



A century ago, potato fields and agricultural barns were as common on the eastern end of Long Island, New York, as seagulls and swallows. Most of that land was later sold off for residential development and golf courses; nowadays, original barns on the South Fork are nearly extinct.

But 41 summers ago, when artist John Alexander—at the invitation of Willem de Kooning—drove his 1970 El Camino from Houston, where he was teaching, to the Hamptons, barns still existed—for rent and sometimes for sale. In short order, Alexander uprooted from Texas and moved into a SoHo loft, made a name for himself on the downtown New York art scene, and started renting summer places out east.

In the mid-1980s, Alexander learned that a pair of old barns on a two-and-a-half-acre property in Amagansett would soon come on the market. He envisioned the ideal setup for an artist: He could paint in one barn and live in the other. No matter that someone was renting the property that summer and the homeowner wouldn't let Alexander inside the converted, connected buildings. He bought the barns sight unseen. (The late-1960s bathroom, with its mirrored walls and sunken tub, would not have been a deterrent.) "It was perfect," he recalls. "I could move in and have a studio immediately—I didn't have to miss any work."

ABOVE: Artist John Alexander and ceramist Fiona Waterstreet, with their cockapoo, Archie, at their Amagansett, New York, weekend house, two linked barns that date from the late 18th or early 19th century; the interiors are designed by Richard Mishaan. **RIGHT:** In the living area, the sofa by Jonas and the cushions on the antique wood chairs are upholstered in Brunswig & Fils fabrics, the custom ottoman is covered in a Cowtan & Tout fabric, and the lacquered cocktail table is from Mishaan's boutique, Homer Design; the side tables are English antiques, the lamps are by Barbara Cosgrove, the sisal rug is by Patterson Flynn Martin, and the painting, *Poppies*, is by Alexander. For details, see Resources.

Field Notes

An artist born and bred in Texas and a British ceramist find that a pair of rustic barns in Amagansett makes the perfect family home—but only after designer Richard Mishaan steps in to add his inimitable flair

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In the family room, the beige sofa and the rug are by Restoration Hardware, a custom sofa is upholstered in a Cowtan & Tout stripe, the leather armchair and cocktail table are antiques, and the walls are painted in Benjamin Moore's Opaline. **OPPOSITE:** A George Smith chair in the living area is covered in a Nina Campbell floral; the charcoal drawing is by Alexander. For details, see Resources.



When he wasn't painting, Alexander, who grew up in East Texas, worked on cultivating the land. He planted lots of trees ("I didn't want to see the road, and the road didn't want to see me") and, with the help of water lilies, cattails, and flowering plants, made the pond on the property look like the Gulf Coast swamps of his youth. "The pond is my baby. It's an integral part of my art," he says. "I fell so in love with gardening and being outdoors. My paintings softened because of that."

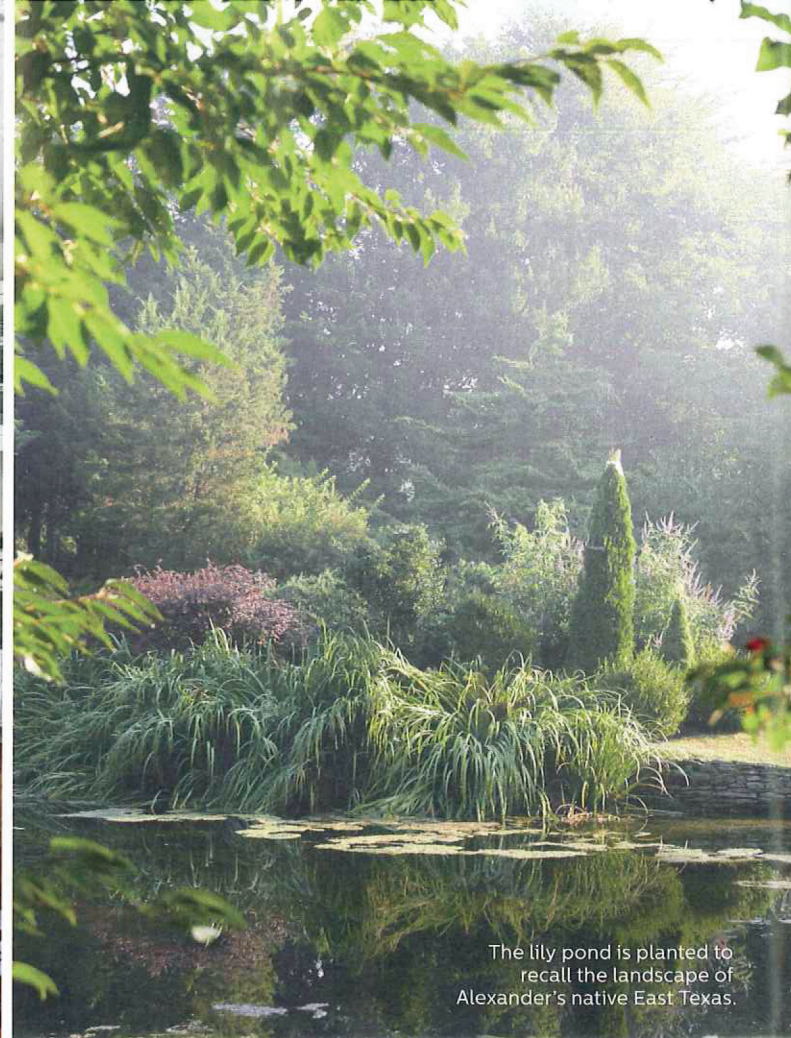
Other than removing a loft area in the main barn to create more open space and jettisoning the bathroom decor, Alexander sought to retain the rustic simplicity of the structures, which date back to the late 1700s or early 1800s. The spartan aesthetic lasted until he married Fiona Waterstreet, a vivacious, color-loving, pattern-happy Englishwoman, who came into his life with her young son, Harrison, two decades ago. "I brought my English sensibility," says Waterstreet, a ceramist. "I wanted boxwoods and lavender, that kind of thing."

Florals and botanicals of a different sort began to infiltrate the interiors in the form of textiles, which Waterstreet passionately collects. When, over time, her affinity for boldly upholstered antiques and patterned pillows threatened to upend the barn's raw spirit, the couple called on their interior-designer friend Richard Mishan, who had previously helped decorate their SoHo loft (ELLE DECOR, September 2014).

Mishan, who has a weekend house in nearby Sag Harbor, made a barn call. "Fiona told me to get rid of anything, and I said, 'I'm going to disappoint you in a funny way'—I wanted to keep so much," Mishan recalls of the charming vignettes that the couple had assembled throughout. "John said, 'If anyone comes



The zinc-topped kitchen table is from ABC Carpet & Home, the stools are by Arthur Umanoff, the range hood is by Thermador, and the walls are painted in Benjamin Moore's Simply White.



The lily pond is planted to recall the landscape of Alexander's native East Texas.



An antique English refectory table in the dining area; the fronts and seats of the French chairs are upholstered in a Kravet linen, and the porcelain candleholders are by Waterstreet.



Alexander's studio, located down the road from the house; the walls are painted in Benjamin Moore's Super White.



The desk in the study is antique, a George Smith stool is covered with a Mexican serape, and the painted wood flooring is original to the barn; the artworks include a Chinese watercolor, photographs by Ashley Pridmore and Bernard Plossu, a framed antique Tibetan *thangka* textile, and, on the desk, a portrait by Jessica Benjamin of Waterstreet's son, Harrison. For details, see Resources.



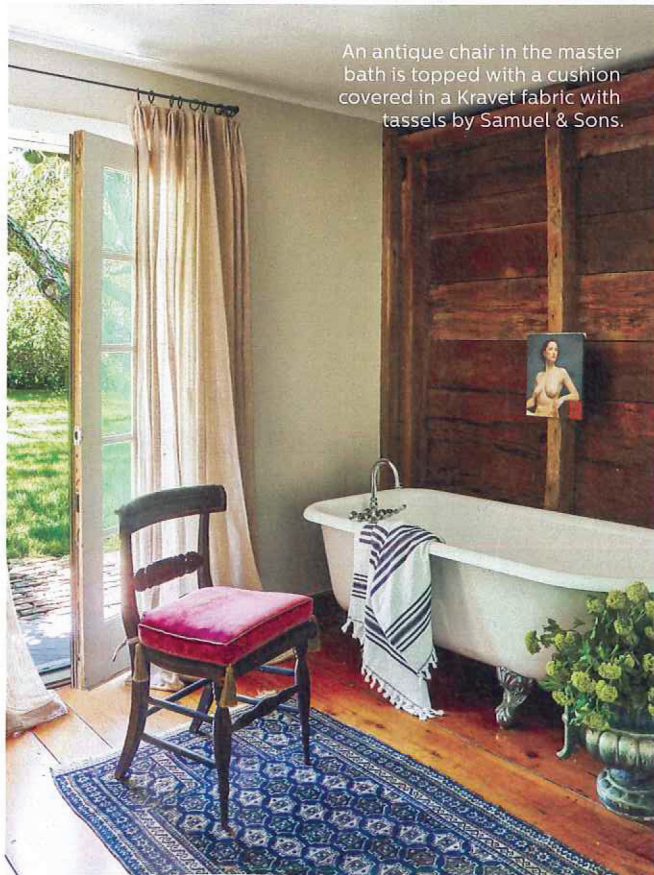
In the master bedroom, the sofa, an antique from Ruby Beets, and the desk chair are covered in Manuel Canovas fabrics, the curtains are of a Kravet linen, the desk is 19th century, and the painting is by Alexander.

in my house and describes it as fancy, you've not done your job.' In the end, it was up to me to hash out what was best for them."

A gifted mix master and serious art collector, Mishaaan has a special knack for crafting eclectic, layered interiors that always look balanced and orderly. Often, he lets the art dictate the order. For the barn's living and dining area, for instance, a painting by Alexander of a field of poppies informed the palette. Mishaaan introduced a beige animal print and upholstered a pair of sofas in emerald velvet to play off the painting's foliage. (When Waterstreet found them too bright for summer, slipcovers were made from an embroidered Mexican fabric.) The couple's dining chairs were refashioned with floral backs but given plain fronts because, as Mishaaan explains, there was already a lot going on in the living area: "We took it just to the limits of where John was going to start to scream."

In the process of the redo, Alexander moved his painting studio to another place down the road, and the second barn was transformed into a spacious family room, with a guest bedroom above. It's Harrison's wing when Waterstreet's now-27-year-old son visits from Los Angeles, where he works at the talent agency CAA. It retains all of the character of a rustic 200-year-old barn, despite the polished look of a well-considered seating arrangement and the gallery effect of the artist's works.

"Richard helped create a calmer, much more organized environment, even though it's very colorful," says Waterstreet of the spruced-up home. "I created clutter," she adds with a laugh, "and he cleaned it up." ■



An antique chair in the master bath is topped with a cushion covered in a Kravet fabric with tassels by Samuel & Sons.



On the veranda, the teak table is by Barlow Tyrie, the wicker chairs are by Restoration Hardware, and the antique wood chairs are from Ruby Beets; the pergola supports a wisteria vine and is surrounded by boxwood topiaries. For details, see Resources.