

We Can Dream: A Grand Guesthouse for Events and Luxurious Stays

Discover this Connecticut dream guesthouse with a French twist

File this guesthouse under the “We can dream, can’t we?” category. When a pair of gourmet chefs, who had their very own dream of an organic farm, had the opportunity to buy the property adjacent to their Greenwich, Connecticut, home, they jumped on it and never looked back. Inspired by Marie Antoinette’s Hamlet on the grounds of Versailles, this grand house is situated among pathways, formal gardens and an organic farm to grow produce for use in the chefs’ cooking.



Photos by Nicholas Rotondi

Houzz at a Glance

Who stays here: Guests of the owners. Also used to host educational lectures and charity events.

Location: Greenwich, Connecticut

Size: 7,500 square feet (697 square meters)

Architect: Charles Hilton Architects

The guesthouse has a steeply pitched graduated slate roof, and is pierced with engaged timber dormers and walls of half-timbering. Randomly laid terra cotta brick tiles give the house its unique character. The corner tower serves as a focal point to the composition.



Architect Charles Hilton had the custom-made brick — thin Roman brick like that used in old Normandy houses — hand laid in a custom pattern. “The brick was laid in between the timbers, to be very planned and organic,” Hilton says. The guesthouse uses post-and-beam construction and has French-style windows.

“In Europe you would have used limestone, but here there’s lots of fieldstone and granite, and stone walls on the property,” Hilton says. “So we used granite for the basement level, tower and fireplace.” The slate gray-green roof tiles graduate in thickness and size.



“The owner was very excited by the prospect of a tower,” Hilton says. The architect toured France to study Norman farmhouse architecture and brought back images that included buildings with towers. Finished with a whimsical cat and mouse finial, the tower houses the master suite and a study.



Guests and visitors enter the residence through a pair of heavy oak doors set in a carved stone entry, which leads to the central great room. At the entry, guests and visitors are also introduced to the home's rugged, sturdy and authentic construction. A mix of hard and soft woods, some of it salvaged barn wood, "were selected for texture and color," Hilton says. "The carved stone on the inside provides a transitional element from inside to outside."



This is the focal point of almost all the spaces in the house and sets the stylistic tone for the whole interior. Its ceiling — composed of antique timber planks supported by a dramatic system of antique hand-finished timber trusses — soars 2½ stories. Dining, living and gathering spaces are well defined by furniture groupings. Modern, open, decorative light fixtures of steel and iron also demarcate spaces within the great room's open plan.



The walk-in fireplace was constructed of Camargue limestone quarried and cut in France. The dramatic fireplace provides a stately counterpoint to the double-height bay window, which overlooks the couple's extensive gardens.

The French plaster walls provide an Old World look and, being porous, also help with acoustics. "You can have 70 people in the great room and they can still enjoy private conversations," Hilton says.



The great room opens onto the kitchen. Two bedrooms on the second floor overlook the space from cantilevered balconies. Used for dinner parties, in which the wife orchestrates the cooking, the great room is also used for educational purposes — the couple invite people in to lecture and teach about organic farming — and for charity fundraisers.



In the kitchen, “a true chef’s kitchen,” Hilton says, the architect compressed the space down to a single story with a beam-and-plank ceiling. The center and eating islands have concrete tops. Countertops around the stove are stainless steel or zinc, while the stove hood was finished to resemble pewter.



Through an archway and behind the formal kitchen is a more rustic working kitchen with custom-designed cabinets finished in a French whitewash. A farm sink adds to the rustic ambience. Organic produce from the estate’s farm rests on shelves nearby.



Stairways carved from solid oak timbers lead to the guest bedrooms above the great room and the garden receiving room, wine cellar and root cellars below.



One of the rustic guest bedrooms, replete with carved oak banisters, timbered walls and ceiling, and French windows overlooking the grounds.



Just below the study is the master bedroom, with oval clerestory windows and high cove ceilings covered in Venetian plaster. The walls are upholstered. The detailing around the windows includes scrollwork and medallions. The formal master, Hilton says, “was our suggestion. In French farmhouses, the aesthetic is rustic as you enter, but becomes more formal as the rooms become more private, which makes for interesting layering.”





On the first level of the tower, through French doors opening to the exquisitely landscape grounds, a spiral staircase corkscrews up to the master bedroom suite. The stair is painted wood, with a handrail of oak with polished-nickel accents inspired by a tower in France. The floor is Versailles-patterned oak. Windows, and white and gold accents, add to the regal aesthetic.



The staircase terminates at the study at the top of the tower. The study “provides a private place for guests or the homeowners to work within the suite,” Hilton says. “The windows face in three directions for great vantage points of the property and the gardens.” The slanted ceilings of painted plaster, an oak floor and painted wood panels complete the room.

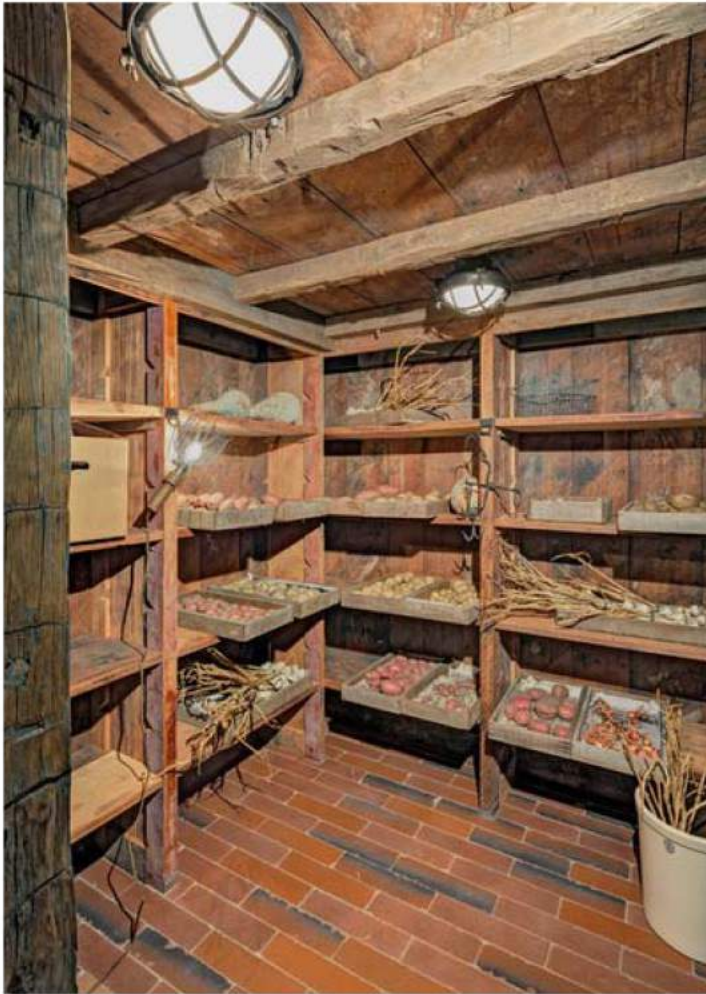


The master bath includes large windows overlooking the formal gardens. The cabinets were custom designed to resemble French furniture pieces. French limestone was used for the vanity countertop. The walls are covered in a gray-stripe wallpaper. “The white aesthetic is perfect for a clean, light, bright master bath,” Hilton says.



Charles Hilton Architects

The guesthouse’s wine cellar includes custom-constructed oak storage. “In looking at French buildings, a lot of the towers are for pigeons and open on the ground floor, so you see the timber construction all the way up. So we did that here too, but finished in between the timbers,” Hilton explains. Limestone and brick pavers were used for the floor, providing a connection between the exterior and interior.



The root cellar, located next to the wine cellar, has a more rustic feel with a brick floor and rugged storage for the organic vegetables.



Despite the estate's historic look and feel, Hilton says that "we incorporated lots of modern technologies, including a geothermal cooling and heating system, energy-efficient spray insulation, LED lighting, and energy-efficient technologies for water and electricity."