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Spring Beauty!

CREATING COTTAGE STYLE NEW OLD HOUSE



“Our cottage is a wooden version of a Greek temple”

Minutes from downtown Boston, architect John Tittmann designed a 2,000-square-foot home based on an ancient form

“THIS HOUSE HAS A LIVABLE SCALE,” says architect and homeowner John Tittmann. “I grew up in the suburbs, but I knew there had to be a way to live in the city without dense urbanism.”

YOU KNOW A HOUSE PROBABLY ISN'T WORTH RENOVATING when neighbors refer to it as the block's “haunted house.” At least that's what Mary and John Tittmann realized when they bought a boarded-up shack on a great lot in Cambridge, Massachusetts, whose only living tenants were the four- and eight-legged kind.

After sitting abandoned for 25 years, the cottage had only one redeeming quality: its ability to scare trick-or-treaters, thanks to neighbors who rigged it with spooky music on Halloween.

While living in such surroundings might have appealed to the Addams Family, John, Mary, and their two children, Henry and Hester, had other plans. As a principal with the Boston firm Albert, Righter & Tittmann Architects, Inc., John loved the idea of designing a spacious family home in the midst of a bustling urban neighborhood. So he knocked down the “haunted” cottage and built something new.

To do so, John reached far back in architectural history and designed a home that's inspired by a >

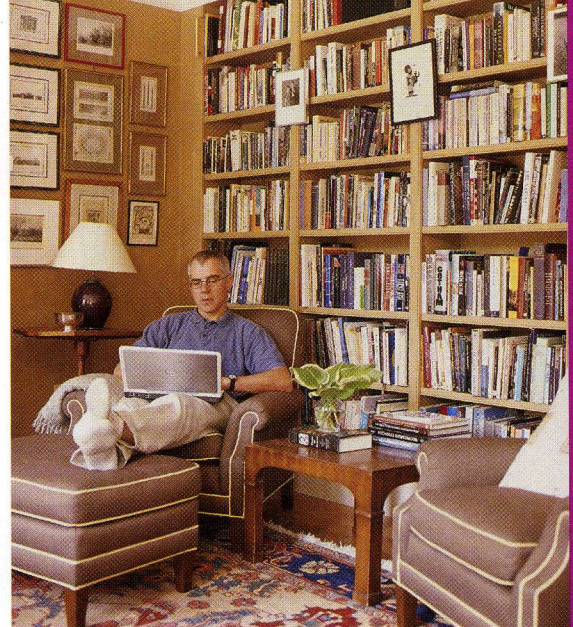
CREATING COTTAGE STYLE NEW OLD HOUSE



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IN THE ENTRY, picture rail molding about a foot below the ceiling creates what John calls a "poor man's cornice." Painting the molding and space above it white produces a big effect.

FOR A SENSE OF PRIVACY from the busy urban surroundings, John placed the front door on the side of the home, but guests can't miss it.



THE LIVING ROOM DOUBLES as a library thanks to built-in bookshelves along one wall. Framed architectural prints inspire John's designs.



very basic form. "The facade is a wooden version of a Greek temple," he says. While the Greeks invented the style, many architects, especially in New England, resurrected Greek Revival architecture from about 1830 to 1850.

"I've always been interested in the deep roots of an idea," he says. "When you know where something comes from, you can understand how to manipulate or change it for an artistic end, and it helps shape new design. It's a way of being modern and ancient at the same time."

Because of the narrow urban lot, John's challenge was to design a new home without wasting an inch. To start, he resisted the common idea of a typical house planned around a front entrance with a central hallway. "In a traditional Greek Revival house, the entrance is at one end, but that forces the need for a long corridor, thus eating up space," John says. His idea was to place the entry in the middle and on one side, eliminating the need for a hallway and allowing larger first-floor living spaces. >

CREATING COTTAGE STYLE NEW OLD HOUSE



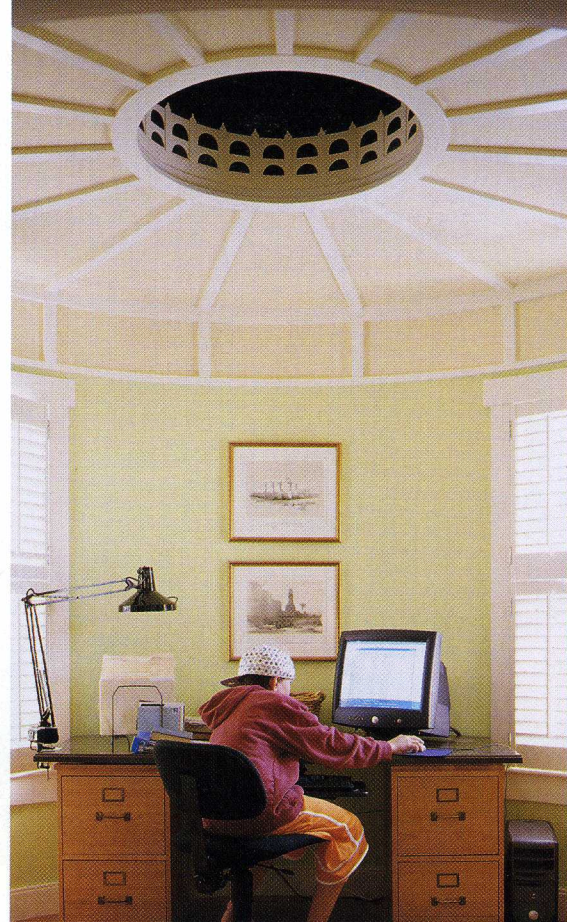
“You don’t have to spend a lot of money to get something artful”

With the house’s front door not placed front and center, John knew he needed to add architectural flourish to give the entry prominence. Again, he looked to the Greek Revival style and chose a rotunda (see Glossary, page 42) with a copper dome supported by simple Doric columns. Because the rotunda projects out from the side of the house, it can be seen from the street and, he says, “brings your eye in and announces the entrance.” Additionally, this placement gives a sense of privacy from the busy Boston streetscape and provides the family with a precious side driveway. (Most of the neighborhood has street parking.)

When planning the interior of the cottage, John began a laundry list of his family’s needs: three bedrooms, an office, an airy kitchen, and a living room that could do double duty as a music room to house the family’s grand piano. With space at a premium, John and Mary decided they could go without a traditional dining room. “We didn’t think we’d ever really use it, and we wanted a larger kitchen,” John says. “So I designed the kitchen to have a dining table in the middle for eating and hanging out.”

To stay on budget, John kept measurements and materials in standard sizes to avoid costly custom work. “The entire house is made out of inexpensive materials from the lumberyard,” he says. “Our only extravagance was the copper on top of the dome.” For interior finishes, John kept things economical: eco-friendly linoleum tile in the entry, synthetic concrete countertops in the kitchen, and bright paint colors on the basic drywall throughout. “You don’t have to spend a lot of money to get something artful,” he says.

In the end, John and his family have all the comforts of suburban life and the added bonus of the walkable neighborhoods of a bigger city. And their home makes a statement about the longevity of good design. “To me, this is not a style we read about in books; this is living history,” John says. “The Greek Revival style looks as fresh today as it ever has.” >



TO SAVE SPACE the Tittmanns chose to have an eat-in kitchen as opposed to a separate dining room. For family meals, the antique table expands (with a leaf) to seat six.

THE ROTUNDA’S SECOND FLOOR serves as an office and homework central. John designed the intricate woodwork and oculus (see Glossary, below) on the ceiling to mimic those in ancient times that opened to the sky.

CREATING COTTAGE STYLE NEW OLD HOUSE

GREEK REVIVAL 101

A quick primer on the classic architectural style



Entablature

The wide band of trimwork just below the roofline that's made up of the cornice, frieze, and architrave

Cornice

The top part of the classic entablature that projects horizontally from the eaves and marks the roofline

Frieze

A horizontal band of trim, just below the cornice, that usually consists of simple boards lacking decoration

Architrave

The bottom band of trim below the frieze that rests on the capitals of columns or pilasters

Pilaster

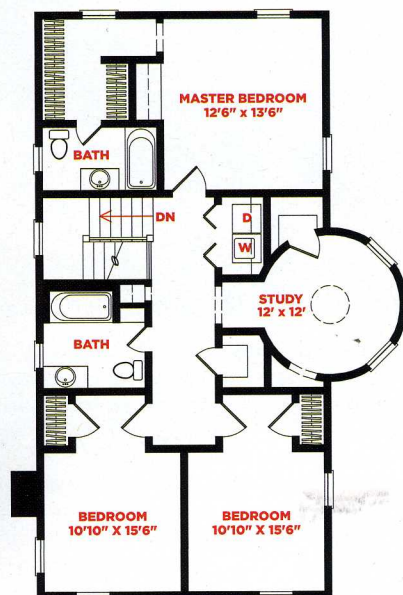
A shallow column that plays a key visual, rather than structural, role in framing the facade of a house

The way they live

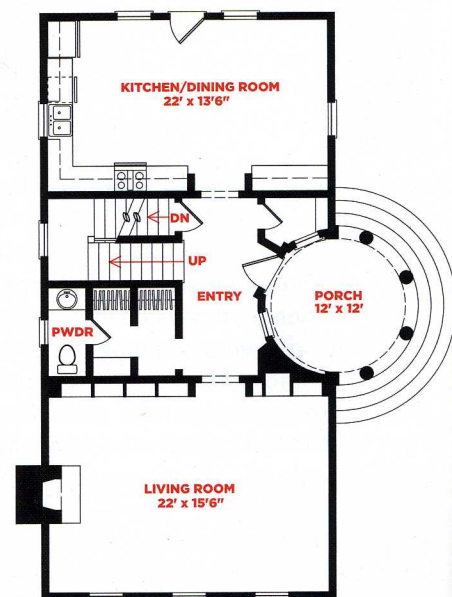
■ **LIVING ROOM** For this family of musicians, having space to play the piano and practice the violin was a must. John designed the living room to double as a music room, and he also included a wall of built-in bookcases for their ever-growing library.

■ **KITCHEN** A rectangular kitchen gives the Tittmanns perimeter space for cabinets and countertops. The dining room table sits in the center and serves as a nightly spot for dinner. "We hang out in the kitchen all the time," John says. "That table sees everything from meals to homework."

■ **STORAGE** John kept the bedrooms fairly small to maximize the potential for storage space on the second floor: A walk-in closet opens to the master bath, and two closets are in the hallway, one housing the family's washer and dryer. ■



SECOND FLOOR



FIRST FLOOR

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