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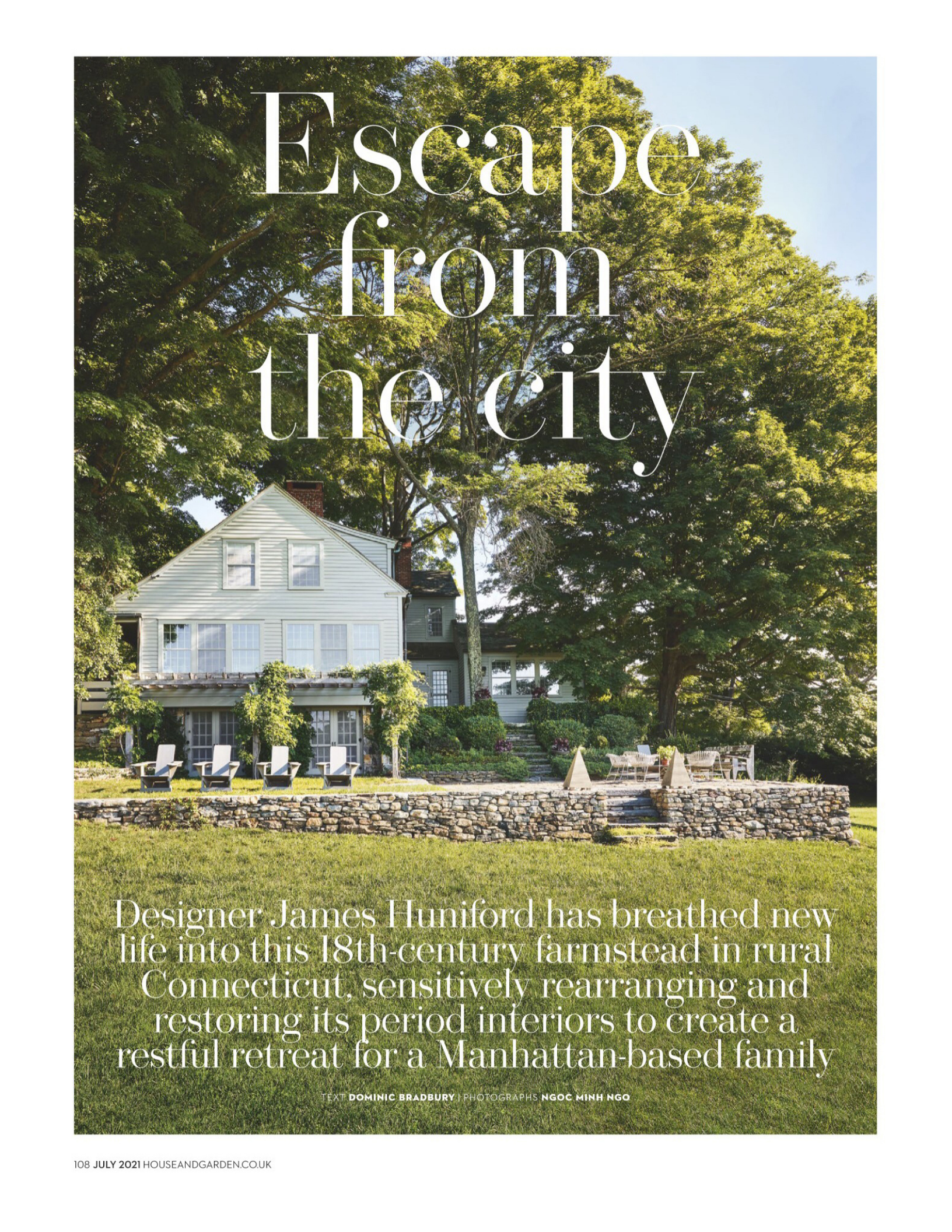
HOUSE & GARDEN[®]

ESCAPE *to*
the COUNTRY

RESTORATIONS AND CONVERSIONS
IN EAST SUSSEX, OXFORDSHIRE
AND CONNECTICUT *Plus*
A WALLED GARDEN REINVENTED



ALL IN THE DETAIL
STYLISH HANDLES
AND HEADBOARDS

A large, light-colored house with a stone wall in front, surrounded by lush green trees and a lawn. The house has a prominent chimney and a covered porch area. The stone wall is made of rough-hewn stones and runs across the foreground. There are several lawn chairs and a dining table with chairs on the lawn. The trees are dense and green, creating a sense of a secluded retreat.

Escape from the city

Designer James Huniford has breathed new life into this 18th-century farmstead in rural Connecticut, sensitively rearranging and restoring its period interiors to create a restful retreat for a Manhattan-based family

TEXT **DOMINIC BRADBURY** | PHOTOGRAPHS **NGOC MINH NGO**



EXTERIOR Surrounded by towering mature trees, the house is in a beautifully leafy setting.
TERRACE An Italian linen tablecloth, French aptware plates and fresh flowers complement the vintage Salterini wrought-iron garden set



ENTRANCE HALL Vintage Howard & Sons-style armchairs upholstered in Scalamandré's 'Elsie de Wolfe' linen are arranged around an inlaid bone and brass coffee table. **KITCHEN Units** by Huniford Design Studio are topped with bluestone. **BREAKFAST ROOM** A primitive-style dining table is teamed with vintage hickory chairs; the cushions are in Lee Jofa's 'Courtenay' cotton in french blue. **DINING ROOM** Walls lined with old French grain sacks create the backdrop for a Dutch chandelier by H Berlage

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here is a gentle and escapist character to the countryside of Litchfield County. Around two hours' drive north-east of New York City, it is a rural New England setting that draws those looking for a quieter way of life, as well as being home to a community of artists, writers and designers. When the Manhattan-based owners of this farmhouse began looking for somewhere to spend weekends and holidays, it was the sense of character,

history and calm that drew them to this area of Connecticut.

'It is a restful retreat from the city for us,' says the owner of the 18th-century farmstead, which has a guest house and barn. 'We tend to spend a lot of weekends up here and sometimes a week or two at a time. Our children are now 22, 19 and 13, but my husband and I were thinking of the house as a place that would evolve with the family, and of a time when they might even have children themselves. We wanted space to be able to spend time with them - having the farmhouse and the guest house means we have a good set-up.'

Parts of the farmhouse date back to the 1750s, while others are from the 1800s. For the next stage in the evolution of their home, the owners turned to the designer James Huniford, known as Ford. They had spotted an earlier project of his - a barn conversion in Woodstock - in the pages of a magazine. After meeting at the house, Ford and his clients got on well, agreeing to push ahead with the project to sensitively update and restore the house rather than reinventing it.

'We have always wanted an old house, but also loved the fact that it had grown over time and been added on to,' says the owner. 'It felt interesting, as though it had a story and we were adding another layer to that story. But we wanted the house to keep its integrity and, when we talked to Ford and brought him over here, he had such a great vision for it. He knew exactly what we wanted but also had his own ideas.'

Fully respecting the provenance of the house, Ford kept any structural changes to a minimum, while drawing out the character of the interiors. One of the key decisions was to turn the old dining room alongside the side door into a welcoming entrance hall, with a sofa and armchairs arranged around the existing chimneypiece. This space is now a firm family favourite. A new dining room - full of soft tones and rustic textures - was created in the former library.

'The brief was to update the house, while making it feel comfortable and inviting for the family, with nothing too fussy or too formal,' says Ford. 'For the dining room, for example, I found some old linen grain sacks in Massachusetts and had them backed with paper, so that they could be put up like wallpaper. The stripes on the sacks don't quite align





BATHROOM Vintage Japanese window shades filter the light flooding in above an antique porcelain bathtub, which sits on the patterned floor in Pewabic glazed tiles in alabaster and aegean. The vintage brushed nickel and opaline glass flush-mounted light is by Sergio Mazza. **SPARE ROOM** Two frosted-glass star pendant lights hang above a pair of early American beds. The muted tones of a vintage striped cotton and wool flatweave rug are echoed by the roman blind in 'Mohave' silk in natural by Schumacher



and their tones and textures are slightly different. It is rare to have a client who understands that kind of creativity and that not everything has to be consistent. They didn't want elaborate curtains anywhere downstairs, so I had shutters made that are almost Shaker-like.'

In the kitchen, Ford exposed the original wooden beams, restored the oak floorboards and replaced a run of Eighties windows with traditional rope-and-weight sash windows. Full of light and enjoying views over the garden, the room is spacious enough to accommodate not just the custom-designed units, but also a breakfast table and a seating area, with an elegant hickory and canework bench.

'The kitchen is simple and modest. And I love that hickory bench – it has such an under-appreciated American sensibility,' says Ford. 'There was no set formula and no rush to get everything done by a certain date. It was an evolving process, with all these intricate decisions that made a big difference to the house. The family gave me a lot of freedom to be imaginative, but at the same time approved everything before we went ahead. I like to have clients who are involved. They were curious, always wanting to learn more. I think they really enjoyed the process.'

There is a soothing quality to the family spaces such as the sitting room, in which light colours and organic textures prevail, lifted by the rich quality of the sunlight spilling in through the windows. But there is also a choice of hideaways, including the den and the bedrooms upstairs, where modest touches of colour and pattern stand out against a calm and pale palette of soft whites and celadon greens. Here, as in a number of Ford's other recent rural projects, his remit also extended to the garden, where his approach was equally thoughtful and understated.

'I have always loved gardens and landscape design, but it is really about creating the right fit for the property and the client,' says Ford, who recently published a monograph on his work. 'With this Connecticut garden, I took a refined, minimalist approach with green and grey planting. It's more about shapes and forms than anything extensive, with these beautiful stone paths and dry-stone walls.'

For the family, the farmstead has proved such a success that they are now working with Ford on their flat in New York City, which is also being gradually and gently updated. 'The apartment is about a slow evolution,' says the owner. 'It is so different from our country house, where we knew he would do a beautiful job but still exceeded our expectations. The farmstead is so much more comfortable and restful than we thought it could be – we are thrilled with the results' □

*Huniford Design Studio: huniford.com. James Huniford: *At Home* (The Monacelli Press, £40)*

'The brief was to UPDATE the house, while making it feel COMFORTABLE and INVITING for the family, with nothing too fussy or TOO FORMAL'



SPARE ROOM The classic floral prints of the bed covered in 'Santander' linen by Claremont and the Victorian armchair in a vintage textile are balanced by a 'Bellucci' rug in ice by Stark