

The “Art” (& Decor) of a Flip

Interior Designer Tamara Magel completes a gutsy renovation on a sleepy NW Woods home

Dawn Watson | March 9, 2016

It's not often that an interior designer has full creative control of an assignment. But when they do, the results of their passion project can be singularly extraordinary.

[Tamara Magel](#) recently completed just such a commission. The Sag Harbor-based interior designer decided to jump in to the hot Hamptons real estate market with both feet. She located and purchased a property that could have been a teardown but instead she opted to do the opposite: a tear-up—renovating and then flipping a four-bedroom, three-bath shingle-style home on Hands Creek Road in East Hampton.

Her goal was simple—to do exactly what she wanted to do in order to turn an unremarkable 2,600-square-foot house that she had purchased for \$674,000 into a design showplace priced to resell at just over a million dollars. The comps in the immediate area suggested it would sell quickly. And it did; literally to the first potential buyer who walked through the door. And there were several back-up offers.

“As a designer, you're always collaborating. But as an artist, you want free reign,” says Ms. Magel. “So I decided to buy a house and renovate it totally in my own vision—using the house as my canvas—and see what happened.”

The circa-2003 two-story traditional wasn't a disaster when Ms. Magel bought it. But it was pretty plain: dated pastel walls adorned with poster prints, sparse Midwestern-style décor, and lower- to mid-range cabinetry and hardware.

The designer, however, looked past the negative elements that had turned other house hunters off. She was taken by the abode's pure potential. Located on .59 acres at the northernmost point of Hands Creek, which opens into Three Mile Harbor, the residence came with deeded water access, a pool, a fireplace, oak floors and 9-foot-high ceilings.

“The day I first saw the house, people were walking in, turning around and leaving. Nobody had faith. They just saw peach walls, green wallpaper and Home Depot cabinets,” she recalls. “But I saw those soaring ceilings, wood floors and the open floor plan. I saw the things that were very valuable to me.”

The house's dramatic transformation didn't include a change of footprint or even major construction. What it did take was creativity, a skilled eye, stylish flair, and a significant amount of upgrading.



“We were able to achieve a very stylish and clean look within a particular budget that ended up turning out really great,” says Ms. Magel. “It's not only a look I'd do for a client, I briefly thought about keeping it to live in myself.”

The biggest changes came in the kitchen and baths, reports the designer, who is known for her use of neutral palettes; textural materials; and marriage of chic, sophisticated style with comfort.

“I thought about where I wanted to spend the money. I knew if it were my house that I'd want a great

kitchen because when you buy a house like this in the Hamptons, you're either going to be entertaining outside or gathering around the kitchen,” says Ms. Magel.

For the kitchen, she practically tripled the space by removing all the upper and lower cabinets, two refrigerators and an old-fashioned looking green sink. She then remade the walls with a white brick-patterned tile, and opted to stain the floors dark, almost black, in contrast to the white walls, adding depth to the space. The designer also added a grouping of light wooden



beams to the white ceiling above, setting off the kitchen from a newly created eat-in dining space and open living room. And she added professional-grade appliances, an oversized island gathering space, and marble-topped white counters with black hardware. Additionally, she decided to take away the upper cabinets completely, replacing them with white shelving.

The designer also decided to turn the former formal dining room into a den. Away from the kitchen and not very inviting, the layout didn't seem to make much sense. But as a den, Ms. Magel sees it as a much more useful use of space.

In the formerly humdrum and inexpensively appointed baths, she went for clean lines and luxury. The peach and beige color schemes were replaced with high-end neutral slate and white marble, accented by black hardware.

Throughout the interiors of the house, the peach paint and green wallpaper were removed and replaced with Dove White paint. The thin moldings were upgraded to thicker, wider and more expensive looking versions. And the main rooms were curated with furnishings personally selected by the designer. Approximately half of them were retained in the sale.

Outside, Ms. Magel improved the pool-facing wooden deck and the driveway but otherwise left the property untouched. As a rule, she says, landscaping adds expense that wouldn't be prudent in the price range of a million-dollar flip.

“At this price point, you have to be very careful,” she warns. “The yard was pretty and it wouldn't have made sense for me to get deep into it so I left that for the next owner.”

The show-stopping stunner was not a one-off for the designer, she says. Even though margins can be slim, if she picks just the right property again, Ms. Magel is eager to find another house to renovate in her own style and then sell. After all, style shouldn't be limited to houses in the \$10-million-and-up range.

“I think that people in every price point are interested in something unique, not cookie-cutter style,” she says. “I know I'd prefer to buy a house that's more thoughtful. Something with a soul.”

That said, buying here in the Hamptons with the intent of reselling quickly can be quite tricky, says [Judi Desiderio](#), Town & Country Real Estate's Chief Executive Officer.

“Flipping homes is not for the fainthearted,” she says, adding that here on the East End, even the best real estate deal comes at a premium price. “But when you hit it right, it can be addictive.”

However, as long as the conditions are right, Ms. Magel says to count her in for another flipping project.

“With this house, I was able to let my imagination run wild and it paid off,” she says. “I want to do it again.”