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A REVIVED LAKESIDE GETAWAY IN UPSTATE NEW YORK

An unexceptional waterfront house in upstate New York is reborn as a grand 19th-century-style retreat with soaring rooms and romantic details, courtesy of architect John I. Meyer Jr. and design firm McAlpine Booth & Ferrier Interiors

Text by Mitchell Owens | Photography by Pieter Estersohn | Produced by Howard Christian

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Shah Jahan, the 17th-century Moghul emperor, dedicated the Taj Mahal to the memory of his chief consort, Mumtaz Mahal. Louis XV funded myriad châteaux to delight Madame de Pompadour. As for recycling entrepreneur Adam Weitsman, when it came to paying tribute to his wife, Kim—"I had no financial success before I met her," he says—nothing would do but a weekend getaway on their beloved Skaneateles Lake, a ribbon of water in the Finger Lakes region of upstate New York. And not just any bucolic retreat, but a full-throated salute to the resort area's Victorian heyday.

The postcard town of Skaneateles, which has been a popular summer destination since the early 19th century, became peppered with grand cottages after the Civil War, one of them the work of Gilded Age tastemaker Stanford White. It was Weitsman's appreciation of those stately residences and their comfortingly traditional architectural vocabulary of cedar shingles and portly turrets that led him to call architect John I. Meyer Jr., principal of the Boston firm [Meyer and Meyer Architecture and Interiors](#), six years ago, after studying his online portfolio of picturesque country residences.

Weitsman wanted to gut a blocky 1902 house he had recently acquired and rebuild it in a

more distinguished style. He also bought two neighboring parcels of land (one with a dwelling he intended to demolish) to give the lakefront home appropriately estate-like grounds. Though Weitsman grew up in Owego, about an hour south of Skaneateles, and now lives primarily in Vestal, near the New York-Pennsylvania border, the Finger Lakes town has entranced him since childhood. As a youth he spent countless hours scouring regional shops for 19th-century American cobalt-decorated stoneware, amassing a stunning crockery collection that he eventually donated to the New York State Museum in Albany. While still in his 20s, Weitsman also opened the American Folk Art Gallery, a widely respected Greenwich Village shop (now defunct).

“It’s a pretty lake, a small town, and the people are friendly,” says the soft-spoken owner of Upstate Shredding-Weitsman Recycling, a scrap-metal processing company that he founded in 1996 at the age of 28 and built into one of North America’s largest; Kim, a former model, is an operations manager at the firm. The couple, well-regarded philanthropists who have a young daughter named Clover, were eager for their new home to bring something to the community as well. “I wanted to hire local craftsmen to support the town,” the businessman says.

The renovated Weitsman residence has a remarkably discreet street presence for a four-story stone-and-shingle schloss encompassing some 14,000 square feet. Sheltered beneath a vibrantly gabled slate roof, the home has the same footprint as the original, but the amount of living space was dramatically expanded after the interior was reconfigured. Neighborhood concerns over the scale of the project led to the restrained scheme for the primary elevation, which now presents a friendly Arts and Crafts appearance (high central peak, curved timbers) that fits neatly with the modest late-Victorian architecture of the region. The rear façade, on the other hand, has an exuberance straight out of the 1890s, from the magnificent bow window framed in pale limestone to the sweeping flights of stairs that separate two balustraded terraces (one stone, one grass) on their way to the lawn below and the lake beyond. “In the beginning I wanted to do something grander,” says Weitsman, an admirer of the Beaux Arts mansions of Newport, Rhode Island. “But John’s team came up with a design that felt right with the historic nature of Skaneateles.”

Inside the house, what had been dark is now light, thanks to Ray Booth, Liz Thompson, and Peter Fleming of [McAlpine Booth and Ferrier Interiors](#), a firm with offices in New York, Atlanta, and Nashville, Tennessee. “The strength of the exterior wouldn’t tolerate any little French objects dropped in,” says Booth, who directed the decoration as well as the rooms’ architectural details, among them the bold S-curve walnut newel posts for the staircases and the living room’s exquisite paneled wainscot and plasterwork ceiling. “Everything had to have gusto,” the designer adds. “We don’t tend to go as formal as we did here, but the clients pushed us to shop for the best we could find.”

Against a background of creamy whites, those fine selections include large, sinuous Regency armchairs in the lounge, a pair of majestic urn-shaped wine coolers mounted on plinths in the dining area, and the antler-like gilt-wood sconces that spring from a wall in the main salon. The clients bought the library’s sculptural Biedermeier armchairs during a trip to Manhattan; Booth praises the seats as “terrific finds.”

To make the ample rooms feel more intimate, the designer relied on some inspiring tricks. Floor-to-ceiling curtains are used as dividers and backdrops, and low upholstered screens embrace various sofas to imbue them with what Booth calls “a sense of place.” Instead of giving the home a standard-issue dining room, seen but rarely used, he positioned a Regency-style pedestal table and lightly gilded white-painted chairs at one end of the oversize entrance hall that bisects the house. The space is paved with a parallelogram pattern wrought in beige and white marble, a refined alternative to the typical black-and-white checkerboard.

Even with all these inviting rooms, the family can most often be found relaxing on the 42-foot-long screened terrace out back, where graceful arches frame watery vistas. Says Weitsman, smiling, “We could have just built the porch and been happy.”

Design Wisdom

Exploit Your Strengths: Booth gave the Weitsmans' capacious entrance hall greater purpose by placing a dining area at one end, alongside windows with expansive views of Skaneateles Lake.

Stay Flexible: Meyer designed a somewhat restrained main façade after neighbors raised concerns about the Weitsman residence overpowering the modest historic streetscape; the elevation's prominence is further masked by expertly placed trees and shrubs.

Cultivate Intimacy: In the largest rooms, Booth deployed generous curtains to serve as partitions between spaces and create a sense of coziness. "In our work, curtains are rarely just on windows," he explains. "We use them architecturally and as a layering device." Booth also propped low custom-made screens around the backs and sides of sofas to give them a secure, embraced feeling.

For the spectacular renovation, click through before and after photos of the [Victorian-style upstate New York retreat](#).

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