



*The Creative Cottage*

GROSS & DALEY

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# The Creative Cottage

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# Suave and Simple

FOR MOST OF ITS 250 YEARS, the small cottage of Michael Leva, a fashion and beauty executive, was “just a sad, poor farmer’s house, until finally it was abandoned.”

Today, the wide-plank chestnut floors and original doors are still there, but the house has been transformed into a much more glamorous dwelling—first by a colonial homes enthusiast, and more lately by Michael, who has given it a very chic styling in his own sophisticated way.

Situated on top of a hill in Roxbury, Connecticut, and surrounded by stone fences, huge old maples and luxuriant gardens, the house is a 1765 saltbox variation of the Cape Cod cottage. Shaped according to this local historical style, the clean, plain lines of the house exterior construct a frame from the past for the spare, restrained decor within.

From the beginning, Michael felt he had entered into a personal partnership with the house and every element in it. Not wanting to stray too far from the roots of the house, he mixed old things with new. “I read voraciously about society decorators and the history of furniture and like to think that I carry on in the tradition of American decorators like Billy Baldwin and Van Day Truex, who were geniuses at mixing periods together,” Michael says. Since the house was so small, he carefully considered and finessed the scale of items, creating a graceful sense of proportion. In the process, he used made-to-fit cabinetry and fine-boned furnishings that were well suited to the home’s petite

dimensions. Following a maxim to control, edit and distill, he furnished the rooms with restraint, choosing pieces such as a diminutive neoclassical settee and a small-scale chandelier.

Along with classical pieces, Michael blended in contemporary elements, including a 1950s Knoll couch, a ‘60s chrome lamp, metal garden chairs and a picnic table.

For the palette, Michael watched the light and colors of the sky and earth around him and chose paint and fabric based on what he saw: pale blues, silver grays, apple greens and many slightly different shades of white. He mixed soft pastels with bold jolts of color, adding drama with a fiery orange chair, a bright blue lamp, or deep black basalt Wedgwood pottery set against stark white walls.

Although the house is spare, the garden is dense and abundant. It teems with a mix of deep border gardens, hedges made out of vines, native perennials and exotic, deadly nightshades.

All in all, the house illustrates the paradoxical way in which complexity is sometimes required in order to achieve a suave simplicity. It’s also an example of the mystery of elegance, knowing what to add and what to leave out.

*Library shelves were built “just big enough to validate the small Swedish Gustavian sofa,” keeping the proportions balanced within the tiny room.*





OPPOSITE: Ruth Nivola used a small converted outbuilding as her art studio. Inspired by a trip abroad, her daughter Claire, who is an artist and book illustrator, painted murals on the walls depicting scenes in a Grecian town.

ABOVE: On the third floor, an unused attic was converted into a studio for Katherine and includes a spool bed that was once her mother's. Above it is a painting by Adrian Nivola of his grandmother Ruth, an artist who created exotic filigree jewelry.

LEFT: The upstairs bathroom still has the original tub, but another window has been added to enable soaking while enjoying a view of the garden.



*An Irish cupboard holds a collection of pewter, Waterford and goblets from a Moroccan bazaar. The couple enjoy cooking in the small galley kitchen, although Peter says he “sometimes has a fit due to the lack of counter space.”*

*RIGHT: Originally a saltbox, the house has an addition dating from the 1970s with skylights and two sets of French doors, all of which provide more light and communication between indoors and outdoors.*

