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MODERN RENOVATION

BY ELIZABETH HOLE



MODERN MOMENT

ARCHITECT **DINYAR WADIA** GOES BACK TO HIS ROOTS WITH A JOHN BLACK LEE RENOVATION OF THE DAY HOUSE

When people walk through a home built by Dinyar Wadia, they often wonder how it can possibly be a brand-new structure. Wadia, a New Canaan-based architect who established Wadia Associates more than 40 years ago, is known for his timeless homes designed as part of the landscape. His clients may request a Georgian, French Country or Colonial, but Wadia covers the architectural spectrum.

"I don't have a signature style," Wadia claims. "To be a good architect, one should be able to design in any style or period."

Following this motto, Wadia boasts an eclectic portfolio of new and renovated estate homes in New Canaan, Greenwich and

surrounding towns. He works closely with clients, managing dream house must-haves with practicality. His bespoke architecture ensures that "no two houses are alike."

But even so, it seems surprising to learn that Wadia has had a hand in renovating a

number of New Canaan's prized Mid-Century Modern homes, many of which were designed by Philip Johnson and other members of the Harvard Five.

While Wadia honed his craft studying traditional architecture in his native India, he says that working on a Modern

is like "going back to my roots." He earned his master's degree at Columbia University, where he studied under Professor Victor Christ-Janer and graduated as a William Kinney Fellow. Christ-Janer was a contemporary of the famous Harvard Five architects who made New Canaan an unexpected hub of Modernist design. After graduation, Wadia joined his mentor's firm in New Canaan.

According to Wadia, "Taking a job with Victor was the best life decision I ever made."

With 91 historically significant Modern homes in New Canaan, many have required preservation. Wadia has worked on two Philip Johnson homes and renovated The Day House, a John Black Lee design built in 1966. While John Black Lee isn't officially one of the Harvard Five, he worked for Eliot Noyes and has been referred to as the "sixth member" of this distinguished group.

Wadia is careful to balance the fine line of restoration with respect for an architect's original vision. "For The Day House, my biggest challenge was to maintain the home so it looked like John Black Lee never left," recalls Wadia.

The homeowner, who chose to remain anonymous, selected

above left and right: The Day House, built by John Black Lee in 1966. A look into the living room, complete with modern furnishings.



FUN FACT

**JOHN BLACK LEE
DESIGNED EIGHT NOTABLE
MODERN HOMES IN NEW CANAAN:**

Lee House 1 on Laurel Road (1952); **Lee House 2** on Chichester Road (1956); **DeSilver House** (with Harrison DeSilver, 1961); **Teaze House** (1962); **Day House** (1966) and all buildings at the **New Canaan Field Club**.

MICHAEL BIONDO PHOTOGRAPHY

Wadia added state-of-the-art appliances and heated flooring but kept the kitchen's original metal cabinets.



Wadia because he was the only architect who “did not advise tearing the house apart and putting their stamp on it.” Not wanting to “live in a museum,” she requested something her family and dogs could call home.

In addition to restoration, Wadia was tasked with updating this architectural showpiece with modern systems and fixtures. He renovated the kitchen and gave the bathrooms a contemporary and sleek revamp. Tackling the leaking problem typical of Mid-Century Modern homes have, he changed the pitch of the roof and rebuilt the skylight

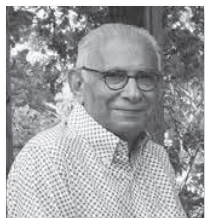
without compromising the design. Wadia’s firm also replaced the outdoor Spanish tile, repaired the stairs, rebuilt the chimney and created corrosion-resistant replicas of the exterior aluminum light fixtures.

For the kitchen, the client wanted to keep the original St.

Charles metal cabinets, so the floor tile was carefully replaced to add an under-floor heating system. Chosen with consideration, the tile seamlessly blends with the original hallway tile. Wadia also incorporated present-day amenities like a second dishwasher and two tall state-of-the-art wine

above right and right: An indoor pool is kept as if John Black Lee never left; a chic updated bar is tucked into a corner for easy entertaining.

“TO BE A GOOD ARCHITECT, ONE SHOULD BE ABLE TO DESIGN IN ANY STYLE OR PERIOD.”



—DINYAR WADIA, WADIA ASSOCIATES

refrigerators.

Adding modern conveniences, Wadia’s team built a sauna and bathroom near the indoor pool and created a new entrance from the house. A nod to his love of gardens, Wadia featured “a little green spot” in the corner of the pool room and advised on landscaping.

The homeowner fondly tells the story of John Black Lee making an impromptu visit to her home shortly before his death in 2016: “To my husband’s delight, John smiled and said he approved.”

Although preserving New Canaan’s Mid-Century Modern architecture is important to the town, there have been times

when Moderns fell out of favor. When Wadia tried to build his first spec house as a Modern in late 1974, he went to the New Canaan Savings Bank for a loan.

“Peter Raymond, the bank president of New Canaan Savings Bank opened the window and said, ‘Jump—I will put you out of your misery now. I already have the mortgage on houses designed by Philip Johnson, Marcel Breuer, Eliot Noyes and John Johansen that are not selling. What makes you feel like you’re better than them?’” laughs Wadia. “Come back with a Colonial.”

Like Wadia says, “Everything goes in cycles and the Modern house is making a comeback.”