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Season of Change



CHURCH SERVICE

An ailing chapel is transformed into a stylish guesthouse that honors its roots

BY ANN LOYND BURTON | PHOTOGRAPHS BY JANE BEILES



Welcoming Space

In the living room, red chairs from Design Within Reach are paired with a vintage sofa in Christopher Farr Cloth fabric. The pastel artwork is by Christian Peltenburg-Brechneff. The wall sconces and floor lamps are from Vaughan. See Resources.

Sublime Style

(THIS PAGE) An Elizabeth Eakins rug anchors the living space, where DeStefano & Chamberlain created a new timber frame structure for the ceiling, and general contractor Renaissance Partners added the stone veneer wall. See [Resources](#).



Church Supper

In the kitchen (TOP), Hayes finished custom cabinetry in Farrow & Ball's Parma Gray; Hans Wegner Wishbone chairs are through Design Within Reach; and the La Cornue stove is from Albano Appliance. Exterior stone walls and windows (CENTER) were preserved and restored. In the powder room (BOTTOM), Renaissance Partners inlaid "1911" with hexagonal tile. See [Resources](#).

W

hen Ainsley and Brendan Hayes moved to New Canaan from Manhattan in 2008, the couple scoured the area for an old house with a barn. They found the perfect fit in a 1920s farmhouse, and, at the time, thought little of the unused church next door. But as the couple reinvented their historic home, it became clear the neighboring structure wasn't getting the same TLC.

"We're both preservationists; we love these old buildings," offers Hayes, principal of her eponymous interior design firm, Ainsley Design. Ponus Ridge Chapel was built as a neighborhood chapel in 1911 for a burgeoning farming community, and in the 1950s, it was reimagined as a community center. By the 1960s, the building fell into disuse, and over time, the wood on the windows and floors deteriorated, leading to structural decay.

Though the fieldstone walls remained intact, the building was boarded up when the Hayes's moved to the neighborhood, and they soon learned they were the only ones who could restore the property. "There's no town water and sewer to tie into, and the neighbor to the north has wetlands," the designer explains. "We have two flat acres, a big field—we were essentially the only people who could provide the building with the necessary utilities."

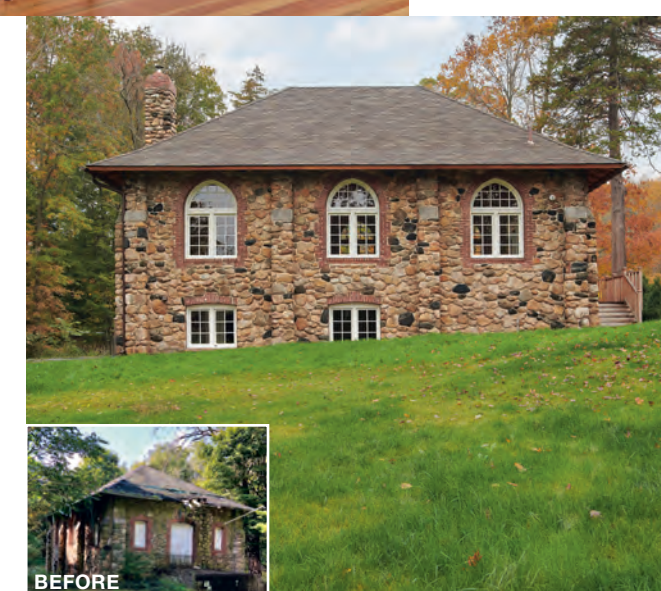
Eventually, the couple acquired the property, and in 2017, set out to bring it back to life as a stylish guest house. Ainsley

Design enlisted the help of New Canaan builder Renaissance Partners to rebuild the structure from the inside out. Together, they replaced the failing roof with a new timber frame (while maintaining the hipped roofline), restored original windows, added radiant-heated floors, and installed new bathrooms and a kitchen complete with custom cabinetry to mimic original details.

Most importantly, the original fieldstone facade remains. Essentially, they set out to build a new house within the existing stone walls, explains Renaissance Partners Principal Ted Sihpol. "We literally took it one step at a time and assessed the situation as we went along," he says. "It was incredibly important for the Hayes's to maintain the aesthetics of the structure. And we needed the space to be, at a minimum, up to today's code, but also super comfortable and able to last another 200 years."

Unable to save the roof, the team tapped Jim DeStefano (of Fairfield's DeStefano & Chamberlain) to design the roof structure, which was delivered paneled and pre-cut on a flatbed. "The ceiling stands today as it came off the truck," he explains. The downstairs garden level (where you'll find a mudroom, two bedrooms, two bathrooms and a den) posed a height challenge, so Sihpol added all of the HVAC ductwork under the slab and radiant heating below the concrete floors.

With the structural challenges addressed, Sihpol added details to pay homage to the





Divine Renovation

(THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT) White shiplap covers the garden level ceilings. The den features a sofa in Elizabeth Eakins fabric, a vintage Angel Pazmino chair and Hooley Mountain artwork. The bathroom has a Bertch vanity and RH fittings, plus tiles from Stamford Marble. See Resources.

original chapel, like adding “1911” into the bathroom’s hexagonal tile design. For the interiors, Hayes took inspiration from the chapel’s important years, choosing furniture grounded in the Midcentury Modern movement that made New Canaan famous (the Philip Johnson Glass House is located just up the street).

It was also a unique opportunity for the designer to flex her personal style, like with the geometric Christopher Farr Cloth fabric on the sofa and bright red wishbone chairs in the living room. “I’m not one to convince my clients to do anything,” she notes. “People

would see that sofa fabric and say, ‘I love it, but it’s too bold.’”

In the kitchen, Hayes saved an original sink from the chapel and then commissioned custom cabinetry to emulate the front door design. A stone veneer wall in the living room references the exterior, which features stone sourced from local farms.

“This building is a symbol of how New Canaan used to be,” Hayes says. “There are neighborhood churches all over New England, and when they’re gone, they’re gone forever. It means a lot to us to be able to keep it, with those four original exterior walls.”

Heavenly Haven
(THIS PAGE) Lee Jofa wallpaper, Matouk bedding, and a vintage turquoise ceiling light create a serene vibe in the bedroom. See Resources.



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