



ALL THE DRAMA

WITH THEIR REDO OF A FARMHOUSE IN UPSTATE NEW YORK, FASHION VETERANS **MARTIN COOPER** AND **KAREN SUEN-COOPER** CONJURE THE PAST WHILE CREATING AN EVOCATIVE SETTING FOR THEIR LOVE OF ENTERTAINING.

BY CATHERINE HONG PRODUCED BY CHARLES CURKIN STYLED BY SOPHIE STRANGIO PHOTOGRAPHS BY FRANK FRANCES



In the entry hall of Martin Cooper and Karen Suen-Cooper's Federal farmhouse in Columbia County, New York, which they renovated with architect Kate Johns, the 19th-century settee, George III-style table and pendant, Regency chairs, Bokhara rug, and painting were purchased at Stair Galleries. The steel balls are from the Chelsea Gardener in London, and the walls are sheathed in a Farrow & Ball stripe. **OPPOSITE:** The couple picnics on a Roller Rabbit tablecloth in their garden. Their son, Pax, plays on a tree swing.



into a beautiful family home rich with historic detail and unexpected delights.

It was 2005 when the pair first saw the big yellow house on 10 acres. They had already fallen in love with the Hudson River Valley, having been introduced to its community of artists, writers, and other creatives by their friend, the designer Sheila Bridges. They were captivated by the rambling structure, an amalgam of the original 1790s building, a Federalist front section from 1810, an Italianate wing built in 1870, and a 1920s addition. “I liked the push and pull of its different time periods,” Karen says.

For Martin, the house recalled the old-fashioned grandeur of his grandmother’s home in Columbia, South Carolina, where he learned to properly set a table and other foundations of hospitality. His goal for the renovation was to add proportion and symmetry—to re-create in the house the sense of “a storied past.”

Working with local architect and restoration specialist Kate Johns, the couple began the renovation of B’ellow, as they named the house (short for “Big Yellow”), in earnest in 2007, just as they moved to London for Martin’s work as vice president and design director of Burberry. That leap over the pond—landing the pair in the cradle of Georgian and Edwardian architecture—turned out to be a boon. “We haunted the John Soane museum and all the National Trust houses, noting every hinge, rim

is not one of those stories. “We basically found a lot of rot,” says homeowner Martin Cooper, who with his wife, Karen Suen-Cooper, purchased this 1790s Federal-style farmhouse in Old Chatham, New York. “In fact, the more we ripped away, the worse it got.”

Unless you count the unusable remains of a back staircase hidden behind a pantry door, the only surprise the pair discovered was that the house—which turned out to be missing key structural beams and load-bearing walls—was hanging by a thread. Fortunately, the couple, both fashion-industry veterans who recently founded the stationery company the Punctilious Mr. P’s Place Card Co., had more than enough vision to remake the ramshackle shell

ABOVE LEFT: The living room sofas are from RH, Restoration Hardware, the cabinet is Edwardian, the piano is by Steinway, and the side tables are by CB2. The walls are in Dalila by Benjamin Moore, and the photographs (left) are by Martin Cooper. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Locust trees frame a path leading to the home.

OPPOSITE: In the dining room, a Maison Jansen table is set with Coalport china, vintage glassware, and place cards from the couple’s Punctilious Mr. P’s Place Card Co. The chandelier is by Richard Taylor Designs, and the room is painted in Benjamin Moore’s Black and Dragonfly.





lock, and cornice,” Martin says. Karen made regular trips back to New York to oversee the progress, often toting brass doorknobs and handles in her luggage.

But for all their desire for authentic details, the couple had no interest in staid tradition. This is most obvious the moment you step into the spiritual heart of B’ellow, their glossy black-lacquered dining room. “This is a room for time travel,” says Martin with a grin. Inspired by their shared obsession with 19th-century mysticism and astrology, the couple designed a “transportive” space. A closer look around the room reveals zodiac symbols and Roman numerals I through XII hand-painted in gilt (Martin’s own handiwork) above the antiqued-glass mirrors, as well as a cleverly constructed jib door and hidden wall compartments. The use of light and mirrors in Sir John Soane’s Museum was a key inspiration for the theatrical room, but so were Charles Dickens,

ABOVE: The salon’s Regency-style armchairs and cocktail table are from Stair Galleries, the side table is by RH, Restoration Hardware, and the chandelier is from Ida’s Eye. The walls are covered in a Brunswig & Fils wallpaper. **RIGHT:** In the guest bedroom, the bed is dressed in Delfinia linens and the coverlet and throw are from RH, Restoration Hardware. The armchair is by Mitchell Gold + Bob Williams, a 19th-century mirror from Stair Galleries hangs over a CB2 dresser, and the sconces are by Visual Comfort. The walls are painted in Aganthus Green by Benjamin Moore.

Hôtel Costes in Paris, Hogarth frames, and the 1980s New York nightclub Nell’s (where Karen once worked as a hostess). The ceiling, meanwhile, is painted a patinated teal copper in a gesture inspired by Grand Central Terminal.

Unabashedly classical though the house may be, jolts of unexpected modernity keep things lively for the couple and their 10-year-old son, Pax, who all moved to B’ellow full-time in 2019. In the sunny yellow living room, contemporary white sofas and Martin’s large-format color photographs contrast with the 19th-century nudes and plaster plaques of Roman friezes.

Renovating the house has been a labor of love, says Martin. And there are still spaces they’ve barely touched, including where they hope to design a library and a breakfast room. “In Bunny Williams’s book *An Affair with a House*, she talks about the 30-year journey of creating her house,” he says. “According to that timeline, we’re only halfway there.” ■



ABOVE: An RH, Restoration Hardware bed in the main bedroom has Yves Delorme linens and Barclay Butera pillows. The armchair is by Oka, the Georgian chest is from Ashby James Fine Antiques, the curtains are of a silk from the Silk Trading Co., and the walls are painted in Benjamin Moore’s Bisque. **RIGHT:** The main bath’s custom vanity has a counter in Emperor Dark marble, a Kohler sink, and Rohl fittings. The tub is from Clawfoot Supply, the toilet is by Toto, the sconces are by Visual Comfort, and the floor tile is by Ann Sacks. For details, see Resources.

