

FEBRUARY 2012

House Beautiful

MAKEOVERS!

LIVING
ROOM
RE-DO
IN
ONE DAY

10
COLORS
*with a
twist*



Makeovers!

WORK A ROOM

THEN

A vast, empty barn

NOW

A cozy English
country house

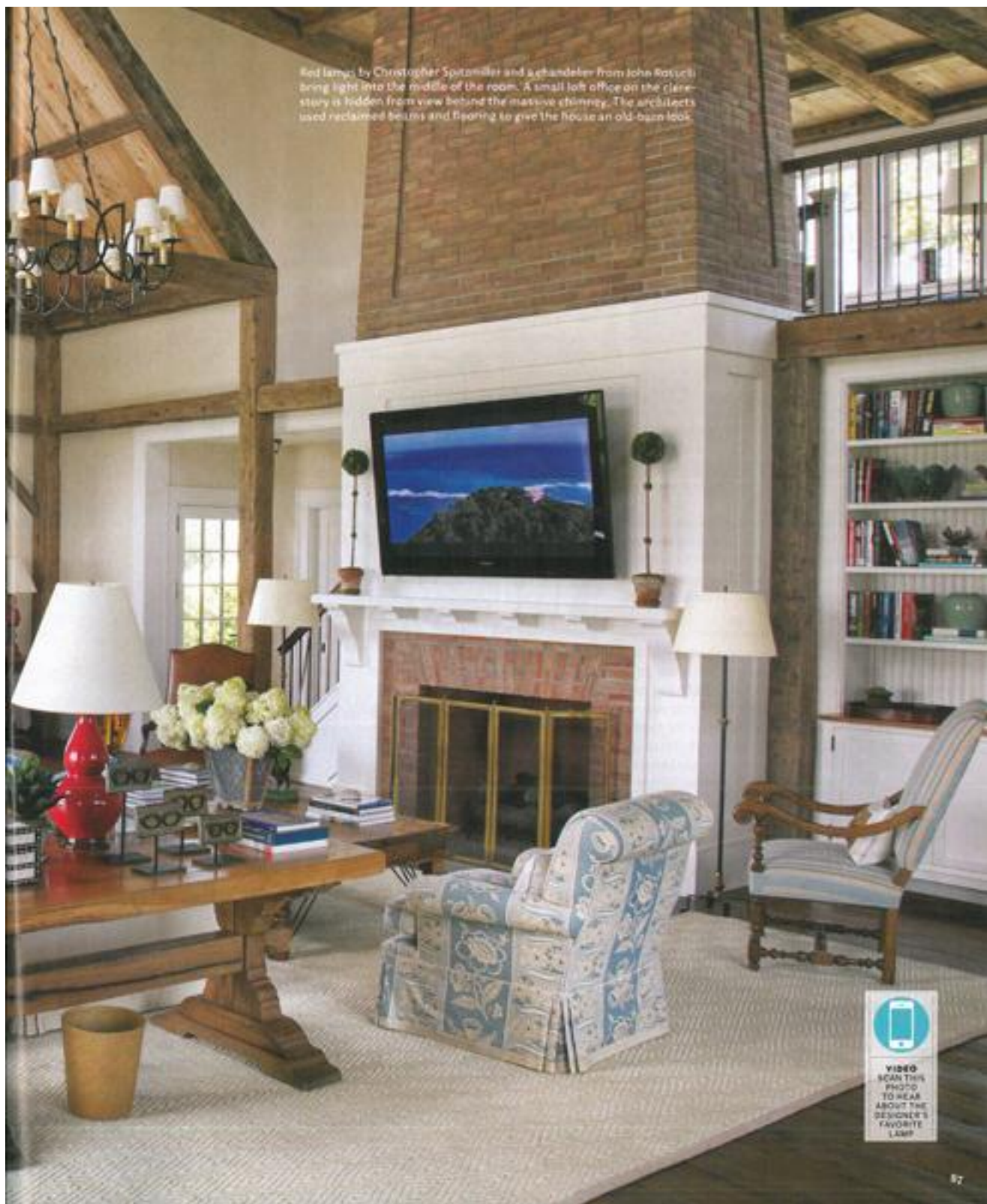
A shingled guesthouse designed by Hart Howerton blends beautifully with the landscape in East Hampton, New York. **OPPOSITE:** To tame the huge main room, designer Bunny Williams broke the space into two seating areas with back-to-back sofas and library tables from John Rosselli. **BEFORE:** Tables, armchairs upholstered in Chateau Stripe by Zimmer + Rohde flank a coffee table from Jayne Thompson Antiques on one side, and a leather ottoman from Niall Smith Antiques on the other. Vintage throws on the sofas are from Treillage. Rug from Shyam Ahuja.

Interior design by **BUNNY WILLIAMS** Interview by **MILES REDD** Photographs by **THOMAS LOOF**





Red lamps by Christopher Spitzmuller and a chandelier from John Rosselli bring light into the middle of the room. A small loft office on the second story is hidden from view behind the massive chimney. The architects used reclaimed beams and flooring to give the house an old-barn look.



VIDEO
SCAN THIS
PHOTO
TO HEAR
ABOUT THE
DESIGNER'S
FAVORITE
LAMP

MILES REDD: I cut my decorating teeth with you, and in fact, I still mimic your process every day. But talk to me about this house. How did you turn a barn-like space into a cozy English country house?

BUNNY WILLIAMS: The main room is huge, and one of the biggest challenges in big rooms is to make them cozy, because you can come in and go. 'Oh, dear.' A lot of people make the mistake of thinking everything should simply be big: 'I have a big room, so I'm going to put in 20-foot-long sofas and a coffee table the size of a twin bed.' But the first thing you have to do is break up the space. I created two seating areas in the middle of the room with back-to-back sofas—one facing the TV, the other facing the ocean view.

One of my favorite parts is how you used the writing tables as end tables for the sofas.

Back-to-back sofas create about eight feet of depth, so to put little dinky end tables there wouldn't work—they have to be big. It's all about scale.

I've never embraced putting a TV over the mantel, but I do now, because it's the practical place if a room is meant for TV.

I'm like you—we came from a school where we don't want to see the TV, but we're in a different era now. It's something that's a fact of life, and the technology has gotten really beautiful. TVs are so thin and elegant, so you know—why not? I think it makes rooms usable.

How do you light such a big, high room?

It has to be lit from high, eye level, and low. It's the combination that gives you an even light that's warm and cozy. You have to light the ceiling—lamplight is never going to reach the top of a 20-foot space. So we have spotlights on the tops of the crossbeams. And there's the chandelier in the middle of the ceiling, sconces all around the room, standing lamps by the fireplace, and big lamps in the center of the room.

What clever tricks do you have for making things feel old and timeless, but at the same time modern?

I love textiles, particularly in a house like this. They relax the decorating and make it seem like it didn't just come out of a design center. You find quilts and old textiles, and it gives a layer of warmth to the place that is more collected-looking. It's much easier to go and buy one fabric and put it on everything, but it's sort of boring when you finish. I like to use a lot of different fabrics, so you feel that if something happens to one thing, the whole room doesn't fall apart. I love feeling like you can change the pil-

lows if you want, or put a different throw over the back of the sofa, so that it doesn't always have to stay the same. To me, rooms are never static, and there's always something I find and think, 'Oh, this will be great.' I want rooms to have a feeling of spontaneity.

Those giant Jeff Koons-ish acorns—did you see them and think, 'Oh, those will be great in the corner'?

I found them in a shop in Connecticut, and I just thought they were sculpture, a kind of folk art. The dealer didn't know who made them.

Or where they would have been used...

But it's these kinds of things that have the personality. I mean, I think all of us, as designers, look for things with character, that are unexpected.

And they give a room curiosity.

That's what's fun. If everything is too perfect, it's a little boring. So you're always looking for an oddity.

You have an intriguing mix in the blue bedroom—the modern print over the bed, the Indian textiles, the painted beadboard...

If everything is alike in a room, you're not going to see anything. It's like going into a shop of all brown furniture—at a certain point it all looks alike. I've learned over the years that when you put something next to its opposite, it's going to stand out—painted furniture next to wooden furniture, metal next to lacquer. So if you put an angular headboard next to a bench that has rococo legs, it's the contrast that becomes interesting.

What's your favorite part of decorating? And what's your least favorite?

My favorite part is shopping and hunting. My least favorite part is finding something great and having it be too expensive. So you're constantly thinking, 'If I can't have this, then what else can I do that will work?' But you can always find other, less expensive things that are stylish.

The kitchen is really clean and crisp.

People say to me, 'Oh, do I want another white kitchen?' But you never get tired of a white kitchen. I think you do get tired of one that's too decorated. I've had many kitchens in my life, and I'm always happier when they're fairly neutral.

You put nothing in the hallway except a bench and three bell pendants.

Decorators need to know when to leave great architecture alone. I think we often feel we have to fill up every space, but I didn't even want curtains here. The light pouring in was all it really needed.



1. Soldier-blue milk paint on guest room walls highlights artwork by Jennifer Bartlett. The antique bobbin chair is covered in a Shyam Ahuja ikat. 2. "The old flooring in this beautiful, modern kitchen really works with the cleanliness of the black and white," Williams says. 3. Dining feels alfresco when the doors, painted Benjamin Moore's Guilford Green, slide open. 4. A John Rosselli leaf lantern hangs from the high, pitched ceiling above the landing. 5. A play of patterns. 6. An April Gornik painting in another guest room is set off by walls in green milk paint. An Indonesian quilt adds texture "and a Deco feeling." 7. Williams eschewed hallway curtains—she didn't want to block the light or detract from the architecture.





In a guest bath, Glacier Bay field glass tiles from Waterworks evoke the waters of the Pacific Northwest. The shower floor and surround, window accent, and countertop are Carrara marble. **OPPOSITE:** Williams likes to put soft, light quilts or throws at the foot of guest beds "so people can nap without destroying the bed." Across a John Robshaw bed cover, the vintage throw from Treillage picks up the blue of the milk paint on the walls. "Beaded board is typically white, but I thought, 'Why not paint it a color?'" FOR MORE DETAILS, SEE RESOURCES

