

# RENEW MODEL INVENT WISE CREATE

Light affects our moods. In our homes good lighting can cheer us, calm us, suffuse us with a sense of well-being. Light is useful, of course, but it can also add drama. The renovation of three rooms in three very different homes in Woodbridge, Old Saybrook and South Glastonbury show how vital both daylight and artificial light are to creating rooms that make people feel good.

These renovations—a new living-room ceiling in a classic midcentury Modern, a kitchen addition in a transformed 1960s Cape and a crafty remodel of an awkward 1980s bathroom—are dissimilar in style. But they all glow.

Wood also plays a role in each of these renovations. Cypress, black walnut and exotic bosse are contrasted with stone, glass and unusual materials like wool felt and linen-pressed acrylic. And, in perhaps a sign of more level-headed times, each homeowner chose to reuse materials, fixtures and appliances.

Let there be light.

## A LIGHT-FILLED MODERN IS ILLUMINATED

When she bought a midcentury home (shown at right) designed by Modernist architect King-Lui Wu, Lauren Cohn wanted to change as little as possible. The first time she walked through the

## CONNECTICUT HOME



VICTORIA SAMBINARIS

CREATIVE LIGHTING AND THE INCORPORATION OF EXOTIC MATERIALS WERE KEY TO THESE THREE VERY DIFFERENT REMODELING PROJECTS. WHAT'S MORE, THE HOMEOWNERS IN EACH CASE CHOSE TO RETAIN—I.E., RECYCLE—ORIGINAL MATERIALS, FIXTURES AND APPLIANCES.

BY ELIZABETH KEYSER

living-room door, she understood Wu's reputation as a master in the use of daylight—rays of golden autumn light streamed through the glass walls and out to the open courtyard the house is built around. But artificial lighting in the mid-1950s wasn't beautiful. Fluorescent tubes were visible between the ceiling's cypress slats. Lights flickered on, buzzed and gave off a sickly glow.

Wu's 1955 "Dupont House" was built in Woodbridge as a weekend home for Benjamin Dupont and his wife, who never lived there. Luckily, the next owners did live there, for almost 50 years in fact, and changed nothing. Cohn had found an unadulterated gem. An aficionado of modern design who likes everything "spare and clean," she wanted to keep the authentic details.

In the living room, the Pennsylvania bluestone floors, which had yellowed under layers of sealant, needed simply to be thoroughly cleaned and properly resealed. The symmetrical set of doors—double solid wooden doors aligned with matching doors that open to the courtyard—showed the wear of 50 years. That didn't bother Cohn; she left them alone.

But the ceiling, whose cypress slats had warped and twisted over the years, would have to go. The key for architect Dean Sakamoto of Dean Sakamoto Architects in New Haven was to design a ceiling that would respect Wu, the room's connection to nature and its Modern features. The most dominant feature is the fireplace, a weaving of blond firebricks designed by Wu's Yale colleague Josef Albers, the color theorist known for his "Homage to a Square" paintings on color interaction and chairman of the Department of Design at the Yale School of Art in the 1950s. Wu himself, who from 1945 to 1988 taught many of today's foremost architects at Yale's School of Architecture, was known for his "Daylight and Architecture" course.

Cohn made two requests of her architect. She wanted to soften this room of glass, stone and brick. And she wanted to reuse the cypress slats. Sakamoto's solution was to rework the salvageable parts into a grid of squares on the ceiling. He created a line of light on an axis with the fireplace by placing opal glass panels over 21st-century fluorescent lights. He flanked the lighted panels with soft squares of natural off-white wool felt (which also help with soundproofing). Contractor Jeff Carter of Westmount Group in West Haven built the ceiling. "He's really an artist," Cohn says of Carter.

Getting just the right amount of light beneath the glass panels—light that would bathe the space—took a fair amount of experimentation, Sakamoto says. Today, the light "doesn't dominate the room," he explains. "It lets the fireplace come forth." Recessed halogen lights set into the felt squares illuminate the fireplace's unique texture. All the lights are on dimmers. Cohn likes the way the glass panels feel like skylights. "I loved the other ceiling, but the lighting is better now," she says.

Looking around the room, Cohn points to the chipped veneer at the top of the door between the living room and dining room.

"Everything is not perfect and it's not going to be," she says. "The most important thing is that the house makes you feel good."

## THE LIGHTING

Architect Sakamoto created a line of light using opal glass panels to cover fluorescent lighting. To soften the hard surfaces, he flanked the glass with squares of wool felt. Halogen lights are set into the squares.

## THE CEILING

A grid of 30-inch squares is defined by cypress slats reclaimed from the original ceiling designed by King-Lui Wu in 1955.



The original ceiling was made of cypress slats, which covered fluorescent lights. In the 50-plus years since the house was built, the slats had warped and twisted, and the lights buzzed and cast a harsh glow.

## THE FIREPLACE

A fireplace of blond firebricks, designed by Josef Albers, a colleague of King-Lui Wu's at Yale, dominates the room. Sakamoto's new ceiling does not upstage the fireplace, but casts light on its unique textured surface.

## THE FLOOR TILE

The floors throughout the house are of Pennsylvania bluestone. They needed only a cleaning and resealing.



