HOME AWAY

Embracing the American barn tradition in Westport, Connecticut, makes room for Moroccan-inspired magic, and an easy escape.

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Architecture: Mark Finlay, Mark P. Finlay Architects **Home Builder:** Jeff Andrews, Auburn Landing, Inc.
Landscape Architecture: Susie Aldrich, Surrey Style Designs LLC

Humble and timeless, barns are the apple pie of American buildings—and an architectural form long admired by the owners of this Westport, Connecticut, retreat. "We'd always talked about building a barn one day," recalls the wife. But it wasn't until an adjacent listing became available that their "one day" dream began to take shape.

Having lived in the idyllic coastal town for nearly 30 years, the couple had witnessed a trend of "tear down, build back big" enough times to know that they "didn't want that to happen next door," she reflects. When the neighbors put their property on the market, they purchased it straight away. "We sat on plans for a while, then one day said, 'Now, how about that barn?'"

Next, they turned to their longtime collaborator, architect Mark Finlay, who, with general contractor Jeff Andrews, erected a destination structure that sits in pleasing conversation with their historic primary home while speaking a modern language all its own. "The initial concepts were so awesome that it gave us the confidence that this could really work," the wife shares. "My style is funky and Mark likes to think outside of the box, so working together is always creative and fun."

In this case, thinking outside of the box resulted in a soaring, two-story main volume which contains a kitchen, dining and living areas and an upstairs bedroom loft flanked by an expansive sun-room wing. Together, the assemblage makes for a dwelling equal parts everyday getaway, private guest house and entertaining paradise. "I always plan for a space to be as versatile as possible," shares the architect. "This is a one-of-a-kind structure that you can puff up or puff down depending on its use," he continues, noting that it can easily accommodate 60-person gatherings.

Linked by a sit-down, pass-through bar, the garden room is an exceptionally festive setting for entertaining. First conceived as a covered porch, it was ultimately glassed in with oversize, thin-framed windows so as to be usable year-round. "It has all the comforts of an interior space while feeling immersed in the outdoors," Finlay shares. "The landscape serves as the walls."

And the landscape is an experience unto itself, executed in concert with landscape designer Susie Aldrich. "We used hedges, paths and evergreen shrubs, as well as an entrance fountain courtyard, to create unique spaces that flow together and invite you to explore," she says. Aldrich's team included installer Isai Guzman and crew, who handled all site work, even crafting "a charming swing on an old stately tree" to draw the eye from the courtyard to the park-like lawn beyond. "The views through the barn windows are just spectacular," Aldrich notes.

Outdoors and in, the project is an exercise in balance. Creating a harmonious sense of proportion (hefty beams lightened by amply sized windows), juxtaposing textures (wood ceilings countered by creamy plaster walls), and spatial gestures like lowering the ceiling height in the second-floor seating area and bedroom all work to give the contemporary dwelling an inviting intimacy. "The tall ceilings and expansiveness are the polar opposite of our old Colonial," says the wife, noting that the barn still remains "comfortable, cozy and a joy to be in."

It was equally a joy for the wife, a seasoned interior designer herself, to decorate alongside Finlay's studio. "Because this is not our primary home, I got to play with crazy colors and let our travels impact many decisions," she notes. One trip to Morocco while construction was underway proved particularly fruitful. After scouring markets from the Atlas Mountains to Marrakech, she returned with inlaid wood furniture, colorful art, rugs and fabrics—and additional inspiration for tile and millwork selections to be recreated stateside by Finlay's arsenal of tradespeople. "Mark is laid-back, with a great sense of humor. I'd come up with some wild idea, and he'd say, 'Okay, here she goes again!' but would make it work," says the wife, pointing to design surprises like the six-lantern rigging in the great room, which was inspired by a fixture she spied in Malibu's Casa del Mar hotel.

Amid such vibrant whimsy, a material palette of bleached white oak, Connecticut fieldstone and hand-forged iron provides a clean, versatile canvas. Nostalgic features including sliding barn doors, outward-opening windows and a cupola at the pinnacle of the articulated ceiling pay further homage to the trusty farmyard form, infused here with fresh verve and Moorish flare. In all, the dwelling reimagines barns as places of indulgence to be shared with many or savored in seclusion. Notes Finlay, "My clients love being able to grab a cup of coffee, walk a few steps from their house, and feel like they're on vacation."

Artisanal metalwork boldly accents the oak-clad great room, from the hand-forged iron balustrades and beam strapwork by Artisans of the Anvil to painted metal casement windows. The double-story hearth is composed of Connecticut fieldstone from O&G Mason.

Above: A Joe Tilson artwork crowns a limestone mantel from Formations in the living area. Rattan chairs from Casa Gusto and an armchair covered in a Lewis & Wood textile gather around an antique coffee table from AOI Home.

Opposite: Six Vaughan Designs lanterns on custom rigging define the dining space composed of a table by The Bright Group and Casamidy seats. The RH end chairs are slipcovered in a Schumacher fabric. The rug is from Chateau des Souks.

Palecek stools saddle up to the bar in the sun-drenched garden room. C&D Upholstery created the bespoke sofa adorned with a Classic Cloth textile and upholstered the Minton-Spidell armchair in a Namay Samay fabric.

Above: A series of Joe Tilson works add bold color above a Spanish console from Antique Row flanked by a chair from The Antique and Artisan Gallery. Replete with a zinc top, the adjacent bar is party-ready.

Opposite: Floor-to-ceiling windows frame views of a water feature just beyond the garden room. The inlaid chairs and coffee table were purchased on a trip to Morocco. A Serena & Lily rug grounds the space atop porcelain-tiled floors. The sculptural cards table is from Kathy Kuo Home.

Right: A Moroccan zellige tile from Country Floors on the walls and flooring of Tabarka Studio tile make for an exciting material mix in the powder bath. Above the bespoke brass console sink is a mirror from Mecox Gardens framed by Porta Romana sconces.

Opposite: A nook in the second-story seating loft procures a cozy conversation spot. Textiles include a Vaughan Designs print for the Roman shade and a Calvin Fabrics cloth for the window seat cushion. The chairs and table are from The Antique and Artisan Gallery.

Above: The green tones of the guest bath's wallpaper from C&C Milano are echoed in the mirror and vanity millwork by Mosaic House. The vessel sink is from Pittet Architecturals, the sconce from Paul Ferrante and the art is by Annie O'Brien Gonzales.

Opposite: An Oly Studio bed topped with a Les Indiennes quilt and swag of Chelsea Textiles fabric is the star of the dreamy bedroom. An RH armoire provides storage. The Serena & Lily rug and Fermoie wallcovering bring textural layers.