



The Black and White Beach Retreat

SHELTER ISLAND, LONG ISLAND

Architects can often neglect their own homes. It's a professional hazard, like dentists forgetting to check their own teeth, or mechanics disregarding their cars. Steve Schappacher, however, is different. His house shines with his attention to detail – although this could also be his wife's influence.

Schappacher and his stylist / designer wife, Rhea White, are the duo behind SchappacherWhite, a design studio based in New York with an office on Shelter Island. A small firm, they are fast establishing a reputation for grand glamour.

Several years ago, they were seeking an escape on Long Island, which is where many New Yorker go when they want a break from Manhattan's pace and madness. Bypassing the usual suspects – East Hampton, Montauk, even Sag Harbor – they found themselves aboard a ferry to Shelter Island. It was here that they experienced a kind of architectural epiphany.

Shelter Island isn't like the rest of the Hamptons or Long Island. It's not flashy. It doesn't encourage fast cars. And the only place you're likely to see brazen bikinis is at Sunset Beach, Andre Balzac's whimsical but mostly understated hotel on the north side of the island. Shelter Island is for those who want,

well, shelter – those who want peace and quiet, not loud, look-at-me style.

When the design duo stumbled across this 1904 cottage, they took one look at its serene location, its expanse of land out the back, and its potential to be so much more, and decided to buy. While they return to New York occasionally, they've never looked back.

Undertaking the renovations of the cottage was a major project, but the two – who share a similar design aesthetic – never wavered in their belief. They embarked on a renovation that virtually gutted the interior and made it brighter, more stylish, and far more spacious. New floors and walls were installed, new bathrooms were crafted, a kitchen was created, and structural foundation work was strengthened. They then opened it up to the exterior by linking it with external porches and an elongated pergola that runs to a freestanding fireplace. Lastly, they added a swimming pool and turned the existing barn into a pool house. The change was amazing.

Half of the change was architectural, and the credit for that goes to Steve Schappacher. But the other half focused on interior design, and the credit for that must go to his wife. Rhea White is a marvel at making spaces look



extraordinary, and for this, her own home, she did more than merely whitewash floors, slipcover furniture, and put in jute rugs and awning stripes. She created a whole new style of interior design: think black and white beach glamour layered over Shelter Island simplicity.

“The house is small, and so care had to be taken with the scale of the furniture, so it didn’t overwhelm the rooms and make them feel crowded,” she explains. “However, we also wanted to bring a sense of boldness into the design, and tried to achieve this with the graphic quality of the stripes and the black / white color combo.”

Being pragmatic souls, they also knew their beach house would be invaded by friends and family, and that it would be subject to “lots of sandy feet and swimsuits”. So they tried to make the house as practical as possible with pared-back floorboards, entrances with ample coat hooks, and various easily accessed “chill-out” spaces. The pergola, reached via either the gate or the living room, is one; the pool house is another, and the hammock slung between two tall trees is a third.

As it all came together, the house became a culmination of their talents, but it also became



a summary of the things they loved – including personal, beach-themed mementos like feathers, nests, and shells.

Their favorite place? It's the pool, they say. "We designed it with the steps running lengthwise, so it's perfect for sunning or lounging with cocktails. It's a great gathering spot for all our friends."

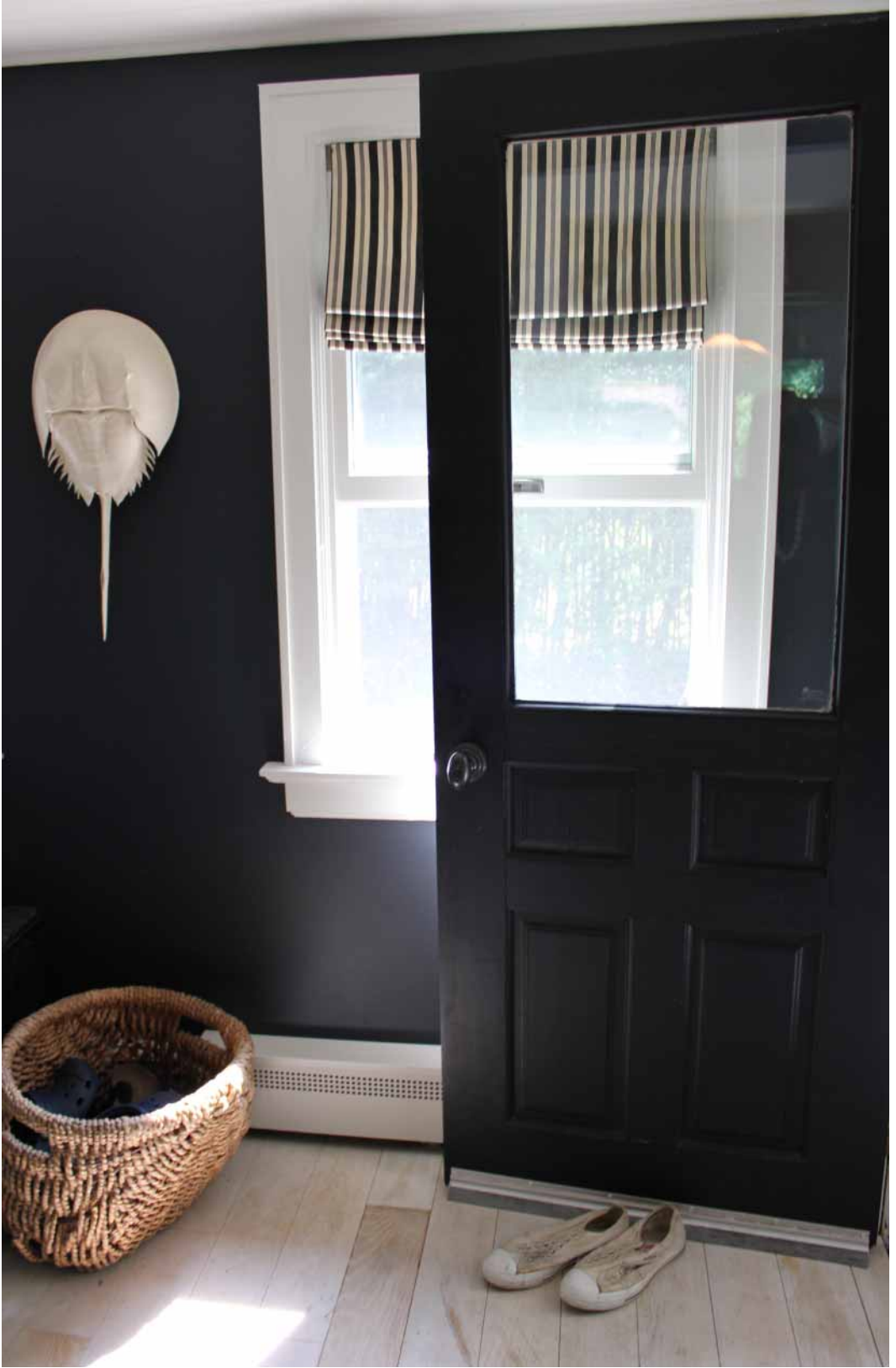
But then they also adore the outdoor living / dining room they created under the romantic length of the pergola and its 17-foot fireplace. "With all the outdoor living spaces, the house seems so much bigger than it actually is."

In short, it's a home for all living styles, all seasons, and all kinds of visitors. The design duo are now looking to bestow their architectural magic on another Shelter Island fixer-upper, but every time they look around this house, they feel too sentimental to leave.













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