

## A Tudor Reborn

Designer Steven Gambrel brings light and life to a historic house

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They were a young Manhattan family making the inevitable move from the city to the suburbs. The property, in a lovely village just 15 miles north of New York City, certainly had a lot going for it: six bedrooms and 10 baths on two bucolic acres, with a terrific public school just a hop and skip down the hill. Perfect—except that the house itself was stuffy, dark, and dreary.

Built in 1927, it was one of Charles Lewis Bowman’s Stockbroker Tudors, houses popular with Wall Streeters in one of New York’s earliest bedroom communities. But while fashionable in its day, the home’s weathered stone, brick, and half-timbered exterior was no longer inviting. The couple had trouble imagining their three children (now six, four, and two) and their menagerie of pets—a Siamese named Tigger, three fish, and a baby guinea pig—living in a house straight out of an Agatha Christie whodunit. Enter **Steven Gambrel**, an interior designer known for his classical approach to modern comfort. “You have to help us make this house friendly,” the wife beseeched him.

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Gambrel, who trained as an architect, knew that the key to warming up the place was to revise its floor plan. He spent a day alone in the home with his dog Dash walking through its rooms and studying their flow. The house had separate family and servants' quarters—an upstairs-downstairs arrangement that no longer made sense for a modern family without a live-in staff. Even on the ground floor, there was no sense of continuity between the spaces. The dining room, for instance, was next to the kitchen—but there was no door to connect the two rooms. Gambrel had a vision: In order to get this old-fashioned house to relax, he would have to open it up from within.

He showed the couple some sketches: The dining room could become a casual family room with archways connecting it to the kitchen for easy snack runs. And why not relocate the dining room to the striking (but not particularly useful) reception hall, where some of Bowman's prettier details, including glorious leaded-and-stained-glass windows and a massive oak staircase, could be enjoyed as a backdrop? They loved it. And everything else followed: the servants' wing converted into a guest room and bath for visiting grandparents, plus a home office for the husband; a basement wine cellar, gym, and children's art room; a light-washed playroom and the wife's office on the third floor; and a cloudlike blue-and-white master suite on the second floor, close to the children's rooms. Given the vast scope of the renovation, Gambrel and his clients brought in [Boris Baranovich](#), the architect responsible for the house's last significant redo in the late 1990s, to oversee the interior gut work and to restore the exterior, where the half timbers were painted blue for a lighter effect. "It was sad to watch all the antique paneling come off and to see the house come apart," Gambrel says of the extensive renovation. "But then we watched it all come happily back together."

With this streamlined new layout in place, Gambrel set out to make the interior design just as affable. He used the wife's favorite color, blue, in abundance, in pale hues that he contrasted with dark, dramatic grays. The casually elegant decor (Gambrel describes it as "ode to an English country house with a fresh take") features deep, comfortable seating, tailored draperies, pedigreed antiques, and striking artwork such as Hunt Slonem's shimmering Gold Butterflies, which hangs in the second-floor hall. On the ground floor, the sunroom—at one time an open-air dancing pavilion—has a bold octagon-patterned rug, a pair of French painted chandeliers, and two generous sofas designed by Gambrel. The living room, used for cocktails and post-dinner party gatherings, is furnished with a soigné mix of club chairs and vintage Maison Jansen and Italian cocktail and side tables, all centered on the original limestone fireplace. Meanwhile, the family's day-to-day existence revolves around the bright and expansive new kitchen, with its ample marble-top island and cozy dining area where a '70s Venini chandelier hangs from the room's new plank-and-beam ceiling.

Once Gambrel felt he had tipped the home's balance from stodgy to friendly, the period architecture no longer detracted. In fact, he found himself admiring Bowman's workmanship and set out to restore what he could. He unleashed a team of three artisans who worked steadily for five months to strip the red paint off the wonderful oak paneling in the library. The floor-to-ceiling woodwork, gleaming and pristine, now frames Gambrel's masterful update on traditional decor. "We weren't slaves to history," Gambrel says, "but we were certainly inspired by it. We took the pieces that worked for us and were really kind to the house."

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