

DESIGN FOR THE WELL-LIVED LIFE

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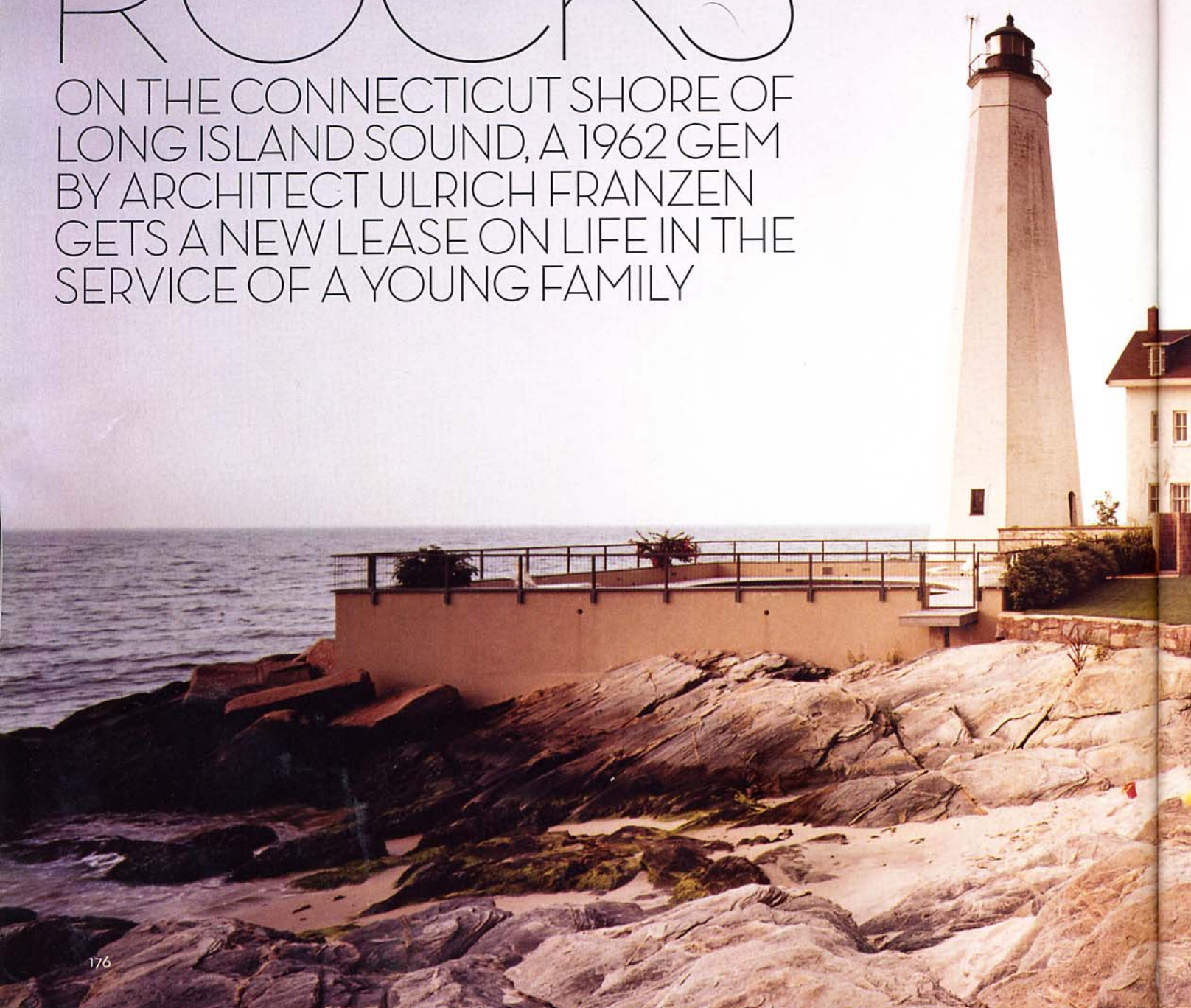
THE
LUXURY
OF
QUIET

ROOMS THAT
SOOTHE,
GARDENS
THAT CALM...
SHHH...



MODERNISM ON THE ROCKS

ON THE CONNECTICUT SHORE OF
LONG ISLAND SOUND, A 1962 GEM
BY ARCHITECT ULRICH FRANZEN
GETS A NEW LEASE ON LIFE IN THE
SERVICE OF A YOUNG FAMILY



When it comes to architecture, good geometry makes good neighbors. The dramatic sweep of the horizontal roofline of the 1962 house by Ulrich Franzen serves as a wondrous counterpoint to the soaring height of the 1801 lighthouse on the property next door.



Intimate seating groups ensure that the scale of the main room is never overwhelming. FURNISHINGS B&B Italia chairs from the Maxalto collection surround a George Nakashima table. The Charles seating system—sofa, chairs, and coffee table, also by B&B—outfits the living area. An Eero Saarinen Womb chair by Knoll sits at the far wall. Cabinets, right, by Ulrich Franzen, are original to the house. LIGHTING The sconces are reproductions of a '50s design by Serge Mouille. RVG Kilim, ca. 1940s, ABC Carpet & Home.

ver the course of the 1950s and 1960s, a generation of post-Bauhaus architects at work in the United States steered modernism away from the orthodoxy of the International Style. Personal expression and unabologetically dramatic effects were no longer taboo. Architects could acknowledge and explore the decorative aspects of modern building materials and construction methods without betraying the cause of modernism.

One of the finest flowers of high modernism's mannerist period blossomed, improbably, on a rocky point of the Connecticut coast overlooking the northern reaches of Long Island Sound. Designed by architect Ulrich Franzen in 1962, the Castle house, as it was then known, brought a new American architectural language to the shore of a historic fishing village known for its eighteenth- and nineteenth-century homes and warehouses. In fact, the home's immediate neighbor was, and still is, a white stone lighthouse built in 1801.

A 1962 article in *House & Garden* lauded Franzen's creation as "A Work



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of Art to Live In." "Architecture is more than the two-dimensional aspect of the facade or even the three-dimensional aspect of the whole exterior, for it also involves the dimension of time—the time it takes to see what happens as you move from one room to another or walk up a flight of stairs," the article notes. "True architecture provokes an emotional response. It kindles excitement, induces serenity or fosters other joys that lift the simple acts of eating and sleeping, cooking meals, and relaxing in the sun to a level well above that of ordinary living. A house that truly qualifies as architecture is, in itself, a work of art."

Franzen's artistry may have been apparent 40 years ago, but by the end of the twentieth century, the Castle house had fallen victim to desuetude and neglect. The wrecking ball loomed, but it did not drop. An adventurous couple with three young children rescued the modernist gem three years ago and gave it new life and purpose. Every endangered architectural landmark should be lucky enough to have such enlightened patrons.

"The new owners genuinely appreciated the quality and complexity of Franzen's design," says Gregory Cranford of Brennan Beer Gorman, the renovation architects. "The husband owns a development and construction company, and his wife grew up in one of the great Charles Moore houses, which gave her a real passion for modern architecture. They were determined to honor the original design intent."

Cranford entered the project following an earlier renovation by architect Peter de Bretteville, who had enclosed the breezeway that connects the main house and the guest pavilion, and built new sleeping quarters for the family along one side of the house. To ensure a seamless integration of architecture and interiors, Cranford enlisted the services of designers Steve Schappacher and Rhea White of SchappacherWhite. The team

One of the many beauties of modernist architecture is the way it perfectly frames objects, nature, and people. 1 Chinese scholar's rocks and a Sumatran textile, both from Throckmorton Fine Art, NYC, make a vivid tableau in the dining area. 2 The family gathers in the sitting area midway down the dock. 3 A view from the street shows the low-slung facade of the garage, tucked neatly beneath the guesthouse. A Karmann Ghia is parked out front. 4 A George Nelson platform bench sits beside a patinated bronze gate in the entry hall. The floors are slate and were made to match the original covered walkway. 5 Schappacher, White, and Cranford reconfigured the kitchen and breakfast area into an open plan. Saarinen Tulip chairs and table by Knoll sit beneath an Arco floor lamp. Turkish wool rug, ABC Carpet & Home. Harry Bertoia bar stools, also by Knoll, sit at the island.





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collaborated closely to develop plans that accommodate the needs of the twenty-first century yet still respect the integrity of Franzen's conception. It was an exercise in sensitive reinterpretation, not historic verisimilitude.

The house emerged from the renovation process with its basic plan and structural logic intact. Its signature space is still the living room, a seemingly independent glass pavilion flanked by brick private wings and crowned by a floating cypress ceiling of paraboloid vaults, which the designers restored. The cypress canopy cantilevers dramatically over a poolside terrace, which hovers over the rocky coastline and juts out into Long Island Sound.

"It wasn't easy to match the rigor of the existing scheme," Schappacher admits. "The more we studied it, the more enthralled we became with the intricacy and complex geometries of the detailing."



The combination pool and Jacuzzi, this page, below, takes in views of Long Island Sound and the lighthouse next door. Contour lounge chairs by Richard Schultz sit on the terrace. ■ Above, in the guesthouse bedroom, a butterfly stool by Sori Yanagi accompanies a bed dressed in Unikko linens by Marimekko. Esque blown glass, Troy, NYC. ■ Batgirl guards a hallway featuring a fun house mirror, from Troy, and a Nakashima bench, opposite page. The passage is lit by alternating lighting panels and skylights, the latter an original element that was restored. The closets have their original walnut doors and rosewood doorknobs; the floor is travertine. See Shopping, last pages.

"It was like a crazy thesis project that you can't get away from," adds White.

One of BBG's boldest moves was the introduction of two new sets of nine-foot-tall sliding glass panels into the solid brick walls of the private wings. "For some strange reason, Franzen wanted to direct views from certain rooms away from the water," explains Cranford. The new windows now provide stunning vistas across the landscaped pool and onto the Sound from the kitchen/family room and the master bedroom.

Schappacher and White worked with Cranford to reconfigure and enlarge the kitchen. By combining the space with a small family dining room, the designers created a fluid, open plan that suits the owners' lifestyle. They also rebuilt the circular, open-air dining and entertaining platform, which sits halfway down a dock that extends into the water on stilts from the side of the house.

"The beauty of having a client in construction is that you can achieve a level of craftsmanship and precision that is critical in modern houses," says Schappacher. "Every line in this house is considered. We obsessed over every detail so that the spirit of the house, even in areas that were completely redesigned, remains true to the original." □



