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IN WINTER

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# YANKEE

NEW ENGLAND'S MAGAZINE

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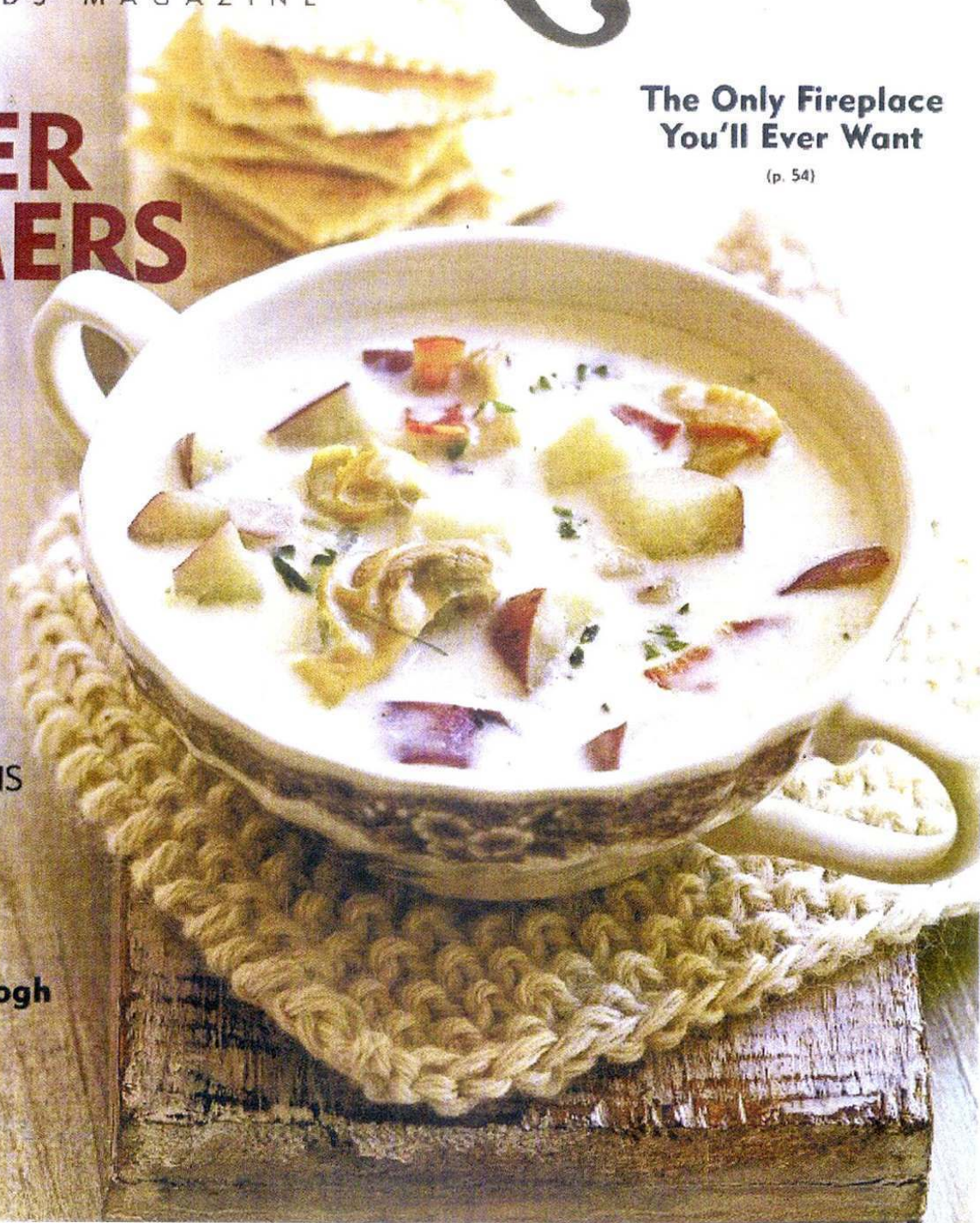
*Plus!*

Connecticut's  
Modern-Day Van Gogh

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The Only Fireplace  
You'll Ever Want

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# The GUIDE HOME

Gertie, the Wells family's chocolate Lab/Weimaraner mix, relaxes in front of the Rumford fireplace. See "Detail," p. 58, for design information.



# Old Becomes New

*A New Hampshire family creates a house that blends traditional architecture with today's lifestyle.* | BY MEG CADOUX HIRSHBERG



PHOTOGRAPHS BY  
ERIC ROTH

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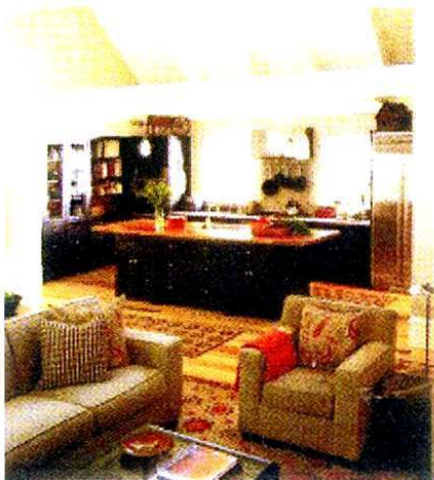
RIVE JUST UNDER A MILE OFF INTERSTATE 89 NEAR THE TOWN OF NEW London, New Hampshire, and you'll suddenly come upon the hamlet of North Sutton, with its blink-and-you'll-miss-it white clapboard general store and Baptist church. Drawn by the sweet calm of tree-lined Kezar Lake, you may find yourself meandering along the narrow lane encircling the water. And if you do go that way, in a half-mile or so you'll pass by the restored Greek Revival home of Roger and Sandy Wells.

Roger, an architect and landscape architect, and Sandy, an antiques collector with a designer's eye, collaborated with their daughter, Boston architect Heather Wells, to resurrect this 1890s structure. It was pretty dilapidated, and the rehab took almost three years. The end result is a beautiful testament to a creative family partnership—one that reflects their mutual passion for reinterpreting historical design to fit a modern sensibility, lifestyle, and aesthetic.

Top: The Wells home comprises the restored original structure (pictured here) and an addition, which is stepped back from the main house to ensure good light and a view of Kezar Lake. Opposite: For the great room, Roger Wells says, "We wanted a modern, light-filled interpretation of a barn, which is why the space is two stories and has exposed rafters." The color palette of the simply designed furniture that Sandy Wells selected consists of beiges and browns. The oyster-white walls throughout the home are filled with splashes of color from paintings. A metal-and-glass coffee table complements the room's warm earth tones. "We're always mixing and matching," Sandy says. "There's no magic formula. A good designer can bring out the best of what you already have."



The kitchen's color scheme lends it a sense of separation from the great room (below). Cabinets are painted a distressed black, with nickel hardware, for a contemporary statement. In contrast, galvanized metal lighting and a hickory-topped island offer a rustic feeling. Blending old and new wins again.



"I'm most interested in understanding what was really good in what was done before me, and then using modern comforts and ways of living to tie it all together," explains Roger. "Any good historic design lends itself to contemporary design. Don't out-shout what was good in the past, but don't ignore it, either."

Roger is troubled by the current trend toward tearing down the old to make way for the new. "People need to see how they can open up historic homes," he notes. "An older house is already settled onto the land and fits into the landscape. It's environmentally more sound and culturally more meaningful to take something old, add your two cents to it, and pass it on to the next generation."

If you think that pairing classic New England architecture with modern design seems counterintuitive, Heather Wells has a different slant on it: The two actually complement each other. She points out that classic New England buildings, with their naturally austere lines, can feel contemporary if given the right accents.

The Wells family's collaboration went smoothly. "My parents and I work well



Above: Sandy Wells owned an antiques shop for many years, and her home reflects her passion for the past. Hooked rugs, both antique and reproduction, warm the hardwood floors. Her advice to antiques hunters is simple: Buy what you love and display your favorites (don't let them languish in storage). Below left: Woven Nantucket baskets adorn the master bedroom. Below: Throughout the house, the Wells family used Dutch paints, creating sublime, soothing surfaces whose varying hues shift subtly with the light. The colors are perfect backdrops for their cherished collectibles and original modern art.





Roger, Sandy, and Heather Wells with pals Hanna (left) and Gertie (right)

together—we have a similar design sense,” says Heather, one of three artistic siblings. “Dad was more interested in the facade and the landscape design. I was more pre-occupied with the interior, in how the house was actually going to live. And Mom focused on interior accents and paint colors. It was a true collaboration, bringing all our skills to the table at the same time.”

Heather is very satisfied with the result: “The house works well for my parents. They can live on one level if they need to. And I like the combination of historic and contemporary. It’s comfortable, and you don’t get bored with it. A little of the old, a little of the new—that’s what makes a classic.”

## RESOURCES

**INTERIOR ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN:** Heather Wells, Boston, MA. 617-437-7077; hgwltd.com

**ARCHITECTURE, HOME AND LANDSCAPE DESIGN:** Roger Wells, North Sutton, NH. 603-927-4969; rwellsdesign.com

**HOOKEED RUGS:** Elizabeth Eakins Inc., New York, NY (212-628-1950) and South Norwalk, CT. 203-831-9347; elizabethheakins.com

**KITCHEN LIGHTING:** Louis Poulsen. 954-349-2525; louispoulsen.com

**DUTCH PAINTS:** Fine Points of Europe, Woodstock, VT. 800-332-1556; finepointsofeurope.com

**KITCHEN CABINETS:** Crown Point Cabinetry, Claremont, NH. 800-999-4994; crown-point.com

## DETAIL: LORD OF THE FLUES

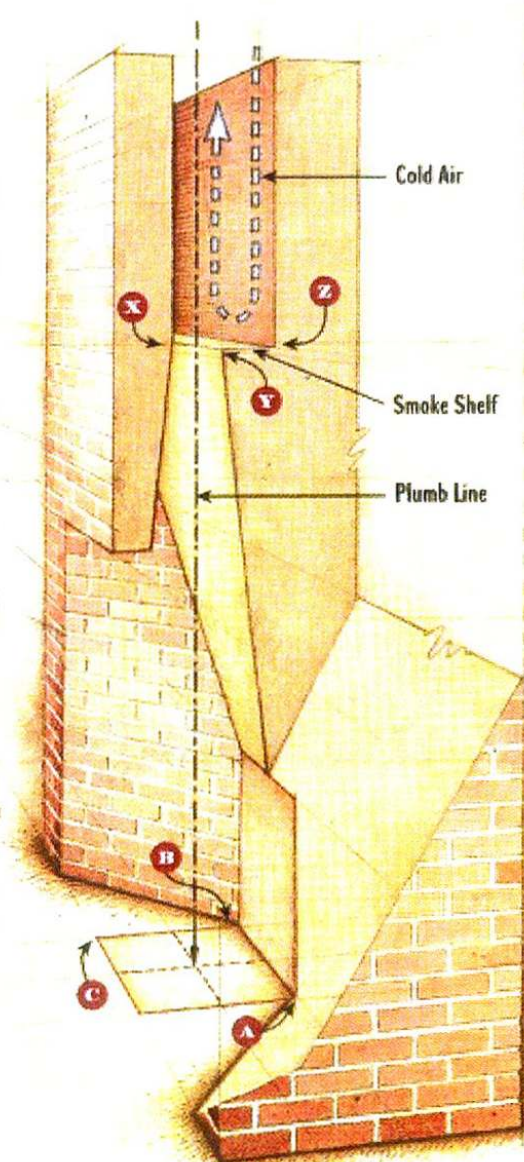
When it came time to build a fireplace, Roger Wells told his mason that he wanted a Rumford—the single best fireplace design to come along in the last 200-plus years. Count Rumford, born Benjamin Thompson in 1753 in Woburn, Massachusetts, was a physicist and genius inventor, a Tory who fled Boston with British troops in 1776 (after he was accused of informing on the Minutemen).

In London, Thompson experimented with gunpowder and other explosives, developed new methods of signaling at sea, and published a treatise on how to build a fireplace that would heat but never smoke. King George III was so impressed with Thompson that he knighted him. Later, Sir Benjamin spent 11 years in Bavaria in various posts, including minister of war, and for this service was made a count of the Holy Roman Empire in 1791. Thompson took the name “Rumford” from his wife’s birthplace, now Concord, New Hampshire. The Rumford (see the diagram below) remains one of the most efficient fireplaces you can build. — Polly Bannister

## Why Smoke Won't Get in Your Eyes

The well-tempered Rumford fireplace features a throat (X-Y) that is a bare four inches from front to back, running the full width of the chimney, all the better to keep heat down below and create a strong draft above. At the throat, where the fireplace becomes the chimney, a shelf (X-Z) has been built so that rising smoke meets and mixes with fresh air entering the chimney from above. A Rumford fireplace locates the fire toward the front, directly beneath the chimney, so smoke rises vertically to the throat without turbulence. Rumford narrowed the fireback, which allowed the sidewalls to be slanted. The fireback width (A-B) is the same as the fireplace depth (B-C), creating a square floor.

— Robert Kaldenbach



FOR SANDY WELLS'S TIPS ON BUYING AND DISPLAYING ANTIQUES, VISIT: [YANKEEMAGAZINE.COM/10THINGS](http://YANKEEMAGAZINE.COM/10THINGS)