

LIVING spaces

HOMES AND LANDSCAPES OF WESTERN MA / NORTHERN CT

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Rooms *with a* **View**

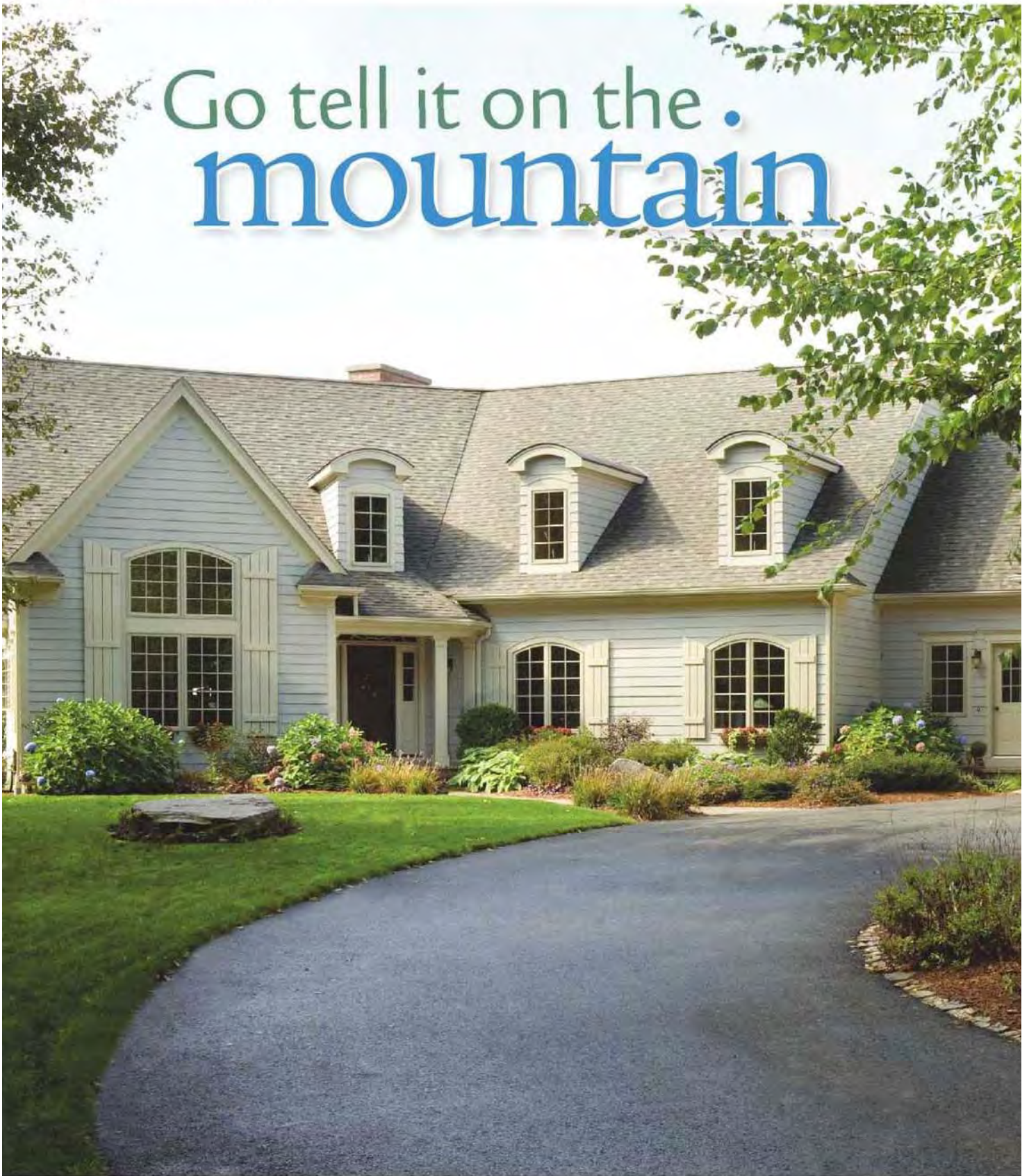
LAVISH LIVING REACHES NEW HEIGHTS

OVERLOOKING THE QUABBIN
RESERVOIR IN **HARDWICK**

A **WILBRAHAM** HOME
PERCHED ABOVE THE VALLEY

WESTERLY VIEWS FROM
A **HAMPDEN** CONTEMPORARY

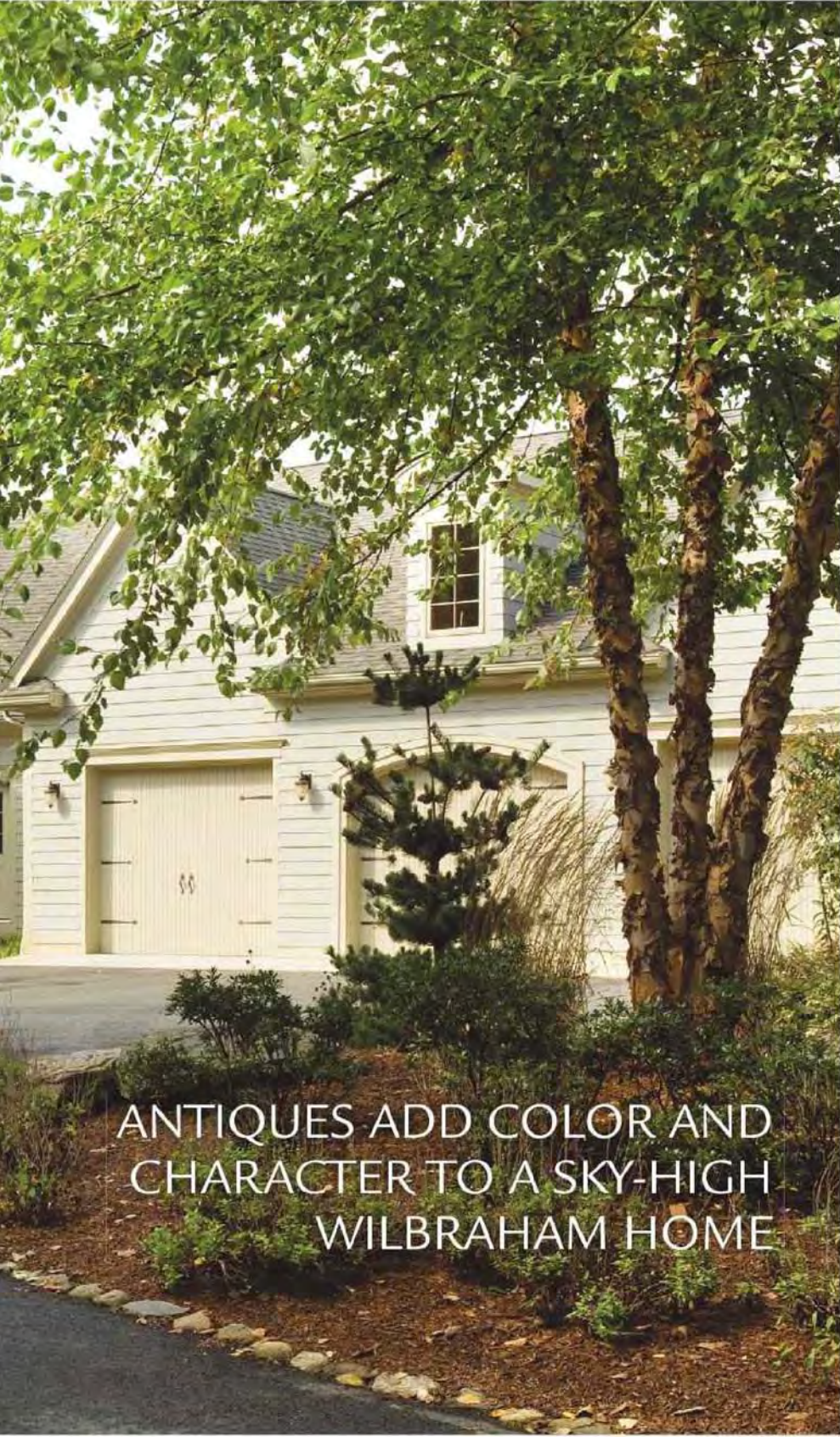
Go tell it on the . mountain



Story | Rich J. Wirth

Tony Gomes has come full circle. Hailing from a small town in northern Portugal, a mountainous region with plateaus indented by river valleys, Gomes, vice president of marketing and corporate strategies for Big Y Foods, Inc., and his wife Karen are living the high life on the crest of Wilbraham Mountain in the town's prestigious Ridge Road neighborhood. Once dotted with cottages and bungalows, some of which still exist today, the area has become a haven for high-end homes.

Living comfortably in East Longmeadow but wanting more land, the couple purchased the 13-acre property in 1995, but it would be almost a decade before any construction would com-



ANTIQUES ADD COLOR AND
CHARACTER TO A SKY-HIGH
WILBRAHAM HOME

photo: Corey Fitzgerald

mence. The timeline is atypical but so, too, was the property. Purchased at auction after the previous owner fell into foreclosure, it included an existing three-story, 3,200-square-foot garage designed to house 12 cars on two levels, and a foundation for a home substantially larger than the family of four required. A decision would eventually be made to tear down the top portion of the garage and salvage the basic structure.

By early 1997, the Gomes had hired a local architect to design a custom home, and had planned to begin construction in 1999 so their then middle school-age children Anthony, now 25, and Valerie, now 23, would not have to switch school systems after entering high school. A year later, their search for a quality builder led them to Kent W. Pecoy of Pecoy Signature Homes in West Springfield

and Avon, Conn., who set up tours of some of his recently completed homes. "We recognized the quality of the work immediately," Tony said. Wilbraham-based Home Building Consultant Elizabeth Murphy would join the mix soon after, working closely with the couple to better understand their design priorities. "They wanted to build us a home that would fit who we are," Tony said.

Despite the momentum, the Gomes decided to postpone construction for another four years so their children could attend—and graduate from—East Longmeadow High School with their peers. The decision would turn out to be a blessing in disguise; case in point—the home's 700-square-foot in-law apartment was not included in the original design, but Karen's 85-year-old mother, Gerry Partyka, had since come to

A vintage lighting fixture over the center island inspired the color scheme in the capacious kitchen. Putty cabinetry and stained ash flooring create a neutral palette in juxtaposition with the deep Cabernet walls.



photo: David Stansbury

Angled windows in the eat-in kitchen provide contrasting views from the same vantage point.



photo: Corey Fitzgerald



photo: David Stansbury

The custom staircase (with mahogany railings) was placed in a prominent location to easily convey to first-time visitors that the home continues downstairs. West Hartford Stairs & Cabinets, Inc., of Newington, Conn., designed the showpiece.



photo: David Stansbury

The angled library makes efficient use of the available space. Columns help define the "rooms" in an otherwise open floor plan.

live with them. In the end, the original design was scrapped altogether. "We put our trust in Kent and let him come up with a new design that incorporated the good features from the old plan," Tony said. "Because our target date for beginning construction was still almost a year away, we had time to consider various ideas." Murphy added, "It's a lifetime home as a result."

The deceptively large French Country-style home has angled wings, faux dormers and interior columns. Rooted in the rural French countryside, the French Country style includes both modest farmhouse designs as well as estate-like chateaus and, at its roots, exudes a rustic warmth. Coming from a Saltbox Colonial, known for its sloping rear roofline and symmetrical layout, the couple knew they wanted an open floor plan, but given the home's mountainside perch, taking maximum advantage of the stunning view was their first priority. Elevated some 25 feet above street level and accessible via a winding driveway, the property features a breathtaking 180-degree panoramic view of the Connecticut River Valley. You'd need wings—man-made or otherwise—to get a better perspective, with Skinner Mountain, Bradley International Airport and the Hartford, Conn., skyline in your periphery. "You can practically see the planes hit the runway (at Bradley)," Tony added. The Mt. Tom ski area in Holyoke was still operational when the Gomes bought the property, and the abandoned trails are still visible.

This writer arrived just in time to enjoy a mid-winter's sunset, and stayed long enough to view what Murphy calls "the night show"—when the valley below begins to twinkle with light. If you didn't know better, you'd swear you were in the Hollywood hills looking down on the city of Los Angeles. Arguably, the best spot to view the night show is from the deck-mounted soaking tub in the master bathroom. A window in the bathtub isn't a novel idea—we've seen lots of them—but they're typically covered with Roman shades or plantation shutters out of necessity. Considering where this home is sited, you can dare to go bare and still enjoy a dazzling, unencumbered view. Windows throughout the home were left uncovered on purpose, save for "sheer-

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weave" solar shades in the great room and the master bedroom, which diffuse light to reduce the fading of textiles and interior furnishings, and help control solar gain. Better still, they provide daytime privacy while allowing excellent outward visibility even when fully closed.

In turn, Mother Nature dictated the home's interesting western-facing tapered rectangle dimensions, where angled windows offer independent views from the same vantage point. Pecoy took a cue from Floridian architecture, Tony said, where water views are commonplace.

Due diligence is required when building a home at this altitude, including sturdier 2x6 construction and heftier, 50-year roof shingles that are rated to withstand high winds. The front of the home is sided with environmentally-friendly cedar shakes, the sides and back with cedar siding, which is naturally resistant to decay. Given the home's 180 degrees of western exposure, Brazilian Ipe (pronounced e-pay) was

used for the decking. An incredibly strong, dense hardwood, Ipe resists rot, insects and mold. "After five years, we've had absolutely no issues with either wind or moisture from the driving rains," Tony said.

Antiques played a significant role in the evolution of the home's interior design thanks, in large part, to Karen's mother, who has been antiquing for the better part of her 85 years. It was never for profit, Karen said, but rather "five and dime collecting" done purely for pleasure. "But she did it passionately," Murphy added. From Victorian table lamps to Depression-era glass, Partyka's treasures are employed judiciously throughout the home. A frosted pink satin glass rose bowl was wired and hung as drop lighting over the kitchen island. To maximize light diffusion on the workspace below, two brand-new one-light pendants were suspended on either side and hand painted by Indian Orchard-based decorative artist Claudine Bouchard to

African series granite and copious cherry cabinetry give the master bathroom an understated elegance. The unimpeded view from the deck-mounted soaking tub redefines relaxation.



photo: David Stansbury



photo: Corey Fitzgerald

Solid granite unearthed during construction was salvaged for use in a retaining wall along the western edge of the property. The homeowners have hosted “a wedding and a half” here thanks to the coveted view.

mimic the variations of the rose bowl’s molded petal motif. The fixture’s delicate pink hue influenced the bold color scheme in the kitchen, particularly the vibrant Cabernet walls. Working with Murphy to create a design scheme, the homeowners bucked several trends here, starting with the cabinetry, which they painted a neutral putty. Instead of popular Brazilian cherry floors, the couple chose ash, which was stained to achieve a darker, warmer tone. Ash has a light, natural color that varies from almost pure white to grey. Pewter pieces in Partyka’s collection inspired the backsplash medallion, which features a grapes motif. A homage to Portugal’s wine regions, that motif was repeated on the hearth-style range hood and the decorative corbels on the center island.

The real smile of the kitchen is the walk-in pantry, but calling this 150-square-foot space a pantry doesn’t do it justice. “In New York this would be a bedroom,” Karen quipped. Bright and airy thanks to an unexpected arched

window, the pantry houses kitchen accoutrements stacked meticulously on chair rail-height open shelves. “It’s just so functional,” Tony said. A smattering of vintage kitchen utensils adds a dash of primitive charm to the space. “Unusual pieces give this home such personality,” Murphy said.

Once the decision was made to create living areas on the home’s lower level, the central staircase became a critical element in aesthetically connecting the two levels. “We didn’t want to give the lower level a ‘basement’ feel,” Tony said, “so we placed the (quarter-landing) staircase in a prominent location that would easily convey to first-time visitors that the home continued downstairs.” West Hartford Stairs & Cabinets in Newington, Conn., designed the multi-spindled piece, which is topped with mahogany railings.

In addition to a sprawling in-law apartment and two bedrooms, the lower level features a walkout basement. Sloping lots are a fact of life in many parts of the country; making the best use of the buildable space requires home plans



photo: Corey Fitzgerald

The back of the house is architecturally stunning. Cedar siding was chosen given the property's 180 degrees of western exposure. The decking was crafted from Brazilian Ipe, which is prized for its durability and natural resistance to decay.

that accommodate the slope, and walkout—or daylight—basements are one of the best ways to do just that. Benefits of a daylight basement include a direct connection with the outdoors, and the natural light that comes from full-size windows (and windowed doors) that are above the grade level. Given the view, it was a no-brainer here.

The lower level was the last to be finished as the homeowners took Murphy's advice to wait and see what they felt the home was missing. But Tony knew he wanted a wet bar for entertaining and to display his collection of vintage port wine bottles. Port is a sweet red wine originating from the Douro Valley in northern Portugal that is often served with dessert. The space has a casual formality. A dry-stack fireplace crafted from local quarry stone complements the engineered mahogany hand-scraped flooring. This style of flooring has exploded in popularity in recent years, particularly among those who are fans of classic, country and Old-World styles. The distressing on the surface of the wood adds a sense of age to the flooring, making it perfect if you want a more rustic feel to your décor or simply want to add texture, beauty and visual interest to a room.

An evolving project almost 10 years in the making, the Gomes couldn't be happier with their mountainside home. "Karen and I are not big travelers. Here, we enjoy the relaxation, the privacy, the wildlife and a first-hand view of what nature has to offer, including the spectacular sunsets, the stars and even those wicked lightning storms approaching from the west," Tony said. "We're very lucky—we have a home and a vacation home in one. And, unlike a traditional vacation home that you can enjoy only occasionally, we take pleasure in ours year-round." ❖



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