattan just 45 miles to the southwest. Located on just over an acre on one of Darien's many peninsulas, the home is sited to maximize views of the sound and to capture dramatic sunrises and sunsets year-round.

The owners of the property hired Scott Raissis of Thompson-Raissis

Architects (TRA) to design the home itself and its custom millwork, front entry court, pool area and surrounding hardscape. Founded in 1994, TRA has been at the forefront of residential architecture for nearly three decades. Its signature style blends classically inspired elegance with contemporary building practices and technology. Known for its modern interpretations of historic architectural styles, the firm creates homes that reflect the contemporary lifestyles of its clients while evoking environments steeped in tradition. Its owner and principal, Scott Raissis, has been practicing architecture since 1989. His expertise in classical residential architecture and construction made him the perfect choice for this project.



Scott designed the home to maximize the 180-degree water views, with its primary spaces facing the water. Surrounded by multiple gar-





The random-width, wide-plank white oak flooring on the ground floor and second story is supplied by Stephen Gamble Historic Floors and Finishes



dens populated by indigenous, salt-tolerant species of vegetation, the 8,000-square-foot, two-and-a-half story residence features five bedrooms, five full baths and three half baths. The finished basement houses a home gym, a full-swing golf simulator and an entertainment space complete with wet bar.

The entire design approach was based on the owners' desire for an authentic-looking Shingle-style home that is typical of the area. "With its Sanford White-inspired Shingle style, you would never think from looking at it that it was a new home," says Scott. The house incorporates the best elements of the classic Shingle-style architecture, including an asymmetrical façade, irregular roof lines, cross gables and wide porches. This style, representing a movement away from the lavish, decorative designs popular in Victorian times, was developed in New England in the late 1800s and was particularly popular at seaside resorts. Intentionally rustic, it evoked a more relaxed, informal lifestyle. Emphasizing grace and simplicity, Shingle-style homes were clad in plain wood shingles that typically blended into natural surroundings. Porches, balconies and large windows were prevalent, inviting a connection with the outdoors.

Attentive to his clients' desire that the house not look just built but rather have the character and feel of the Shingle-style homes in the

area, James selected material based on researching the style, components and detailing of the home's late 19th-century predecessors. Its roof and siding are made from white cedar shingles that were pre-dipped and given a weathered finish appropriate to the period, giving the wood a beautiful, aged appearance. The lead-coated copper flashing and custom chocolate-brown color chosen for the siding further contribute to the structure's authentic look. Additional details used to evoke the design and craftsmanship of a Shingle-style home include Palladian windows with a diamond-shaped muntin configuration and custom-designed pilasters, moldings, brackets, railings and balusters in keeping with the traditional style.

The stones used for the exterior were locally sourced. The architects were careful to leave only the weathered faces of the stone exposed, giving the cladding an antique feel and a beautiful patina, with colors ranging from a light, sandy beige to a dark espresso brown. Designers considered not just the materials themselves, but also to how to treat and install them to enhance their natural beauty and evoke the desired old-world character.

It was very important to the owners that the house be built with environmentally friendly materials and remain energy-efficient throughout the seasons, including the harsh New England winters. Thomp-



Chesneys USA fabricated the custom hand-carved marble fireplace.



The wine room, located in the kitchen pantry for convenience, features a custom-fabricated bronze-and-glass door by the French company LMC.



son-Raïssis Architects, with its long track record of designing homes incorporating state-of-the-art technology, designed its infrastructure using the most modern techniques available, including a geothermal heating and cooling system, obviating the need for unsightly oil tanks and AC condenser units. The team also installed heat-recovery/air-exchange systems, radiant heating and high-performance closed-cell spray foam insulation, allowing the home to achieve levels of heating and cooling efficiency uncommon in buildings of its size. They paid special attention to indoor air quality by choosing—whenever possible—paints, adhesives, insulation and other products that were free of volatile organic compounds. The entire back of the house, which faces the water, is lined with porches that are ideal for outdoor entertaining and also save energy by reducing the amount of sunlight hitting the house during the hottest months.

Another of the owners' priorities was a family-oriented home with spaces arranged to facilitate and enhance a shared living experience. Scott designed the house so that the family room would function as its core, with all the other rooms radiating out from that space. The result is an easy, welcoming flow from the family room to the kitchen, living and dining rooms, all with spectacular views of the Long Island Sound.

The owners also wanted the interior of their new home to be transitional with more of a modern feel, counterbalancing its traditional exterior design. Scott took a minimalist approach, choosing elements such as Calacatta marble to create a sleek and contemporary look, while using wide-plank white oak flooring in



Designed by Thompson-Raissis Architects, the master bathroom is dominated by Calacatta gold marble. The barrel ceiling with cove lighting was created to maximize the sweeping view of the Long Island Sound.

keeping with the home's Shingle-style roots.

Scott's vision for a home fully customized for his client and his clever approach to how the built environment is experienced are evidenced as soon as one approaches the structure's front door. Conceiving the optimal way to take advantage of the spectacular setting, he wanted visitors to experience the striking water views only after entering the

house. "The typical waterfront home has a direct view of the water at its entrance, but I didn't want to give away the view at the front door," Scott explains. "First, we did not use a glass door. Then we positioned the door so it is centered on the fireplace, but to both the right and left there are openings with three sets of French doors along the waterside view. Once you enter, you experience not only a view of the water, but a different view of it from each room." While the most

dramatic vantage point is from the central family room, those from the living room and library at the end of the hall offer varying perspectives. "As you take in the house, you experience a different view from each room, instead of just a vacuous space," says Scott.

While an interior design firm was hired to do the decorating—including the soft goods, curtains, paints, wallcoverings and fixtures—TRA

collaborated with the owners on the theme of each room, designing every detail to realize their tastes and desires. The grand two-story foyer, the gateway to the home, is the perfect reflection of the partnership between architect and client. Its sweeping master staircase features a white oak handrail and pencil-thin, hand-forged wrought-iron balustrades, creating a light and airy feel. The stone is travertine, with the fireplace mantel custom-made from limestone. The walls are





wainscoted two-thirds of the way up, with a decorative painting application to the field above.

The family room has an inviting feel, featuring custom millwork designed to wrap the walls with wood, eliminating the need for casing. The wood ceiling was designed with a deep board pattern, creating a genuine sense of warmth. The library doubles as a home office, fully paneled in rift white oak and opening onto a private porch with stunning water views. It also features a soaring cathedral ceiling and a Chesney USA hand-carved marble mantel. A second home office is cleverly tucked into the mudroom, which runs the entire depth of the house.

The master bathroom was designed around large slabs of Calacatta gold marble, which clad the bathtub, matching picture windows and divider between the two vanities. Two recesses in the divider house a TV and a gas fireplace. A barrel-vaulted ceiling with cove lighting was installed to maximize the breathtaking vista.

The outdoor porch is one of the loveliest spaces in this magnificent and thoughtfully designed home. Its floors and fireplace are bluestone from New York State. Above the fireplace is a custom solid-granite quarried mantel that is perfectly integrated into the stone veneer. The TV is discreetly hidden behind mahogany folding doors, while a ceiling crafted from five-and-a-half-inch wooden planks painted in white adds light and brightness. The automatic roll-down screens, perhaps the most enchanting feature, allow the entire porch to become screened-in with the push of a button.

With an outdoor fireplace and infrared heaters installed in the ceiling, the porch can be used year-round. It is the perfect spot for entertaining or lounging with the family while enjoying the view of the pool and the tranquil Long Island Sound beyond.

Resources:

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