



house tour

CHATEAU BOW-BOW

A BLUE-RIBBON HOME FOR PRIZE-WINNING DOGS

On a portion of his picturesque estate near downtown, Alfred Wiggin, president of Chase Bank, built a modest cottage for his daughter in the early 1920s. It remained so until Cecelia Ruggles, a Ridgefield woman aiming to move closer to Main Street, discovered it a few years back. “This house spoke to me when I saw it,” says Ruggles, looking past the daunting task of a major renovation. “I knew exactly what the house needed.” Two critical items on her list of must-haves were creating a welcoming environment for her visiting adult sons and a customized facility for the other babies in her life: her dozen or so award-winning show dogs. >>

BY MIMI SHANLEY TAFT
PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAN LENORE



PASSIONS
Dog art and pieces from around the world fill each room of the Ruggles home. "I want it to feel like home," she says.





WELCOME
DCA Architects added wings to either side of the entryway, which warmly embraces visitors entering through the glorious front garden area.

"I use Cecelia's house as an example for a lot of my clients when we begin to talk about renovation," says Peter Coffin of DCA Architects. It is a cautionary tale. There had been a bad fire early in the life of the house, Ruggles and Coffin discovered. The charred structural supports remained hidden for years

says Coffin, who planned a new house around the core of the old, which needed an overhaul in far greater scale than originally anticipated. The design created an elongated loggia to one side of the living room—a beautifully scaled space with a generous fire-

porch. By making this simple addition, the living room became a dedicated space that is flexible enough for entertaining intimate groups while also welcoming larger gatherings. Standing opposite the living-room fireplace is an imposing yew wood breakfront, pur-

"WE COULDN'T FIGURE OUT HOW IT WAS STILL STANDING," SAYS THE ARCHITECT OF THE ORIGINAL STRUCTURE.

until Coffin's team began peeling back layers to discover a compromised frame. "To be honest, we couldn't figure out how it was standing," says the Ridgefield-based architect.

Still, enough of the character and architectural detail remained, such as the columns on the front porch and mullioned windows. "We tried in many cases to use old windows and maintain the old character of the house,"

place at one end—making it possible to pass from one wing of the house to the other without traversing the living room. Visitors enter under a high-pitched roof above the foyer into the loggia, which by day is flooded with sunlight that pours through French doors. Windows from the original house have been preserved on the interior walls as decorative reminders of a former exterior

chased at Mill House Antiques in Woodbury, Connecticut, that balances the room while providing a safe place for a rare collection of Japanese day dolls.

The project transformed the character of the house by adding wings to either side of the living room, gently and elegantly expanding the existing footprint. Within the wing to one side of the living room are the public



“WHAT I WANTED”

The spacious kitchen is lined with buttery toned wood cabinets, and equipped with first-class appliances, with a comfortable table in a window-filled breakfast nook.







spaces. There is the dining room, exuding an Asian feel, painted a deep sage green and furnished with a custom rug and a table that seats a dozen diners comfortably. Beyond that is a large kitchen that Ruggles proudly points to as a prime example of her collaboration with Coffin. "I designed this kitchen with my architect," she says, "and I love it because it is just what I wanted." It is a spacious room lined with buttery toned wood cabinets, equipped with first-class appliances, and a comfortable table in a window-filled breakfast nook. Further away from the living room is the library. "It is the most heavily used room in the house," says Ruggles. It essentially

AN ELONGATED LOGGIA NEAR THE LIVING ROOM ENABLES PASSING FROM ONE WING OF THE HOUSE TO THE OTHER WITHOUT TRAVERSING THE LIVING ROOM.

functions as a family room—a comfy place to sip a drink before dinner, chat about family news, or put your feet up while perusing a recent copy of *Dogs in Review*.

The south wing is comprised of a suite of rooms that are the exclusive domain of Ruggles. There is a spacious dressing room ("the best thing I ever did"), a private bath, a cozy bedroom, and a sunny sitting room with a pale blue ceiling with soft white clouds painted along its surface. The second floor is also divided into two wings with guest and family rooms.

VERSATILITY

The living room was transformed into a dedicated space that is flexible enough for entertaining intimate groups while also welcoming larger gatherings.

The house has been decorated using a pallet of warm colors and a selection of cheery fabrics that evoke its heritage as a country cottage. In each neatly organized room, the walls, tables, and cabinets are adorned with mementoes humming two themes: artifacts from her worldly travels and trophies from her many victorious appearances in dog shows.

"You should walk into a house and know who lives there," says Ruggles. "Every corner of this house reminds me of something." There are kimonos in various



ABOUT THE HOUSE
This sun room has garden views. Below, an indoor kennel and groom room house the owner's many show dogs. The dining room houses elegant dinner guests.

THESE ARE NO ORDINARY DOGS, MIND YOU. HER BICHON FRISE, NAMED JR, WON BEST IN SHOW AT THE WESTMINSTER KENNEL CLUB DOG SHOW IN 2001.

spots, a delicate silk wall screen purchased in Japan, and an imposing Buddha that holds court in the dining room. And of course there are the dogs.

A defining feature of the house is photos, paintings, sculptures, doo-dads, and trophies of dogs, dogs, dogs. These are no ordinary dogs, mind you. In 2001 Ruggles's Bichon Frise named Special Times Just Right (JR for short) won Best in Show at the Westminster Kennel Club dog show—the premier prize at the world's premier canine event held each year in Madison Square Garden. JR prevailed over 2,500 other dogs of varying breeds. And JR is just one of the several award-winning dogs Ruggles has bred and shown in the past decade and a half. She also raises Lakeland terriers and the rare Sussex spaniel. Last year, Ruggles's Sussex spaniel, a breed that was nearly extinct 40 years ago, was group winner at the





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Westminster Kennel Club, the most prestigious of 36 prizes achieved by that dog.

Hence the need for a custom canine wing, which sits just off the kitchen. In addition to office space and rooms for handlers, there is a large kennel that accommodates a dozen or so of her four-legged friends in enclosed raised stalls. Each stall has its own electrically operated mini garage door that leads to the outside run and play yard. There is a doggie-porcelain tub mounted at counter height

alongside a wall of windows looking out over the play area. The design allows that every surface be hosed down, and the water to drain. In addition, there are dedicated dog laundry facilities and an air-circulation system independent from the rest of the house.

Ruggles has decorated this area with gigantic framed ribbons (mostly blue ones) and an assortment of covers from magazines such as *Dog News* and *Dogs in Review* that sport photographs of her pups. With her ded-

ication to showing and breeding dogs it is easy to predict that there will be other winners to come, posing the happy dilemma of how to make room for more ribbons, silver cups, and doggie magazine covers in a home sporting the Ruggles touch. It is a house that has deep architectural roots in the past but which is well-suited for the future. RM

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editorial@ridgefield-magazine.com