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## Bucking Tradition

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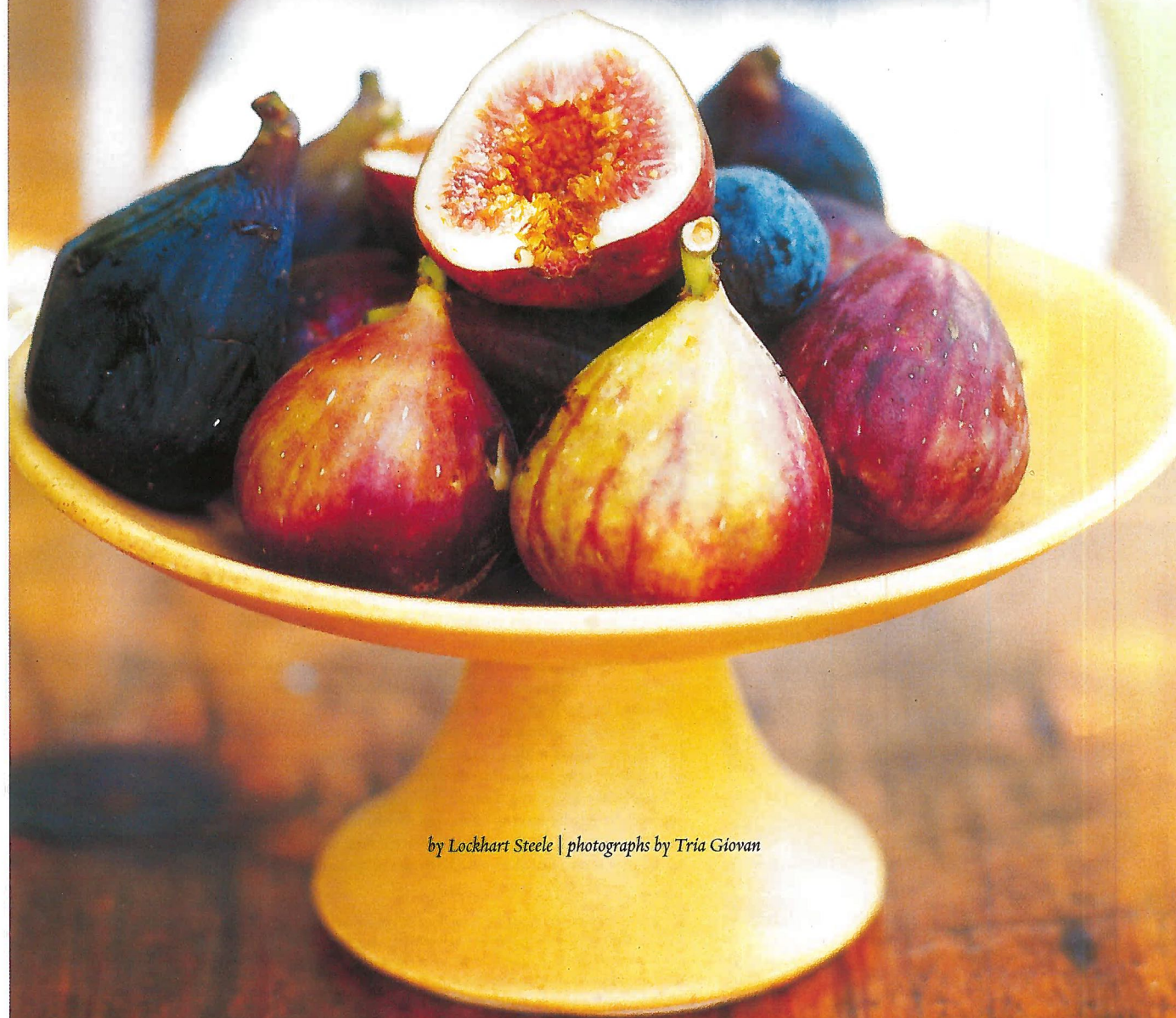
### NET WORTH

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# SHORING UP THE PAST

A SNUG SAG HARBOR COTTAGE IS REMADE IN THE IMAGE  
OF ITS FOREBEAR BY AN IMAGINATIVE COUPLE



by Lockhart Steele | photographs by Tria Giovan





**SPEND AN AFTERNOON WINDING** your way through Sag Harbor's narrow streets and you'll find yourself immersed in colonial splendor. On street after street, grand captains' houses from the 19th century stand astride one another, reminders of an era when hunting whales on the wide ocean brought prosperity to those who manned the helm.

This is not one of those houses.

"They called it Captain Brewer's House," Jon Gilman says of the house he owns with his partner, Brad Learmonth, "but he must have been the poorest captain out there."

Gilman laughs. It's not a rueful laugh, or even one that disguises a faint jealousy. After all, the cozy house Gilman and Learmonth own on a dead-end street just a block off of Sag Harbor's main drag is more remarkable, in its own way, than many of the temples to whale oil that pepper this historic seaside community.

Built in the 1840's, the compact building long housed blue-collar shoremen, who frequented the nearby taverns. Over time, the house was added onto as haphazardly as a child might engineer a Lego structure, with new rooms hung off the back like so much laundry set out to dry. Add over 100 years of general neglect, and you have a house that

**Eat Out** | Brad Learmonth and Jon Gilman set the outdoor table at their Sag Harbor cottage (PREVIOUS SPREAD, LEFT). **In Season** | A bowl of fresh figs (PREVIOUS SPREAD, RIGHT). **Back Track** | French doors open from the rear of the house to the backyard (ABOVE), which boasts a multitude of distinct spaces. **Al Fresco** | A midsummer lunch: barbecued salmon on chives, and fresh figs with sage and spec (LEFT). **Cook Up** | The revamped kitchen includes Thermador ovens and range, and a KitchenAid dishwasher. See Resources.















**India Ink** | The results of the owners' eclectic taste is evident in a downstairs guest room that's referred to as the "India Room" (OPPOSITE). The tiny space holds an iron frame bed, corner brackets mounted as bedside tables and hand-tinted portraits of Indian families that came from a friend who bought a stash of them.

**Mixed Media** | The revamped dining room (RIGHT) now opens to the kitchen. See Resources.



by the turn of the 21st century all but pleaded for the wrecking ball's mercy.

Enter Gilman and Learmonth, who after many years of shacking up in Bridgehampton (literally: their annual summer rental was a converted chicken coop) had set out in search of a place to buy. Shrugging off fears of skyrocketing real estate prices—this was four years ago, mind you—they found themselves drawn to this run-down property that was long on potential but short on just about everything else.

Recalls Gilman, "It was filled with charm, but there wasn't one level surface in the entire house. There wasn't one window that you could open or close." Needless to say, they took the plunge.

The owners knew a renovation would be in the cards, but they decided to live in their new home for a summer to gauge the house's rhythms—and get to know its previous occupants. "There was a lot of intrigue about the house," Learmonth explains. "All of

our neighbors came up to us when we bought it and said, 'You know, this house is haunted.'"

Haunted or not, the small house—it's set on a mere .12 acres—called out for resuscitation. The owners called on a longtime friend, Bridgehampton-based architect Kathryn Fee, to help them remake the residence. First to go were the ersatz additions that had been tacked on to the back of the house. Then, the frame of the house's original front section was moved three feet to get it off the property line on which it sat. "The goal was to preserve the original half-house, then to create an addition with the appropriate scale and detail," Fee says.

In back, a new foundation was dug, and new rooms added, matching the footprint of the original house almost exactly. Wherever possible, details from the original house were retained, such as the dazzling pumpkin pine wood floors in the front of the house on the ground floor. When it came to decorating, a similar philosophy was employed. "We wanted to try to echo some of the









**Good Wood** | In the upstairs bathroom (OPPOSITE), a four-by-four timber from the original structure was incorporated into the design by architect Katbryn Fee. **Top Stop** | At the top of the stairs on the second floor (LEFT), a small desk creates a simple workspace. **New Light** | In the master bedroom (BELOW), a dormer was added to let in more light. **Blue Too** | As a nod to the past, the bedroom's original blue floor (BOTTOM) was carried forward in the new design. See Resources.



things we loved about the original house," Gilman says. In this regard, the new owners were aided by the fact that the previous owner left behind literally every single furnishing—touches that Gilman and Learmonth liberally integrated into their interior design.

When the situation called out for new pieces, the duo was equally resourceful. "We did a lot of scavenging," Gilman recalls. Visiting friends in upstate New York, they found turn-of-the-century showerheads for the outdoor shower. An antique lighting store in Great Barrington proved a fruitful source for unique lighting fixtures of all sizes. And, an expedition on the Bowery in New York City turned up a bargain claw-footed tub (minus one easily-replaced claw).

Local finds figured prominently as well. "Brad and I both love garage sales," Gilman continues. "We'd scour the papers, get up early on Saturday and head out, sticking in and around Sag Harbor. We found so many great things"—like the funky dining room table (\$15) and a butcher block that now occupies the center of the kitchen (\$40).

Ah yes, there is the kitchen—a particularly important space for Gilman, who runs Manhattan-based Taste Caterers. (Learmonth works as director of programming at Aaron Davis Hall in Harlem.) Appliances from Thermador and Sub-Zero create a serious workspace that, like the rest of the house, brims with personality. French doors open to the small but carefully plotted backyard, which includes a dining pavilion set underneath a pergola.

The house may not have been fit for a captain way back when, but it is now. "This house has been transformed from this poor little thing sitting on rocks and sandpiles to something we think is quite special," Learmonth says. "It's our little dream house." 🌟

