

TEXT LISA FREEDMAN  
PHOTOGRAPHS LUCAS ALLEN  
LOCATIONS EDITOR LIZ ELLIOT

# country FUSION

*On a plot of farmland on the Atlantic coast of Long Island, a firm of Manhattan architects and a London-based interior designer have created a barn-style holiday house for their clients that is appropriate to its rural setting, yet has all the accoutrements of stylish modern living*

The owners of this barn-style holiday home wanted an open-plan sitting and dining space in which to entertain. It is on the first floor to make the most of the views. The vintage bar stools at the island are by French designer Jean Prouvé, while the modern handmade dining table and chairs came from BDDW in New York



It may not always be obvious to those of an urban bent, but the primary function of a barn is to house livestock and feed. It's only when you attempt to impose the requirements of modern man on a structure initially intended for cows that its drawbacks become apparent.

'My clients had owned a holiday cottage on Long Island for many years and then bought a large plot of farmland next to the sea,' says London-based interior designer Veere Grenney. 'They originally contemplated buying an English barn and shipping it to the US, but soon realised that wasn't practical.' Instead, they contacted Marc Turkel, a partner in Manhattan architectural practice Leroy Street Studio, a firm noted for its sympathetic approach to local building materials and techniques.

Marc helped the owners to reinvent the form, taking the simple language of a barn – four timber sides, a pitched roof and a single large opening – and using it to make a compelling modern statement. 'At a distance, the house has a barn-like quality,' he says, 'but here the façade acts like a screen, allowing light to filter through.'

At first sight, the building, which sits in a glade of trees, appears solid and opaque. Yet coming closer you see that everything has been done to make the most of the surrounding views of fields and ocean. 'At the start we hired a cherry picker to identify the best vantage points,' says Marc.

The house was built 'upside down', with the huge, multi-windowed living space and main bedroom on the first floor, three more bedrooms and a large billiard room at ground level, and a gym and wine cellar in the basement. An Escher-like array of staircases, gangways and bridges unites and animates the intricate internal space.

As in a traditional barn, the link between indoors and out is fundamental, but here the relationship is anything but conventional. Those

**THIS PAGE** The screened porch on the first floor (above left) is typical of traditional 'Shingle'-style houses. It is a place to sit and be cooled by cross breezes in the summer, the folding, louvred shutters acting as sunshades. The furniture here was designed by the owner. All around are stunning views (above right). The solid barn-like exterior of the house (left) belies the sleek, light-filled, inner living space.

**OPPOSITE** The sitting area, with its double-sided granite-faced chimney, has a summery bleached-oak floor. Next to a Fifties lamp by Arteluce is a wooden chair by George Nakashima, who also made the coffee table. The vintage armchairs were discovered at a flea market, while Veere Grenney designed the sofa, which can seat up to 12 people





inside the building are constantly drawn to light and sky – from the main entrance, where new arrivals step into an airy courtyard before reaching the front door, to the billiard room, which creates a tunnel of daylight across the house; from the first-floor veranda, with its wrap-around views and folding shutters, to the spinal skylight in the roof ridge. ‘You are always looking through the building,’ says Marc.

Just two-and-a-half hours from New York, the house is used as a weekend retreat throughout the year, but the location has an emphatically holidays-by-the-seaside mood, and when it came to the interior design, Veere Grenney set out to encapsulate long, hot, lazy days and balmy, starlit nights. ‘We were trying to capture summer,’ he says, hence the bleached-oak floors and gentle palette of aqua, stone, earth and creamy white.

Comfort was, of course, a key part of the brief, and the decoration makes it easy to kick off your shoes and relax, but the interior, like the architecture, is not all it appears at first glance. Veere is a designer in the classical manner, whose work is defined by a ferocious attention to detail, reflecting a long career at the pinnacle of interior design. A New Zealander, who arrived in London ‘along the hippy trail’, he moved from life as an antiques dealer to a top-flight apprenticeship with Mary Fox Linton and David Hicks, then rose to prominence as a director of Sibyl Colefax & John Fowler. He set up his own Chelsea firm in 1996 and now has an appreciative clientele on both sides of the Atlantic. ‘For the past 15 years, we’ve always had a project in New York or the Hamptons,’ he says.

Two characteristics of Veere’s style are purity of line and quality of finish, but perhaps his greatest skill is the knack of combining the antique and the modern to create a look that is understated, luxurious and subtle. ‘I think being a colonial

**OPPOSITE** Stainless-steel cross-bracing lightens the timber load of the roof and creates an elegant armature. The glassed-in space above the sitting area is the study. ‘In this room, there is a real feel of being among the rafters,’ says architect Marc Turkel. **THIS PAGE** CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT A bridge leads from the sitting area to the main bedroom suite; the lights hanging over the staircase are from Bernd Goeckler. Through the glazed main entrance, lit at night, you can see the intricate geometry of the window frames and staircases. Landscape architects Reed Hilderbrand planted a grove of trees around the house and mowed pathways through the long grasses





means you're not restricted by tradition,' he says. 'You have no preconceived notions of what you can and cannot do in a specific place.'

In this Atlantic coastal home, the design is both specific to the place and anything but. The tradition of prosperous holidaymakers descending on Long Island goes back to the nineteenth century, and the vernacular of the large New England colonial-style 'Shingle' houses that once dotted the shore, with their linear silhouettes and cedar frames, remains very much part of the narrative. The use of wood was integral to this revivalist style and here wood is also a central theme. The owner, an amateur boatbuilder and carpenter, asked that the façade be clad in teak, a marine hardwood that fades to a grey similar to that of cedar while being much more durable.

Veere used wood as a dominant note, both as a finish and as an art form. In the main bedroom and adjoining bathroom, for example, he has added texture to the walls with seaside-style matchboarding, painted in white gloss. And throughout the sleek, light-filled building he has carefully placed pieces by some of the twentieth century's finest craftsmen, from the knotted solidity of George Nakashima to the sinuous curves of Jean Royère and Italian maestro Giò Ponti.

This is country living with a strong city accent and the work of revered designers such as Terence Robsjohn-Gibbings and Maison Jansen are the reminder that, while ties have been loosened and suits abandoned, the highest design standards have been maintained. This is a house that seamlessly unites town and tradition in a constantly surprising and refreshing way □

*Veere Grenney Associates: 020-7351 7170; www.veeregrenney.com*  
*Leroy Street Studio: 00-1-212 431 6780; www.leroystreetstudio.com*



**THIS PAGE CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT** The painting at the entrance to the main bedroom suite is by Francis Picabia. Not far from the house is an eighteenth-century chapel. On the ground floor there is a billiard room and media suite. **OPPOSITE** The boarded walls in the main bedroom (top and bottom left) are an echo of local architecture. Next to the Giò Ponti chair is a standard lamp from FontanaArte. Veere designed the bed, while the bedside tables are by British furniture designer Terence Robsjohn-Gibbings. The vintage bath and double basin (bottom right) were restored by The Water Monopoly

