

TRADITIONAL HOME[®]

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SIX DESIGNERS AT HOME

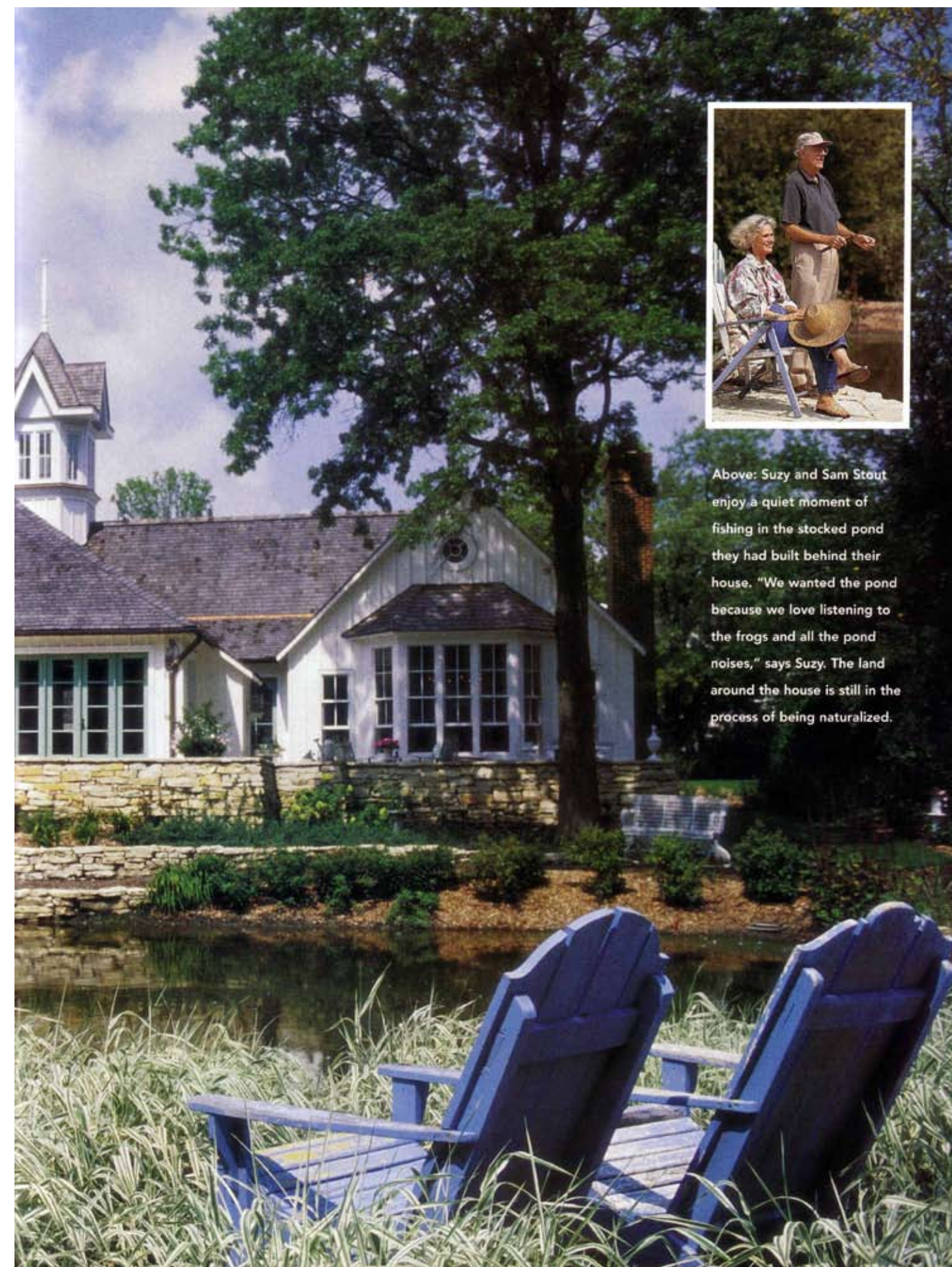
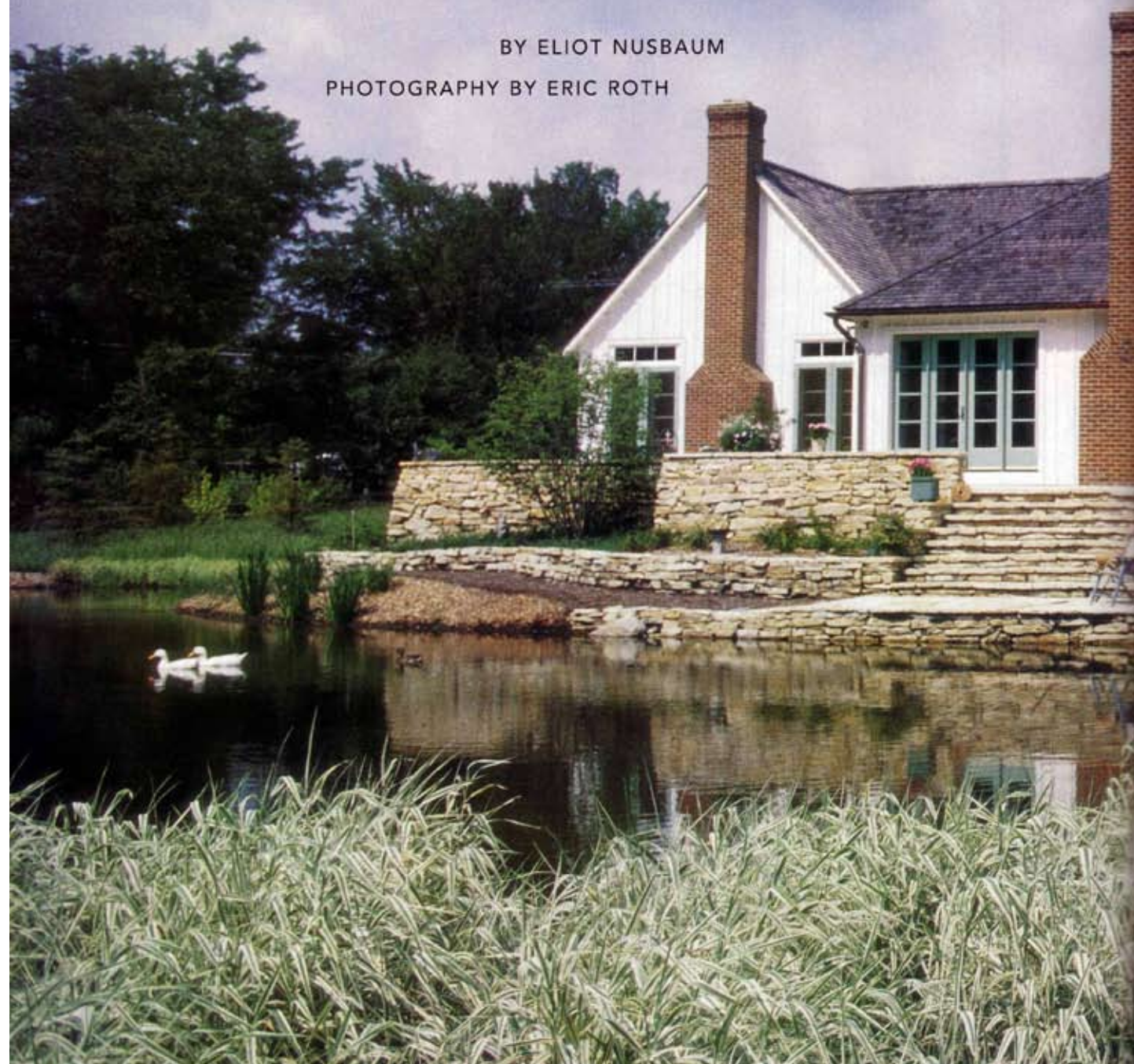
EXCLUSIVE

THE COLORFUL
WHITE HOUSE
OF HILLARY CLINTON

A FABULOUS FOLLY

THE DESIRE TO STEP BACK FROM A BUSY WORLD INSPIRES 1993
TRADITIONAL HOME DESIGN AWARD WINNER SUZY STOUT
TO BUILD A FANTASY FRENCH FARMHOUSE IN THE ILLINOIS COUNTRYSIDE.

BY ELIOT NUSBAUM
PHOTOGRAPHY BY ERIC ROTH



Above: Suzy and Sam Stout enjoy a quiet moment of fishing in the stocked pond they had built behind their house. "We wanted the pond because we love listening to the frogs and all the pond noises," says Suzy. The land around the house is still in the process of being naturalized.



SUZY AND SAM STOUT HAVE PUT SO MUCH

of themselves into their new home that even their body sizes figure into the design. For example, the finial atop the belvedere is the same height as Sam. The belvedere? The rooftop structure is just one of the old-fashioned elements woven into this agrarian fantasy—a never-never land, as Suzy puts it, that the couple has built near Chicago. Planned by Suzy and architect Michael Graham, it's a little French, a little Midwestern, and a lot of fun.

"Our dream was inspired by the desire to step back from a world we feel has become too much with us," says Suzy. "We longed for more impact from nature, more solitude, and a feeling of refuge from the busy world that we live in today."

She had a pretty clear idea of what she wanted this house to be, envisioning a French

stone farmhouse next to a pond. "It's a folly I carried around in my head," she confesses. She also worked out a basic floor plan and a firm philosophy about how the 3,500-square-foot house would function and be furnished: "It would not be a large home but a big 'small' house, an eclectic collage of things—flea market, country, or casile—I love from any period, where living space is dual-purpose, where nature has been expanded and brought inside through abundant windows and doors, and where the romance, softness, and spirituality of the past are remembered and celebrated. It was intended to be a truly enlightened farmhouse."

The house is as personal as the vision. Graham, working closely with Suzy, designed what appears to be a cluster of farm structures. The belvedere-topped main house has two wings running off it—a "stable" that is actually the guest wing, reached by a hall from the kitchen, and the master-bedroom wing. Plus, there's a "gatehouse," topped with a cupola, that serves as a garage. The wings frame a courtyard, and landscape architect Tony Tynnik has surrounded the house with natural plantings, limestone terraces, and, of course, the frog-filled pond.

Inside, the house is the embodiment of Suzy's philosophy. She has combined a sophisticated knowledge of design with a sense of fun and comfort to create a relaxed, gracious home completely attuned to its natural setting. Nowhere is this more



Opposite: Rather than build a formal dining room, Suzy asked the architect to design the house with a large front entrance hall that could double as a dining room when needed. Separating the entry hall from the living room is a pair of antique columns Suzy found in Florida. The bench was bought off the back of a truck at a flea market. **Right:** A high-peaked ceiling and chandeliers with a rusted finish top the entrance hall. **Above:** The garages form a sort of gatehouse entrance to the courtyard in front of the house. Bedroom wings almost completely enclose the courtyard.





Left and right: The living room is simple and undecorated by design, giving it an elegant country feel. Mossy green walls, bare windows, and screenless French doors bring the outside in, says Suzy. "You are very aware of the outside—the terrace, the trees, and the pond." The secretary and mantel are from New England. The screen is a French antique. **Below:** The stone terrace extends across the house. The seating area off the kitchen gets sunlight from the east, so it's the perfect setting for morning coffee.

clearly expressed than in the living room. "It's a very undecorated room," says Suzy. "I think people often mistakenly think that it is great decorating if they get a fabulous fabric, a wonderful drapery design, or an incredible rug. Certainly those things are important, but more important are proportions and accessories."

In fact, the mellow old pine flooring that runs through most of the house has been left bare in the living room. Suzy hasn't yet found a rug she likes for that area. And there are no draperies on the windows or French doors encircling the room. "I wanted every bit of the view to be a part of this room," she says. "This is also why I painted the walls a soft, mossy green: It brings the outside in." The sofa is covered with chenille in a deeper shade of the same green.

Perhaps the most unusual feature of the house is the feature that is missing—the formal dining room. Suzy believes dining rooms tend to be underused and are therefore a waste of space.

Sit-down dining hasn't been abandoned, however. Comfortably nestled into a delightful windowed bay at the end of the kitchen/family room is an antique French wine-tasting table plus six chairs that Suzy found at a resale shop. Immediately



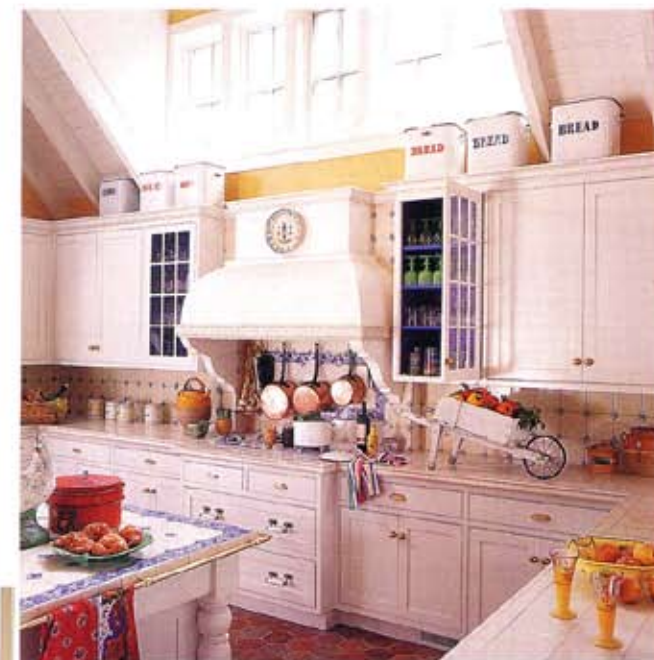


adjacent is a snug sitting area around the fireplace that Suzy helped design. Tying all together are the antique French hexagonal terra-cotta tiles on the floor, the mustard yellow walls, and the blue-checked draperies.

The kitchen/family room is perfect for family gatherings, but for entertaining larger groups, Suzy combines multiple functions in one room—the 16x28-foot entry hall. It is a vital cog of the house, with the living room, kitchen, and master bedroom all leading off it. “In our old house, we found that during a party, everyone stands either in the front hall or in the kitchen,” she notes. “So we knew we wanted the front entrance hall to be an addition to our entertaining space and to open up and flow into the living room. We also use it as a dining room. It works with a long holiday banquet table or with two to four round dinner tables for dinner parties.”

The front hall is treated as the major room that it is. It was designed with soaring beamed ceilings, stone floors, matching rusty steel chandeliers, and walls faux-painted to give them an aged finish. It’s furnished with a mixture of antiques and family heirlooms, including a wing chair upholstered with pieces of antique needlepoint, a French buffet, and an antique bench that Suzy bought, literally, off the back of a truck. Several charming European paintings hang on the walls, and a pair of weathered wood columns frames the double-wide doorway between the front hall and the living room.

In the master bedroom are “all the things I love,” says Suzy. Like the rest of the house, it is furnished with a mix of antiques, family heirlooms, and flea-market finds. The fireplace is the focal point, with a pair of French doors topped by transom windows on either side. The draperies don’t cover the transoms; instead, they are hung on rods between the upper windows and the doors, allowing warm sunlight to pour into the room. Adding to the personality of the room are light touches, like a mannequin head, old hatboxes, a funny gold wicker shoe, and a Victorian-era rug—enlarged by adding a border around it—depicting a girl boating on a pond. It’s this



Opposite: Suzy describes the kitchen area as a “big, old-fashioned country kitchen.” Along one side is a seating area nestled around a fireplace that she helped design. Blue-checked linen draperies keep the room from seeming too big and help warm the space. The walls throughout are painted a French yellow.

Left: The dining area is anchored by a French wine-tasting table and chairs from a resale shop. The chandelier is a larger version of one Suzy had in her old kitchen.

Above: The focal point of the modest-sized, U-shaped kitchen work area is the stove hood, a copy of one Suzy designed for her previous house. High barn-like windows bring ample light into the space.





Right: "I have all of the things I love in this room," says Suzy of the master bedroom, furnished with a mix of family keepsakes and flea-market finds. Left: A horse's head sign (probably originally for a harnessmaker) adds a touch of humor to the hallway in the stable area, which actually serves as the guest wing.

Below: Suzy told her architect she wanted her bathroom to look like one in the Ritz in the '30s. With its deep tub and eclectic mix of furnishings and accessories, it's a fun room to be in, she says.

sense of playfulness that gives the house so much personality. "There is lots of folly and whimsy in this house," Suzy notes. "I think every house should be full of things you love, things that make you smile."

The designer credits architect Graham's efforts in making the whole thing come alive. "Michael perfectly romanced our idea, always carrying every detail one step further to perfection." Graham was inspired by Chicago architect David Adler's description of his own house—"It was a labor of love, and it shows"—and by the vision and energy that Suzy brought to the project. "I wanted to bring our work process up to that standard," Graham notes.

But the real test of the house is how it works for Suzy and Sam. Says Suzy: "This house answers a lot of our needs, including our desire to be surrounded by nature. It is a sort of haven for us, with the quality of serenity and peacefulness." ■

Architect: Michael Graham
Regional Editor: Sally Mauer

For more information, see the Reader's Resource on page 178.

