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Reluctant to Leave a Shelter Island Vacation, They Moved Full Time

A family fell in love with the spot near the eastern end of Long Island, so they bought and gut-renovated a house, keeping energy-efficiency top of mind.



By Tim McKeough

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After Hannes Ciatti and Verena Zannantoni rented a house on Shelter Island, N.Y., in the summer of 2020, they experienced a vacation-time pang of reluctance familiar to many. They didn't really want to return home.

For Mr. Ciatti, 47, and Ms. Zannantoni, 43, home was Brooklyn. But on Shelter Island, "we couldn't quite believe there was such a beautiful place just two hours from the city," said Ms. Zannantoni, who, along with Mr. Ciatti, grew up in the Dolomites of Italy.

"We just fell in love with the island," she said, "walking to all the little nice beaches, going for bike rides and living this very simple life that reminded both of us of our childhoods."



Hannes Ciatti and Verena Zannantoni worked with the architecture firm BarlisWedlick to renovate a house and barn. Chris Mottalini



Ms. Zannantoni and Mr. Ciatti at home with their children, Ennio, left, and Matteo. Chris Mottalini

By then, the pandemic had rewritten the rules regarding whether they needed to sit in urban offices for work, so the idea of moving to the island full-time seemed like more than just a dream. Mr. Ciatti is a founder of Alto, a creative agency comfortable with virtual work arrangements, and Ms. Zannantoni began working as a freelance project manager shortly before the couple had their children, Ennio, now 5, and Matteo, 3.

Near the end of that summer, they visited a couple of houses for sale on the island, picked their favorite and quickly made an offer. “On the last day of our stay, that offer actually got accepted,” Ms. Zannantoni said.



Windows and doors from the Italian company Molaro offer views to the garden from the breakfast nook.

Chris Mottalini

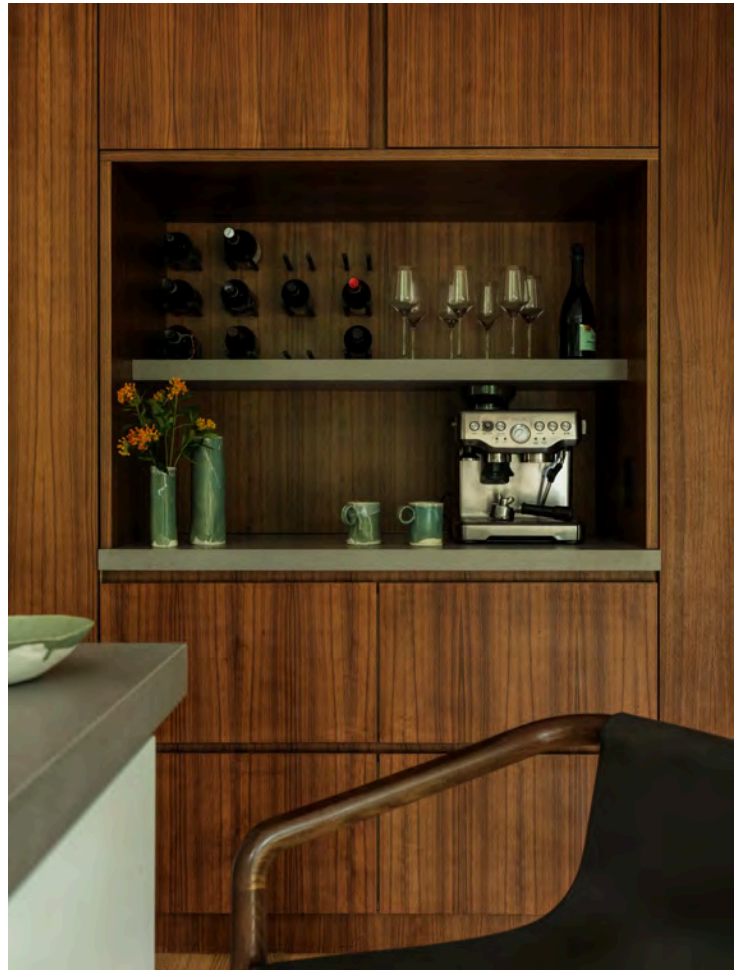
The 1,800-square-foot house was a relatively unremarkable 1980s structure, which they bought for about \$1 million. “We loved the location, a little further from the main town,” Mr. Ciatti said. “It had trees and nature, and a walk to the beach, so it had all the right ingredients for us to make it something we could call our own.”



BarlisWedlick raised the kitchen ceiling to make the space feel more generous. Chris Mottalini



A photo by Claude Nori hangs in the dining area. Chris Mottalini



The walnut cabinetry includes space for a coffee and wine bar. Chris Mottalini

After moving into the house that fall, they began thinking about renovating the kitchen and maybe a bathroom. Mr. Ciatti also mused about transforming an existing 900-square-foot barn into a dedicated home office.

For help with the renovation, they approached the architecture firm BarlisWedlick. They were impressed with the way the firm designed energy-efficient houses that were filled with character rather than looking too high-tech.

“We really liked their passive house designs,” Mr. Ciatti said. “But their overall design aesthetics and creativity also really resonated with us.”



“We wanted a large living space, and kitchen space, where our family can enjoy the day together,” Mr. Ciatti said. “We cook while the kids are playing in the living room.” The artwork on the back wall is by Marty Schnapf. Chris Mottalini

When they met with Alan Barlis, a principal at the firm, plans for a piecemeal renovation quickly blossomed into something more.

“I definitely blame our architects, because they just wowed us from the get-go,” Ms. Zannantoni said with a laugh. “They had foresight and could see the full possibility of what this house could be.”

Before long, the project grew to include a complete gut renovation of both the house and the barn, as well as an overhaul of the surrounding landscape.

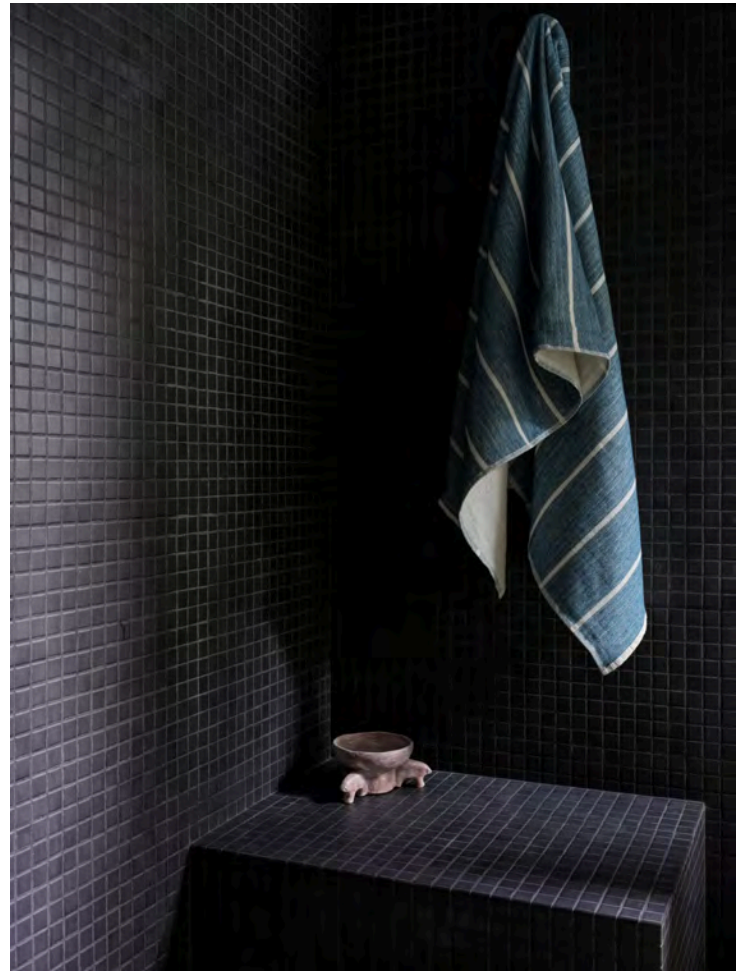


The primary bedroom has a view of trees and water. Chris Mottalini



The primary bathroom has walls finished with lime wash paint and a double concrete vanity.

Chris Mottalini



The tiled shower has an integrated bench. Chris

Mottalini

The house and barn, Mr. Barlis said, “were two banal boxes that were inward-focused and not particularly connected to this interesting site. We really wanted to turn that inside out, and connect to the landscape and views.”

To do it, they substantially rebuilt the two structures on their existing foundations while introducing a large new pergola and deck between them to create a connected indoor-outdoor living space.

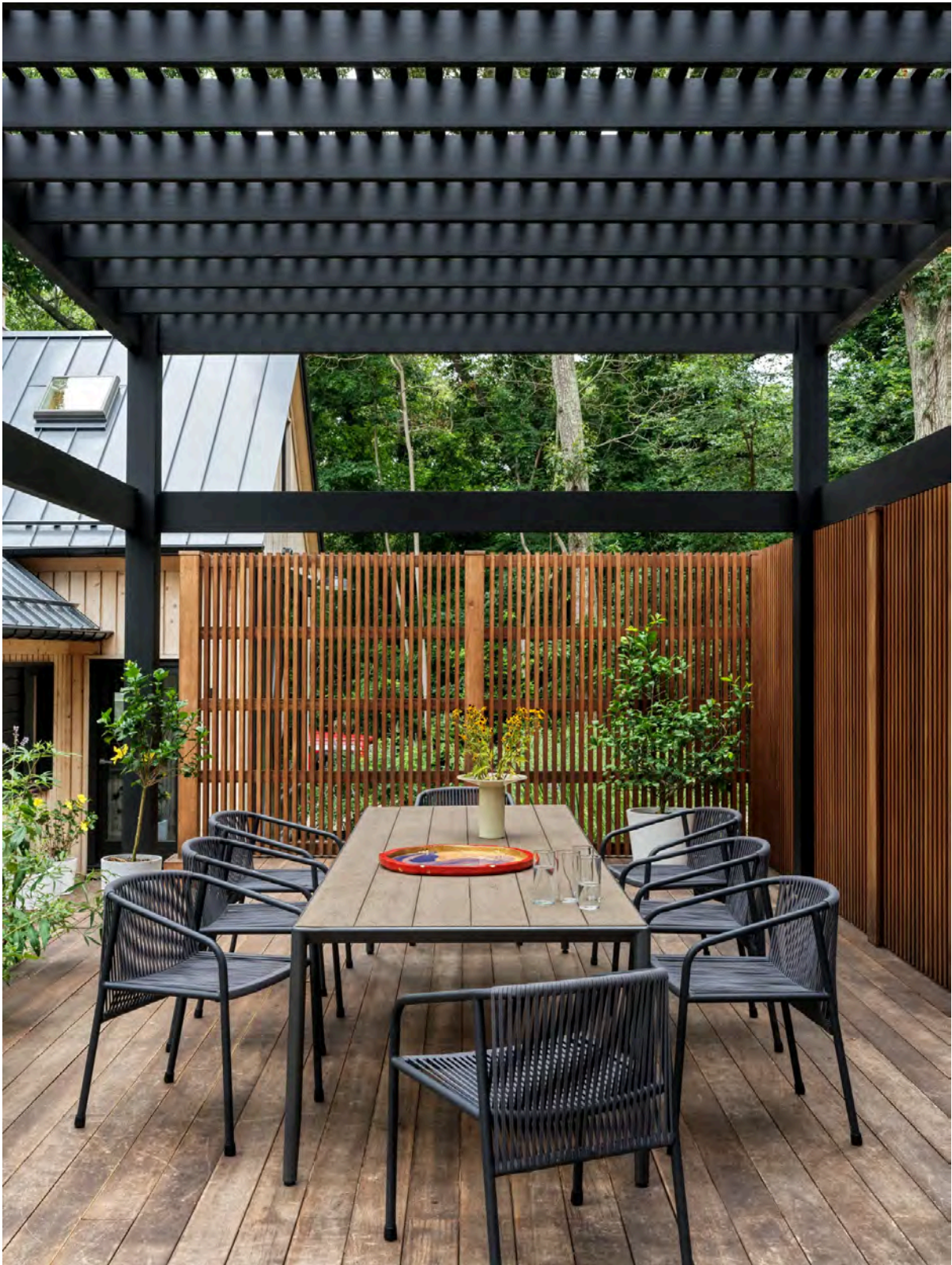


A window nook offers a comfy place to read. Chris Mottalini

“We stayed within the physical footprint of both buildings, so we were able to reduce the carbon footprint by conserving the foundations and a lot of the framing,” compared to new construction, Mr. Barlis said. They also built new airtight walls

with more insulation.

The architects made the house feel larger and airier inside by raising the roof in a few key areas. “One is our bedroom, which has large windows that look out to the water,” across the street, Mr. Ciatti said. “The other is this high-ceilinged kitchen that opens out onto the deck and becomes a second living room for us.”



A large pergola and deck connect the house to the barn. Chris Mottalini



BarlisWedlick converted the barn to a home office for Mr. Ciatti. Chris Mottalini

Mr. Ciatti and Ms. Zannantoni decided to use triple-pane windows and glass doors from the Italian company Molaro. Mr. Ciatti's father used to work for the company, "so it's a piece of home, of Italy and of my dad," he said. "Every time I open the

window, it has a deeper meaning.”

Mr. Ciatti also had a childhood friend who is now a partner at the Italian metalwork company Formetal, and collaborated with him to produce staircases for the house and barn as well as an awning for the home’s front entrance.



Mr. Ciatti’s commute to the office now takes only a few seconds. Chris Mottalini

When construction began in November 2021, the family moved out and began short-term stays in rental homes, friends' houses and hotels. The company Curate Build completed the work near the end of 2022, and the family moved in that Christmas Day.

"It was a very nice Christmas present to ourselves," Ms. Zannantoni said.

The construction cost was about \$2 million, she noted, which is roughly four times what she and Mr. Ciatti had initially expected to spend on a smaller-scale renovation.

"But we have no regrets," she added. "We are very, very happy with the outcome."