

Power House

A power couple create a perfect place for family



BY DUO DICKINSON

PHOTOGRAPHS: ANTHONY DeCARLO

It is said that an attorney who represents himself in a court of law “has a fool for a client.” However, for designers in almost any discipline — whether architect, interior, landscape or fine arts — the end user often designs for him/herself.

So when Roz Cama and Ron Mazzacane decided to build a house together some ten years ago, the potential downsides were evident. Both Cama and Mazzacane are forces in their respective professions. Onetime pharmacist Mazzacane works at Coldwell Banker Coast & Country in Guilford, where he is one of the area’s most prominent and successful residential real-estate agents. Cama has helmed her own award-winning interior design firm, CAMA Inc. in New Haven, for decades. So when it came time to create their own nest, there was a substantial knowledge base from which to draw.

Their initial desire to build a home sprang from the availability of an extraordinary piece of property — the last parcel sold from an estate known as Oakledge, created in 1897 by the Wilcox family, which in turn over time intermarried with the Pignatelli family.

This Madison property is south of the Boston Post Road, just north of the Madison Beach Club. The connection between Mazzacane and Cama and the property’s owner, Marielena Pignatelli, began in 1995 when the former’s passion for sailing Hobie catamarans caught the eye of Pignatelli. Following a bit of friendly negotiation, this last buildable lot of the much larger original Oakledge was set aside for a new interpretation of a family home.

As Cama recalls: “First, of-course, as an interior designer, I programmed the scope of the house from its inside out to meet our personal needs. We have a close family who likes to gather at our house. We like our quiet moments alone and wanted sweeping, long views of nature.”

What resulted was a house that is intricately intertwined internally without any sense of fussiness or complexity. The home has a natural sense of openness and flow that happens only when a confident hand knows how to make the visual



Ron Mazzacane and Roz Cama surrounded by their home. Two people steeped in the world of buildings make their own space in Madison

background “noise” disappear, while at the same time provide enough detail, finish and surprise that this open interior never ceases to move the visitor through it.

The exterior design of the house could be described as Shingle style and its soft lines, expressive trim and natural materials make it a new house whose evident age is nevertheless quite ambiguous. “My favorite compliment is when someone walks in and asks when did we renovate the house,” Cama says.

Because of Cama’s and Mazzacane’s familiarity with construction and related fields, they were able to assemble a list of subcontractors with whom the couple would work directly. Having assumed the role of designer and general contractor, Cama sallied forth into a multi-year collaboration that yielded terrific results.

Design began in 2001 and the house was completed two years later. But the house has been continually “tweaked” by Cama ever since then, so the structure retains a fresh feel despite being occupied for nearly a decade. This hands-on process created a place for the couple that clearly “beat the market” in terms of value.

Cama and Mazzacane were savvy enough to hire John Harrington as a construction manager, but Russell Lanziero of Lanziero Restorations in Old Saybrook implemented Cama’s extraordinary interior designs and detailing with the highest level of artistry. Lanziero became the real-life equivalent of Murphy Brown’s Eldin the painter who “showed up every day for the first three years of occupancy to detail a dream come true,” Cama recalls. “He still calls when I need him to execute yet another incredible detail — or just for dinner.”



The front façade sits back from the street, not far from the shore. This home presents a centered asymmetry that makes the entry both inevitable and delightful.



Master suite. A fully open and flowing ensemble of spaces, the sanctum sanctorum of the couple allows for multiple points of use and focus, including a host of closets and exercise space behind the bed (note the fully present tub, left background).

Gedney Kitchens provided the kitchen and Swansea’s Brian Catabia provided custom-crafted cabinets — all designed by Cama, naturally.

Shavaun Towers of Towers Golde Landscape Architects in New Haven created the landscape design, and Nancy DeBrule of Natureworks in North Branford worked with Cama to create a final planting scheme. Stonemason Dave Barbinek created the sinuous landscape walls that envelope the home, including restoring the original stone wall and pillars that were part of the Oakledge estate.

But this was not just a family home for family and relatives to enjoy; it was actually two homes, as Cama knew that her mother, Angie Cama, would eventually be moving in with them. Thus the interior of the home was planned from the outset to have several truly discrete, but yet effortlessly interconnected, uses.

First of these interconnected ensembles is the open family room/kitchen/dining room that flows effortlessly from the entryway. But tucked into the other side of the front door away from view (unless you know it’s there) is a mahogany-dominated study that Cama designed for Mazzacane to satisfy his one and only request — for an office that he could retreat to even in the midst of many social gatherings.

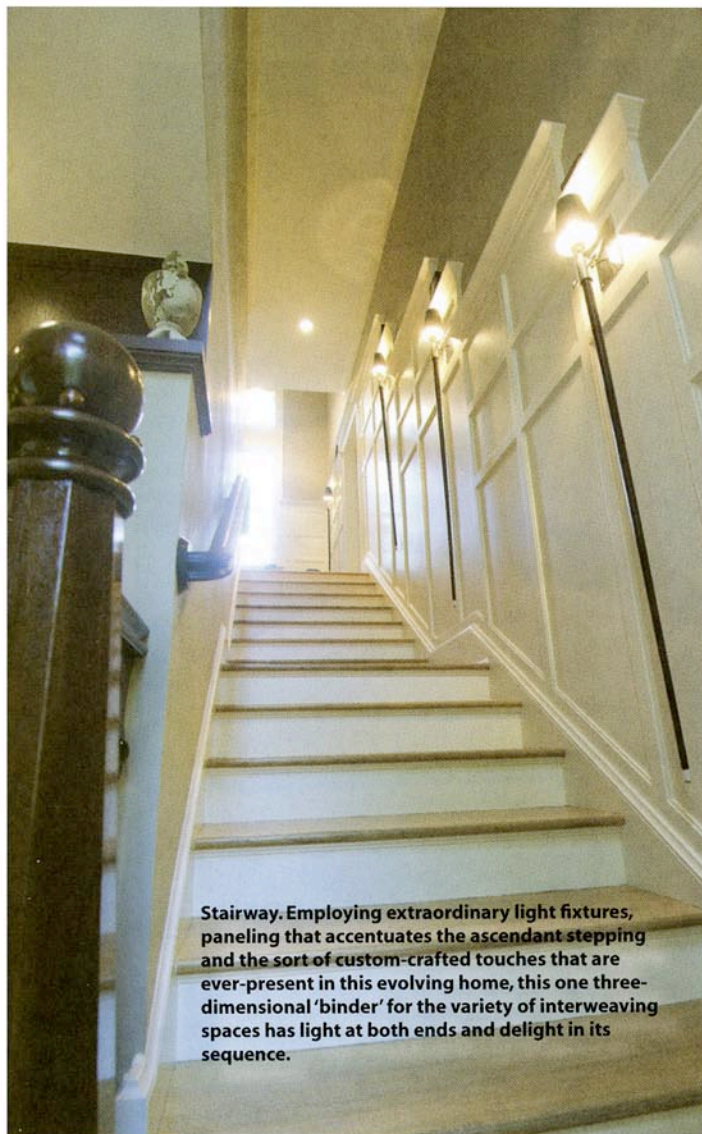
The second self-contained series of spaces is the couple’s master suite, an open, flowing space including a sleeping porch that eventually morphed into a three-season room, as well as a tub that is fully present in the overall space of the sleeping area. Generous closets accommodate every possible need for sartorial organization and a large bed is fully engaged in an open windowpane that looks north to avoid an unwanted, rude awakening in the morning. There’s even



before & AFTER



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Stairway. Employing extraordinary light fixtures, paneling that accentuates the ascendant stepping and the sort of custom-crafted touches that are ever-present in this evolving home, this one three-dimensional 'binder' for the variety of interweaving spaces has light at both ends and delight in its sequence.

an area dedicated to exercising in this multi-functional living accommodation.

The next ensemble of spaces are Cama's mother's "home" that includes her own living, sleeping and bathing spaces, completely separate from the flow of the home.

The combination of private places (Ron's office, the master suite and Mom's *de facto* apartment) are completely out of the flow of the public areas. Connecting these discrete interiors is a dramatic stair and second floor work space, a sequence that lives up to the level of detailing that surrounds it.

Given the quality of detail and careful coincidence with an existing site, the home exudes an affect of quiet repose that is uncommon for a building that has as many different interior functional requirements.

Ultimately the home evidences the best aspects of what Cama calls "a busman's holiday — it was excruciating fun, next to writing a book" (which she, as one might expect, has indeed done). "The hardest job is designing for yourself considering more than every detail

and resource and being sure to please your most important client — your family!"

Clearly, for professionals who dedicate their lives to the level of service that both Mazzacane and Cama have accomplished in their extraordinarily successful careers, there are professional accolades aplenty. (Cama just earned the highest award that the American Society of Interior Designers bestows nationally, the "The Designer of Distinction Award," for 2012.) But more importantly, when people mature to the point that they know themselves well enough that they can edit and focus their own desires in built form, the result truly reflects decades of real-world experience.

Cama's and Mazzacane's home is a place of never-ending activity, but it's also an escape for two frenetically paced lives. And that's pretty nice description of any successful home.



Kitchen, living and dining — By varying ceiling heights and co-coordinating wood, trim and appurtenances, a potentially chaotic flow of different spaces feels both coherent and intimate under the careful hand of Cama's experience as one of the nation's premier interior designers.



Bedroom interior: the use of ingenious built-ins allows this bed not only to have a full focus to the outdoors, but also provides access to closets and bath (right).