

Period Homes

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Interiors

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From 2002 to 2003, Wadia Associates, LLC, of New Canaan, CT, renovated an Italianate mansion in Greenwich, CT, for a young family. The stone and brickwork were re-pointed, the tile roof was restored and new traditionally styled double-pane wood windows and paneled doors were installed. Work also included the interior and landscaping. All photos © Jonathan Wallen

Taking the Castle

A major renovation revitalizes a five-story, 15,000-sq.ft. mansion in Connecticut.

PROJECT: RESIDENCE, GREENWICH, CT

ARCHITECT: WADIA ASSOCIATES, LLC, NEW CANAAN, CT;
DINYAR WADIA, PRINCIPAL

GENERAL CONTRACTOR: ACI GENERAL CONTRACTING, INC.,
GREENWICH, CT; LARRY KENDALL, OWNER

While Europe and Japan are known for their castles, the U.S. is not, so one of the last places one expects to find a castle is the coastal city of Greenwich, CT. But in 2001, New Canaan, CT-based Wadia Associates, LLC, was hired by a young family to renovate one there. Though not occupied by a king or lord, the residence is a stately five-story, 15,000-sq.ft. mansion.

The mansion, fittingly referred to as "The Castle," dates from the 1920s and is in the Italianate style, with rustic stonework and brick infill, a tile roof and multiple chimneys. But when Wadia Associates first surveyed the house, it was in very poor condition. "Problems with the exterior included crumbling stone and brick," says Principal Dinyar Wadia. He also describes lumber-yard-quality doors, old abused windows as well as new single-pane windows and cheap replacement hardware. The majority of the rooms were excessively painted and much of the original detailing was lost.

Wadia chose to gut the mansion except for a few elements and most of the third floor, where, due to budgetary constraints, the clients requested some rooms to remain as they were. "There was little to save," he says. "The house hadn't been maintained." And then there was the fact that the architects couldn't find any information on the residence. "We tried to research the house – the architect, construction history, anything – but there was no information out there," says Wadia. He found neither books nor photographs, and wasn't able to learn the name of the original architect.

"We ended up using old books on Italianate houses as our guides," says Wadia. "Also, there are houses in the area similar to the one we were working on. There is another castle nearby that belongs to a client of mine that I am currently doing a house for. One mansion was turned into condominiums for a while before we turned it back into a single-family home. I am told there are two more in Greenwich."

Drawing from these examples, Wadia planned to restore the exterior and design an Italianate interior. The exterior stone and brick, including the six brick chimneys, were re-pointed, and an entirely new roof was



The second-floor addition (left), which houses the master bathroom, replaced a porch. The addition was designed to be a seamless match with the existing house.

installed. "A research architect found the exact old brick," says Wadia. "He tracked down the name of the supplier, a company that was luckily still in operation and still made the same kinds of bricks in the same method." The architect was also in luck when it came to the roofing. "We reused what roofing tile was salvageable and then, to fill in the spaces, matched the original tile," says Wadia. The original manufacturer, Ludowici Roof Tile of New Lexington, OH, supplied the matching tile.

The substandard windows and interior and exterior doors were replaced with traditional wood models. The custom-made double-paned windows were fabricated with the same muntin pattern as the old ones, which were found overly painted on the first and second floors. "We also found some stained-glass windows," says Wadia, "which we protected and then restored." All of the flimsy doors were discarded and new paneled ones were installed in their places.



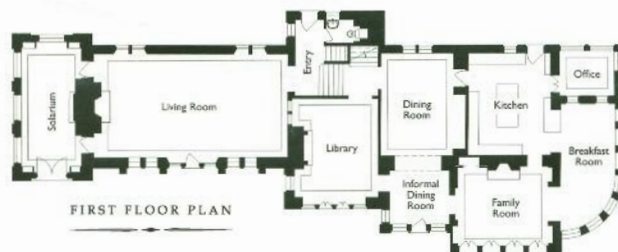
An expanded yard replaced dilapidated tennis courts just outside of the renovated basement, which features new French doors. Wadia also installed the retaining walls and pergola.

The whole interior was a design challenge, says Wadia, "because previously none of the rooms worked together. The breakfast room and kitchen had no connection to each other, and the family room had no connection to these rooms. Also, the dining room was long and narrow." Wadia reconfigured these rooms, creating a separate breakfast room with a vaulted ceiling off of the formal dining room and changing the passageways.

The living room, on the other hand, was one of the few rooms that was beautiful to begin with, says Wadia. "Beautiful, but not Italianate," he says. "Now that we have stripped the paint, restored the mantel and restored and stained the oak ceiling beams, it looks like an old Italian mansion."

For an informal touch to the family room, Wadia installed a coffered ceiling and a native-stone fireplace extending from the raised stone hearth to the ceiling. "In fact, we were able to restore all of the mantels," says Wadia. "Some of them are marble, while a few are wood."

Other interior wood elements were refinished, including some of the quartersawn oak flooring, the paneling in the library and an old staircase. "The main staircase was dilapidated, so we stripped and refurbished it," says Wadia.



When they approached the project, Wadia and the clients felt that none of the rooms were connected or flowed well into each other, so Wadia reconfigured many of the rooms and changed some of the passageways. Among other renovations, the first floor now features a transformed family room and dining room and a separate breakfast room. Floor plan: Wadia Associates, LLC

The project extended to the basement. "We made another usable space," says Wadia, "by digging out the old foundation and lowering the footings and thus the floor by 2 ft." Copper ceilings were installed and French doors were specified to connect to the spa area in place of small windows. The basement now functions as an exercise room and a large playroom for the clients' children.

What began as a large project became even bigger about midway through. "When we started the house," says Wadia, "the clients did not want us to touch certain rooms, due to the budget, but once they realized what could be done there, they were persuaded. It always happens that way in a renovation. Clients think some rooms are fine and can't see the large picture, how everything is going to fit together." In the end, Wadia renovated every room in the house. "The study is a good example. It was horrible – cheap painted windows, poor lighting and a boring ceiling – but the owner loved the room. However, once other rooms were renovated, he saw a vast difference and conceded to having the study renovated, too. In the end, he was really pleased." New lighting and a plaster relief ceiling were added in the study; the paneling was also restored.

The mechanical, electrical and plumbing systems were also updated. "There is a brand new lighting system," says Wadia. "We installed very little recessed lighting, using lamps, sconces, chandeliers and other fixtures instead." The kitchen and all of the bathrooms were also modernized.

The master bathroom, off of the master bedroom, was converted from a large porch. "Actually, I tried to insist on a keeping the porch," says Wadia, "because it was one of the nicer features of the house. But in the end, the bathroom looked quite nice." It added another 480 sq.ft. to the house and is simultaneously comfortable and luxurious. Wadia specified the same rustic stone that was used on the exterior for the bathroom walls. The bathtub, shower and other fixtures are contemporary.

The other addition was not to the house, but to the property. "During our renovation, the land next door came on the market," says Wadia, "and we persuaded the owner to purchase it." While assuring privacy, the land also provided space for gardens.

The remainder of the hardscaping was also done by Wadia Associates. This included new retaining walls, gardens, terraces and a sunken courtyard off of the family room that features a year-round spa. "The site pitched toward the house, which was unusual," explains Wadia. "We remedied that by digging the site and leveling it and planned a spa." Another change was to a tennis court that was built about 10 ft. from the house. Wadia dug it up to expand the front yard. Plant material was selected by the clients in conjunction with a nursery.

It took only about a year to complete the renovation of "The Castle." "Though one of the first things we did was gut the house, leaving nothing of the old house but the shell," says Wadia, "when we were done with renovations, it looked like a well maintained house that had been there forever. That's how we know we've done a good job." – Hadiya Strasberg



The study was once a room with cheap painted windows, poor lighting and a plain ceiling, but now boasts new lighting and a plaster relief ceiling. The paneling and the mantel were both restored.



Wadia specified three-quarter wainscoting, leaded windows and a decorative paneled ceiling for a new informal dining room. Complementing those windows are the pair of doors with arched transoms between the informal dining room and the family room.



The master bedroom features double-hung windows and French doors, which lead to the new master bathroom. The antique marble fireplace is the focal point of the room.