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Echoes of Tuscany

CHANNELING THE ITALIAN COUNTRYSIDE IN NEW ENGLAND

Architecture by Steven F. Haas/Interior Design by LST/Landscape Design by Renny Reynolds
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An architect tends to be very pleased when a satisfied client returns to ask for another house—one that is just as well designed but different from the one before, and bigger. Steven F. Haas has just such clients—a retired investment executive and a psychiatrist, both of whom now work in the nonprofit field. Their house in Litchfield County, Connecticut, is the latest of four homes to have been so commissioned. “The couple, and particularly the wife, wanted it to reflect their passion for Tuscany—its landscape and architecture,” Haas explains. He and landscape designer Renny Reynolds made choices to stir her memories of the walls, terraces, stairs, sculptures, plantings and water courses of the Tuscan villas of the Renaissance.

The architect’s decisive gesture was to cleave the landscape with an unadorned ochre-colored stucco wall similar to those by which Tuscan villas declare their





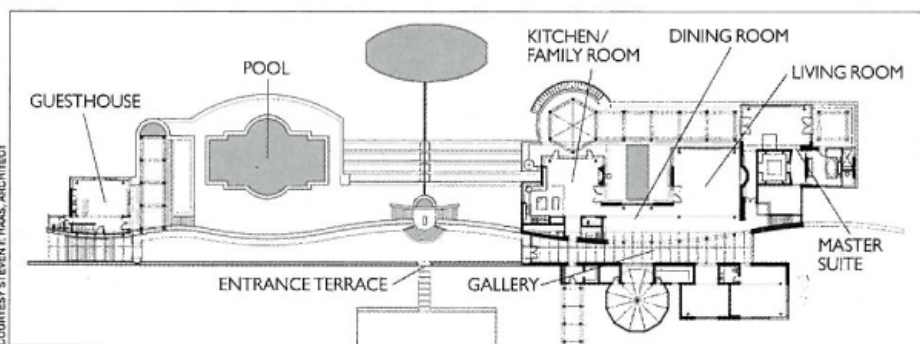
The decisive gesture was to cleave the landscape with an ocher-colored wall.

boundaries. The focus of the wall is a wide gateless portal, open to the sky, that leads to a long, north-facing undulating terrace connecting the main house to the guesthouse 200 feet away. Once one is inside the compound, neither house immediately commands attention, because the magnificent view of a distant lake surrounded by farmland takes over. On the 14-acre site itself, a broad meadow slopes gently downhill to an area dense with trees.

The terrace directly overlooks a formal garden a story below. The garden, bordered on one side by a stone retaining wall, is on axis with the portal above it. Set in this wall are a cabana and, where the wall accommodates a stair, a carved head of Bacchus. Water spills from his mouth into a concrete basin and then overflows into a rill that bisects a gently stepped lawn to arrive at a reflecting pond in the meadow. This homage to Tuscany completes



LEFT: The family room adjoins the kitchen and features a 19th-century cherry low table, from Suzanne Golden, a Doris Leslie Blau 19th-century Ushak and a pedestal dining table from Tucker Robbins. Chef Jean-Georges Vongerichten was consulted on the kitchen's titanium-clad design. Wolf oven. **ABOVE:** Looking onto a courtyard with a reflecting pool is the limestone-floored dining room. **BELOW:** The plan shows the siting of the main house in relation to the guesthouse as well as the walled terrace that architecturally unifies the two structures on the 14-acre property.



itself at the entrance façade of the main house and, opposite it, at the poolside terrace of the guesthouse.

The plan of the main house is organized around the gallery, which functions as its spine. On the south side it interconnects the private family entrance from the garage, various secondary spaces, a circular steel-framed glass-roofed conservatory that emerges into an outdoor garden of its own, a soundproof audiovisual room

and a corner office for joint use by the couple. On its north side, the gallery leads first into a large kitchen/family room dominated by a big fireplace. This space is defined along the gallery by a stone wall. Where the formal dining space begins, the gallery's perimeter opens into a row of widely spaced steel columns, sheathed in a cylindrical veneer of mahogany.

Seated diners have two beautiful views. The space is on axis with the conservatory

in one direction and faces its own small courtyard and pool in the other. It also flows, without interruption, into the grand living room, which has a ceiling height of 22 feet. The master suite is located at the end of the gallery, at the northeast corner of the house. The bedroom itself interrupts a pergola-framed terrace that begins with a gazebo at the kitchen end and continues along the north façade of the house to the bedroom. Beyond the bedroom, the



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pergola reappears as a very private outdoor space near the edge of a forest.

Interior designers Lisa Tillinghast and Robert Nassar, of LST Design, planned and furnished all the principal rooms for multipurpose use. In the master suite, the bed shares ample space with other furniture groupings. The informal kitchen/family room and the grand living room have large low tables and plenty of chairs and sofas arranged for welcoming con-

versation. The office opens to a Japanese-like garden, designed by Reynolds, with a stairway of stone slabs leading to a vegetable garden.

Tillinghast and Nassar designed the beautifully crafted millwork and chose all the interior materials, finishes and colors. They also selected the exterior colors of the structure and its stucco façades. Furnishing the house was demanding, as Tillinghast recalls: “How wonderfully



LEFT: The master suite. Bedcovering fabric, J. Robert Scott. Sham silk, Jim Thompson. Sofa fabric, Great Plains. Drapery sheer, Larsen. Bergamo fabric on chairs at right. **ABOVE:** The western view of the guesthouse, where crimson-painted stucco wall surfaces contrast with large mahogany-framed windows and where the Tuscan-inspired terrace wall culminates. **BELOW:** In front of the undulating Pennsylvania fieldstone wall and below the guesthouse and a series of dining and lounging terraces are a lawn and a swimming pool.



intense a challenge it was to discover odd and rare pieces from what seemed to be every country on earth and reinvent them for our purposes. We ordered many items from a Web site that covers flea markets in London and Paris." For Nassar, the space for live music in the living room is typical of their accomplishments throughout. "We found the music stand and stool, the collection of African flutes, the antique Indian beaded cloth and the antique rug

to go with them. We then arranged all of these items together with the client's existing grand piano." In each room they gathered old and new, with or without provenance, added custom-designed items where necessary and did not seek a particular ethnic or decorative style. "Our intention," Nassar explains, "was to create a warm, comfortable, romantic style that's both luscious and refined."

The clients believe their new house to

be all of that and more. "We're a big family," says the wife, "with grown children and many grandchildren. The youngest is a year old, and the oldest is 21. For two weekends a year we have what we call a cousins weekend, when they come without their parents, and the house is perfect for that kind of thing. It's also a good place to be when we have 32 people for dinner or when we're by ourselves." It can't be any better in Tuscany. □