

Colonial Homes

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Comfort in a Formal Setting

Many envision a weekend house as the ultimate in informality: a place in the country, maybe without all the comforts of home; a sometimes disheveled haven reached after a journey that always seems too long. Meet a Manhattan couple, who with the help of New York designer Matthew Patrick Smyth, have rewritten that scenario more to their liking: Their weekend home is an elegant brick house in Tuxedo Park, New York, furnished with an air of formality as befits its setting, yet also achieving comfort and gracious ease with its soft colors and furnishings chosen for beauty and livability. The atmosphere is rural and wooded; a lake stretches out at the foot of their property; deer roam nearby—yet they are but an hour's drive from their East Side residence.

"We were dedicated New Yorkers," says the husband. "One Saturday a few years ago, when we were leaving a matinee at the Metropolitan Opera, my wife said, 'What we need is a place near enough so we could go home now, and then drive there for the rest of the weekend.' " He adds: "We did not want a place that would take us prisoner, requiring a three- or four-hour trip to get there."

After some research, they concluded that the picturesquely rural countryside they sought was in the Tuxedo Park area, only 40 miles northwest of the city. They came, they saw, and were conquered by its beauty and serenity, by the mountains, lakes, and distinctive old houses.

Their house had been built on four acres bordering Tuxedo Lake in 1934 for Alfred Benziger, a partner in a New York company that published religious material. A local legend goes with it. Benziger had the brick painted a pristine white that gleamed as it caught the sun. But across the lake sat the baronial mansion of one local grande dame who objected to the bright sunlight bouncing off the house and into her eyes. She had what to her seemed a reasonable solution: chip away some paint to a weathered appearance that would not reflect the sun. It was such a small thing to ask, and one would not want to miss her fine par-



*Photography by Erik Kvalsvik
Produced by Susan Leaderman
By Jane Clancy*

ties. The Benzigers complied, and so the house remains today, its weathered, ivy-laden walls growing more beautiful with age.

Tuxedo Park, also a legend, is an incorporated village within the community of Tuxedo, New York. Its name derives from the Indian word "tuxedo," meaning "birds flew away." Its existence was the idea of Pierre Lorillard, an heir of a tobacco industry family, who loved its woods and rural atmosphere. In 1885, he bought several acres surrounding Tuxedo Lake, and with Bruce Price, a noted architect, laid out streets, building lots, and a water system for a planned community. He built a clubhouse and invited friends to build homes to enjoy during the spring



OPPOSITE ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: A brick arcade, embellished with 19th-century statuary, leads to the garden. The brick house was built in 1934. A terrace at the back of the home offers a tranquil view of Tuxedo Lake. **OPPOSITE BELOW:** In the living room, the original fireplace mantel has been finished in faux marble by Eileen Connor of New York. Atop it is an antique Parisian gilt-decorated footed basket. An ornate, circa 1760 Chippendale giltwood mirror hangs above it. The armchairs wear Brunswick & Fils' "Persian Miniature" print. The lacquer coffee table has an oxblood crackle finish with gold decoration, while the round side table, from France, features chinoiserie motifs. The Persian rug is a Laver Kerman. **ABOVE:** Living room draperies are Cowtan & Tout's "Ranelagh" cotton floral print. "Rowen," a Brunswick & Fils satin stripe, covers the Sheraton settee. The coffee table's top is a mid-19th century silver tray. The owners had the mahogany frame made for it. Antique side chairs have caned backs and gilt-trimmed legs. From England, the tripod table with brass trim is a George III piece.

In the secluded wooded haven of Tuxedo Park, New York, a couple's weekend house blends classical architectural elements with soft colors and treasured furnishings for comfortable, elegant interiors.



and fall (many wintered in Palm Beach and summered in Bar Harbor, Maine). Among the residents was Price's daughter, Emily Price Post, who wrote her etiquette books there. And it was in the 1890s at the Autumn Ball at Tuxedo Park that a dashing young dandy appeared in a new-style dinner jacket that looked unlike the traditional formal tailcoat (although he wore it with white tie). It soon became known everywhere as a tuxedo. The enclave prospered until the Depression. After languishing for several years, it became a village in 1953, and, no longer a private club, it was open to all who wanted to live there. The lake is now a reservoir.

Before the couple moved into the house in the summer of 1992, they made several changes to restore the interior. They and Smyth updated the bathrooms and kitchen, tiled the basement, and turned a niche for statuary next to the dining room into a built-in cabinet for china and crystal. A previous owner had stripped and bleached the fireplace mantels, destroying their grains, so the new owners had them painted with faux marble and wood finishes. The dining room ceiling had been dropped and recessed lights were added, and several walls had been mirrored. "It looked like a restaurant," says Matthew Smyth. Much of the woodwork around the arches was gone, but when Smyth removed the mirrors and old wallpaper, "I found the architect's sketches done right on the wall," he notes. "They showed how the original arches were to look, and happily that is how I had already planned the work."

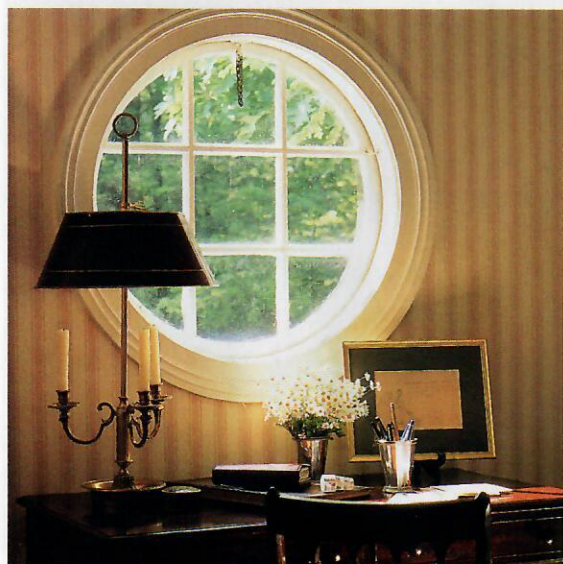
The owners bought all the furnishings, browsing in London's Kensington High Street and King's Road for English antiques, which they highlighted with French pieces found on the Left Bank of Paris. "Nothing was chosen just to fill a certain spot," adds Smyth, "but because they loved each piece. There is no strict use of periods, but a blend that reflects the couple's enjoyment of wood textures, finishes, and inlay. The dining room is a good example, with quite different pieces looking well together." The owners also wished to make a subtle transition between indoor and outdoor spaces, says the designer. "The landscape and views were taken into consideration with a palette of soft, clear colors and several floral-patterned fabrics."

Comfort is never forgotten, and the furniture plan groups together inviting chairs and tables for relaxation and conversation. The elegance never overshadows the comfort of a weekend retreat.





OPPOSITE ABOVE: The original mantelpiece in the sitting room is painted in faux mahogany, also the work of Eileen Connor. It displays a pair of Irish crystal vases dating to about 1870. The Persian Nain rug is antique. **OPPOSITE BELOW:** In the entry hall, the antique marquetry cabinet with marble top is French. Above it is an Art Deco mirror dating to about 1920. Opposite the cabinet is a circa 1780 English George III mahogany side chair. The William IV crystal chandelier was crafted circa 1830. Beyond the arched doorway, in the living room is an English Regency sofa table of Indonesian macassar wood, inlaid with satinwood and dating to about 1810. The sofa is covered in Coutan & Tout's damask "Rochefort." **ABOVE:** Hand-painted Chinese wallpaper panels bring a serene mood to the dining room. The design is "Flower and Bird" from Gracie. A circa 1815 Regency elm sideboard features ebony trimming, and displays a pair of Louis XV gilt-bronze candelabras; above it is a Venetian mirrored crystal wall sconce circa 1850. Brass fittings embellish the English Regency mahogany dining table.



TOP: Rose taffeta and lace cover a dressing table in the master bedroom. A large giltwood mirror and side chair are both French Louis XVI-period designs. The wallpaper is Brunschwig & Fils' "Little Kimble." The balloon window shades are fashioned of "Windsor Rose" chintz by Cowtan & Tout.

ABOVE: A circular window that overlooks the garden lends its Gallic charm to the sitting room adjacent to the master bedroom. The English mahogany two-drawer writing table dates to around 1870. An early 19th-century bouillotte lamp sports a painted tole shade. The wallpaper is Hinson's "Try-on Palace Stripe." **RIGHT:** Green and pink combine with white in a guest bedroom. The early 1800s mahogany inlaid-and-banded chest is English. Above it is a hand-carved, wooden Italian mirror that is based on an 18th-century original. The pink-on-white wallpaper by Hinson is "Martin Stripe." Windows wear draperies and shaped valances of Hinson's floral cotton chintz, "Remsen."



