

Renovation transforms Craftsman-style home in Cos Cob

By Robert Marchant

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GREENWICH — A home can be like a person in some cases — it can have second, even third acts over the course of a lifetime.

The house at 32 Mimosa Drive is an example of a home given new life through a creative renovation and careful additions made through the years. What started out as a fairly conventional split-level ranch house has been transformed into a Craftsman-style dwelling that appears right at home on a parcel framed by tall trees and an old stone wall in Cos Cob. Co-owner John Shulman recalled it all started at a July 4 party when he was having drinks with a friend, local architect Jay Haverson. His family had been living in the house for years and wondered whether there was a way to expand it, as well as give it a more distinctive look.

Another request to the architect: “We wanted to see a tree from every window,” Shulman recalled.

Haverson came back with a plan for a Craftsman-style renovation. The new look had a certain logic to it: The design movement developed in the late 1800s, encouraging the use of natural materials, simplicity, elegance and a renewed connection with nature. The style seemed a natural for the heavily wooded 1-acre parcel.

The first major renovation began in 1995. The flat roof was raised and given a peak, which also allowed for the construction of a new master suite on the upper floor. The house was re-clad with cedar shingles, with trim and overhangs painted with hunter green. New mullioned windows were re-cased inside the older window frames, and bay windows installed throughout the house. That added touch gave the Shulmans the view of trees from every room. “The exterior was truly transformed,” Haverson wrote in a trade magazine about the redesign. A soaring entryway was also added into the mix. The house was expanded, but not bulked up. Soft, creamy paint colors were applied, and in the solarium, a sea-foam green.

Through it all, the renovation followed the credo of the the Society of Arts and Crafts, when, in Boston in 1897, its leaders called for “the necessity of sobriety and restraint, of ordered arrangement ... and of harmony and fitness” in housing and design.

The renovations to the house, while plenty of work, was a source of deep satisfaction to the family. “It’s been a wonderful home,” said Shulman. “And a very distinctive house.” Getting up in the morning is a particular pleasure, the owner remarked. “I can get up in the morning and look at this,” he said, gesturing to the rocky glade beneath his bedroom window, surrounded by old oak and tulip trees. The parcel has 99 mature trees on it — Shulman counted them himself.

That natural canvas also makes for an alluring tableau throughout the day, as a mix of light and dark play out on the property. “Tons of sun and shade,” the owner remarked, “Morning sun, afternoon shade.”

After the major renovation, the family has been carrying out further additions and upgrades. An office off the master bedroom was added, as well as a walk-in closet. A hot tub and a patio were put in back. The master bathroom got heated floors. The kitchen was upgraded. A custom fireplace was built. Coffered ceilings and recessed lighting added a sophisticated touch to the living areas on the first floor.

Throughout the many additions, an informal, relaxing feel was retained, the owner said, one conducive to family life. There's plenty of room for kids and visitors — five bedrooms — and ample space for entertainment and recreation.

"We wanted to do something a little different," Shulman said, "And it's everything we ever wanted."

The listing agent for the property, Barbara Hindman, noted the size, location and value of the house were a great combination. On top of that, she said, "They really took advantage of the scenery."

The \$1.915 million listing is being handled through Sotheby's.
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