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JANUARY 2004

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HOLDING SWAY

WITH THE BLESSING OF ENLIGHTENED CLIENTS, ARCHITECT
DAVID SCOTT PARKER RESTORES A SAGGING 18TH-CENTURY
HAMPTONS COTTAGE WHILE LETTING THE HOUSE SHOW ITS AGE

PHOTOGRAPHED BY MICHAEL MUNDY STYLED BY PETER FRANK WRITTEN BY PAUL O'DONNELL



Architect David Scott Parker exposed the house's plank walls, opposite page, which retain traces of their original milk paint. ■ Owner Nathalie Sann plays with nephews Maxence and Virgile in the living room. Chandelier 34 in pewter is from Gates Moore Lighting, Norwalk, CT.



THE SINGULAR LOOK OF HAND-MADE SHINGLES

➤ **SIDING** The cedar shingles are new but to preserve the house's character, architect David Scott Parker copied the irregular shapes of the originals.

➤ **FIRM BASE** Built on a bed of fieldstone, the 1800 house sagged in the middle. After securing the frame, Parker set steel beams under it, then poured a concrete foundation.

➤ **BRICKWORK** Parker disassembled the severely leaning chimney prior to the foundation work, and rebuilt it later, tilt and all.

➤ **WINDOWS** Parker carefully preserved the 19th-century glass and frames. The windows were numbered and removed, their woodwork restored with epoxy, and then put back in place.

TRADE SECRETS

Inside and out, the house is a model of simple, traditional gentility.

FIREPLACE The restored Colonial cooking hearth and bake oven, opposite page, were fitted with a custom-made mantel by John Hummel, East Hampton, NY.

Sann found the andirons at a French flea market.

LIGHTING Table lamp by Circa 1820,

Vassalborough, ME.

FABRIC The wind chair is covered in a cotton/poly blend from the Silk Trading Co.

When the drooping, 200-year-old shingled house in the eastern Long Island village of Sagaponack was sold three years ago, locals fully expected that the dilapidated place would soon be, as the phrase goes, history. These days, in the area known as the Hamptons, even "renovation" can mean a cycle of subtraction and addition so radical that the owner gets a virtually new house while tiptoeing around building rules. But the buyers of the Sagg House, as it is called, were different. Nathalie Sann and her husband proposed not only saving the house but also preserving its well-earned signs of age.

In the end, the Sanns did less to change the house's face than did its nineteenth-century occupants, who, after all, had upgraded the street-side fenestration by replacing the 12-over-12 pane windows with stylish 6-over-6s. The Sanns could accept that antebellum alteration, but as for the rest of the house, "when we found an original detail, we kept it," says Nathalie Sann.

Decrepit as it looked, the Sagg House, in truth, was never terribly well constructed. In the late eighteenth century, farmers, lacking timber on Long Island's swampy South Fork, had house

frames shipped in from Boston—making the Sagg House, like several of its neighbors, a sort of Colonial-era prefab. "Nothing was level, nothing was plumb," says architect David Scott Parker. "That's partly what attracted the Sanns to the house," he adds, with admiration for his clients' respect for "the poetic evidence of decay."

Their having a sense of the house as a record, not only of past days but also of the ravages of time, had recommended the Sanns to the previous owner, Henry Golightly. He was painfully aware of the house's quickening decline. When he saw the Sanns' commitment to the place, he sold it and everything inside, including a Shaker quilt chest that stands on the second-floor gallery and a nineteenth-century salesman's sample case that now serves as a coffee table. He even threw in his 1969 Cadillac. Crucially, Golightly also left notes on the house's history, which would complement Parker's scan of permit filings and historical documents. Says Nathalie Sann: "The house was like a small museum."

Built on a foundation of loose fieldstone, the Sagg House's frame was sinking into the sandy



LESS WAS MORE. REMOVING A LOW CEILING
EXPOSED BEAUTIFUL HAND-HEWED BEAMS;
DETACHING A MODERN FIREPLACE SURROUND
REVEALED THE ORIGINAL COOKING HEARTH



THE KITCHEN WAS THE ONLY ROOM ADDED TO THE HOUSE, BUT THE SPIRIT IS KEPT INTACT BY THE USE OF SALVAGED ANTIQUE LUMBER AND PERIOD FURNISHINGS

TRADE SECRETS

Modernity treads lightly in the kitchen. The table is set with glassware from ABC Carpet & Home, NYC. The cabinetry is by John Hummel. The 17th-century kneeler chairs, are from Comoglio, Paris.

soil, with the main weight of the structure unsupported by rotting floor stills. Parker removed the moldering cedar shingles and put on a plywood cladding to help hold the house together. The severely leaning chimney was disassembled, lest it crumble when the house shifted. Only then did Parker bring in heavy equipment to drive steel I beams under the house and pour a foundation.

The next step was to refurbish the exterior's unmatched, flowing-glass windows. They were numbered, removed, restored with epoxy consolidator and put back. Parker replicated the irregular sizes of the old shingles in the new ones. Modern ductwork had to be hidden where it was never imagined. Bad floorboards were replaced, while the plank walls were washed to reveal the original milk paint.

Turning to the interior, the architect suggested that his clients deviate a bit from the original layout. Removing the low living room ceiling and exposing the beams, Parker created a great room that approximated a "keeping room," where a Colonial

family gathered to cook and stay warm. Nathalie Sann points out the huge cooking hearth and bake oven, which were disguised as a conventional fireplace in a twentieth-century update.

Other major changes took place largely out of sight. Golightly's notes revealed that the library at one rear corner had once been a shed—gussied up with bay windows from a schoolhouse—that was attached to the Sagg House in the 1940s. It was left nearly unchanged, down to the paint color that Golightly put on the walls. But the kitchen, a small, dim shed dating from 1858, was taken down altogether, with Nathalie Sann's blessing. She had in mind the commodious kitchens of country houses of her native France, where the host can entertain (and be entertained) while chopping, cooking, and tasting.

Her collaboration with Parker on the kitchen decor blends pastoral French and Early American. All the wood, from the salvaged barn boards on the walls to that used to make the custom cabinets, is local antique lumber. Sann chose the French terra-cotta tile and church kneeler chairs. The antique bakery table is emblematic of the new kitchen's natural fit with the old house. As Parker notes: "Kitchen islands weren't around in eighteen hundred."

The last significant change was to the only part of the house with an unobstructed water view, the third floor, once a dormitory for summering grandchildren. That view today belongs to the master suite, created by pushing out a bright dormer and adding a wall to separated a corner for the master bath. "When we have guests we have a big space to ourselves," says Sann, though she says that she and her husband enjoy moving from bedroom to bedroom in winter. It's a small eccentricity, but appropriate to a house like this, which proves that idiosyncrasy is another of the many charms of architecture. □