

# ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

THE INTERNATIONAL MAGAZINE OF FINE INTERIOR DESIGN

JUNE 1991 \$5.00



# Colonial Air in Litchfield County

*A Designer's Bucolic 18th-Century  
Connecticut Residence*

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When interior designer David Laurance seeks to escape the confines of Manhattan, he heads for The Pond, his estate in Litchfield County, Connecticut. Built circa 1760, the double Colonial residence, which has been completely restored, sits amid seven acres of grounds. INSET: "From the moment I first saw this house, I knew it was the beauty I had been looking for," recalls Laurance. A pair of stone dogs guard the entrance path, which is shaded by a centuries-old maple.







THE PAIR OF SWANS that live on the pond behind designer David Laurance's Connecticut country house became parents to five cygnets last year on Mother's Day. They could hardly have picked a better setting as their nursery. The tranquil expanse of water is bordered by forest on one side, while in the other direction it is edged by the verdant lawn that rolls down from the double Colonial house. A garden of hollyhocks, foxgloves, phlox, lamb's ears and delphiniums assures that one plant or another is in full bloom from early spring to late fall.

If swans and flowers and trees thrive at The Pond, as the estate is called, so do people. Laurance's idea in renovating his country retreat was to have a "traditionally beautiful Connecticut Colonial house," but above all to create a comfortable retreat from his hectic life in New York. In each room, a series of appealing details unfold before the eyes—

damasks and chintzes, French bedcovers and American quilts—but at the same time, it is a place that works effortlessly for modern living.

David Laurance's way of life is based on the compatibility of contrasts: formality and friendliness, elegance and simple ease. The first instance of this is offered by the very region in which his residence is set. Though The Pond contains an urbanite's assemblage of fine French, English and American antiques, the surrounding countryside is a sparsely populated area of rolling hills and orchards and primitive fruit stands. The nearest town has nothing but a single general store with creaky wooden floors, of the type that recalls Vermont twenty years ago. Proceeding from it to The Pond, one does not know what to expect, but then the white picket fence opens electronically, and a very different world unfolds.

"I wanted the living room to be understated Yankee chic with American and English antiques," says Laurance. "I used light colors for the background." *Portrait of a Lady*, 1907, is by Alphaeus Cole, an American who painted in London. Chippendale mahogany Pembroke table, left, from Florian Papp. Kentshire Galleries circa 1860 Victorian stool and Edwardian hall table, far right. English open-arm chair from Bardith. Clarence House chintz, damask and horsehair. Schumacher draperies with Scalamandré tassel trim. Crystal lamp, foreground, from Marvin Alexander. Rosecore Chinese floral needlepoint rug. The sisal rug is from Patterson, Flynn, Martin & Manges. Striped pillows and silk cord trim on club chair cushions, Brunswick & Fils.





TOP: "The living room provides intimate seating areas for conversation and music," says Laurance. Mill House Antiques Victorian folding table, center, and English pedestal table, left. Blue-and-white charger, Imari bowl and tray-top table, right foreground, from Christie's. Tiffany's crystal vase. Two-tier stand, William Doyle. ABOVE: "The winter dining room is solid and warm," says Laurance. A chandelier hangs over a George II table from Mill House Antiques. Fabric on French doors, Schumacher. Wallcovering from Clarence House. Bardith plates and English tureens. Tiffany's silver flatware. Door hardware by Baldwin.

It is the quiet side of life that strikes one first. "The automatic gate floats open, and a peace comes over me," says Laurance. "There's a security in the gravel courtyard. We have the rolling green grass, the pond, the swans." And, of course, the clean lines of the gracious white house that Robert Starr designed circa 1760—testimony to the Colonial grandeur that proliferated in rural pockets in this part of Litchfield County.

The surprises do not decline once one goes inside. The living room is a luminous pale yellow that makes a warm and graceful backdrop for its Chippendale and Victorian mahogany furniture. When Laurance acquired the house, those yellow walls were off-white. "But even then it seemed the house was dark, so I introduced colors that would bring the sunlight in," he says. It is now a room that could warm up the grayest day, as could the solarium, with its woven raffia on Billy Baldwin chairs and its large, Mediterranean-toned terra-cotta floor tiles.

The winter dining room, however, is something altogether different. Laurance formed it by subdividing a larger space; the other part is now a small library. In these two chambers he wanted enclosure and intimacy. And so

he made the dining room walls an unexpectedly deep and inky blue black: "Every day the painter came, it got darker." That color is maintained both on the barn siding he had cut down to chair-rail height and on the striped wallcovering above.

A vast kitchen features a banquet-size but informal table, and the space is replete with every implement from a professional salamander to an antique English baker's cabinet. Upstairs there is one airy guest bedroom after another, with antique Marseilles bedcovers, linen Roman shades and pale English wallcoverings. Out back is a large swimming pool of such modest and simple design, bordered only by a band of granite, that it blends in perfectly with the surrounding countryside. "I don't like to draw attention to something like a pool," says Laurance. "I hate it when certain objects say, 'Here I am. Look at me.'"

For all the grandeur, it is modesty and an unpretentious approach that have the upper hand. Indeed, what is today called The Pond bore, for over a century, the name Tranquil House, and what David Laurance has created remains true to that idea: a formal residence for an informal life, a setting as salubrious for people as for swans. □

RIGHT: In a guest bedroom is a circa 1825 marriage bed brightly painted with birds, flowers, swags and tassels, which is paired with a colorful chintz bedcover. Resting on an 18th-century gateleg table is a 19th-century bronze Commedia dell'Arte lamp.

"This house is about comfort—books everywhere, fireplaces in every room." OPPOSITE: Of another guest bedroom, Laurance says, "It's multipurpose. I wanted it to be used by children and adults alike." Framed antique map is of Paris. Sheer bed hangings by Scalmandré. Pair of iron beds are from Pierre Deux.

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