

A shaded lane leads to the Wetherill house. Just past the wrought-iron gates, the drive is flanked by stables. Left: Cortie Wetherill rides a champion large junior hunter, an Oldenburg named Cool Magic.

old stone house at **Wide Rill Farm.**

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It's no wonder that Janice and Cortright Wetherill feel at home in Pennsylvania horse country.

They have had a lifelong love affair with horses. Daughter Amanda, now married, grew up with a passion for horses, and teenaged Cortie is one of the nation's top young equestrians. Here, where Cortright grew up, the couple was lured by a centuries-old stone house of irresistible character.

Smitten with the structure's historic charm, Cortright and Janice saw its potential as a year-round home. They admired the house's eclectic Colonial Revival style and were determined to bring it into the 21st century while honoring its past.

Located in Chester County, 15 miles from Philadelphia, the original farmhouse dates to the 1700s. Although it had been enlarged several times, becoming a classic Main Line country home by the 1920s, it lived small and came up short in modern comforts. "This old house merited a renovation," says Janice. "We wanted to breathe new vitality into its soul."

The couple turned to architect John Milner, a champion of historic vernacular home styles. "We knew right away he was the architect for us," says Cortright. "His comprehension of our everyday life, along with his sensitivity to the house's historical context and setting, instantly won us over." Janice and Cortright also hired the New York design team of Bill Brockschmidt and Courtney Coleman for the interiors.

In keeping with the Wetherills' vision of a comfortable, modern country home, Milner designed a three-level stone addition that harmonizes with the style of the historic house. The addition includes a conservatory, a wine cellar, and a master bedroom



The three-level addition includes a conservatory with fanlight-topped French doors. Far left: The symmetry of the seating arrangement in the conservatory complements the architectural design.

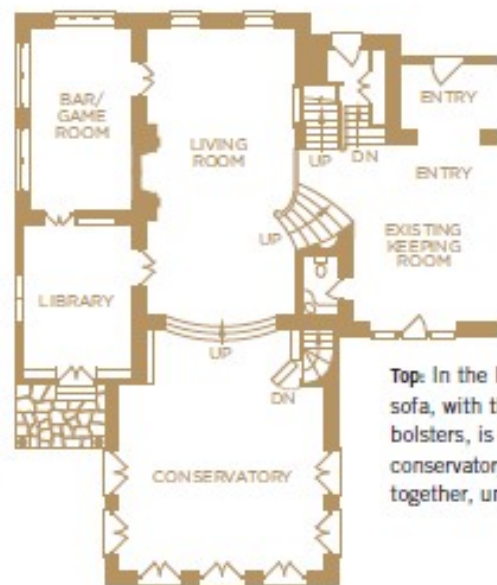
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—HOMEOWNER JANICE WETHERILL



John Singer Sargent

The most celebrated portrait painter of his time, John Singer Sargent (1856–1925) was at the peak of his career in 1903, when he painted this portrait of Cortright Wetherill's great-grandmother Ella P. Widener. The artist captured her elegance and flair with dashing brush strokes and outstanding virtuosity. The portrait now hangs in the Wetherills' living room.



Top: In the living room, the new custom Chippendale-style sofa, with the traditional loose seat, back cushions, and bolsters, is luxuriously comfortable. Floor plan: The new conservatory and existing living room flow gracefully together, united by architectural detailing and design.

suite. The new rooms feature elegant plaster ceilings with cove cornices, wood ceiling beams, hardwood floors, and arched doorways and windows that complement the original architecture. Despite their age differences, there is an easy flow between the new and old rooms. On the main level, the bright and lofty conservatory serves as a dynamic counterpoint to the adjacent cozy, older living room.

For the interior design, Brockschmidt and Coleman conceived an elegant but relaxed scheme, drawing inspiration from the Wetherills' extraordinary range of antiques, fine art, and decorative objects spanning the centuries. "We explored their collections and discovered surprising connections," Coleman says. The design duo mixed the couple's treasures and favorite things with new furnishings, fabrics, and accessories throughout the house.

In the keeping room, which is a reception area in the renovated 18th-century part of the house, rustic character contrasts with fine antiques such as a William and Mary wingback chair, a Philadelphia Chippendale table, and a pair of Spanish rococo chairs. These are particularly striking silhouetted against the lunette doorway, a 1920s enhancement that opens to a garden. ▶



Left: In the bar and game room, one of the three resident dogs, a corgi named Lexington, pauses under the backgammon table, which has a needlepoint board in the Wetherill family's horse-racing colors. Above: A striking lunette doorway in the keeping room opens to gardens.



the Preakness trophy

One of the most prized of the Wetherills' many horse-racing trophies is the Preakness won in 1945 by Polynesian, a thoroughbred owned by Cortright's grandmother Gertrude T. Widener. Inaugurated in 1873, the Preakness Stakes is a race for 3-year-old thoroughbreds, held in May each year at the Pimlico racecourse in Baltimore. It's the second leg of American thoroughbred racing's Triple Crown and almost always attracts the Kentucky Derby winner. The Preakness Stakes has been termed "The Run for the Black-Eyed Susans" because a horseshoe of these flowers is traditionally placed around the winner's neck.

Around an elegant fireplace in the living room is a graceful grouping of period American and English chairs with a custom Chippendale-style sofa. Chinese Chippendale consoles, complemented by chinoiserie mirrors, blend with Asian ceramics and Oriental rugs to contribute a refined Far Eastern flavor. But the tour de force is the portrait of Cortright's great-grandmother Ella P. Widener, painted in 1903 by the master John Singer Sargent. "Like my great-grandfather Joseph E. Widener, who was a founding benefactor of the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., she was a great patron of the arts," Cortright says. "Sargent captured her brilliant beauty, and she remains our family's quintessential grande dame."

The Sargent portrait influenced color choices for the living room. "We often take our cues for paints, fabrics, and trimmings from our clients' favorite possessions," Brockschmidt says. "The portrait certainly inspired the oyster silk curtains with coral and pale blue embellishments. Even the tassels and tiebacks were custom-matched to the distinctive blue of the painting."

Next to the living room, the bar and game room was refreshed with whitewashed walls. A new banquette runs the width of the sweeping lunette window on one wall. Silver commemorations testify that trophies have come like clockwork to family equestrian champions over many years.

The new conservatory is a space that draws family and friends like a magnet. "It's the pièce de résistance, the perfect gathering room," says Janice. "We love to spend time here." This airy space, with its series of high-arched French doors evocative of an ▶



Top: The wine cellar is a favorite refuge and an ideal spot to enjoy gourmet meals.

Above: A cellar anteroom is fitted with cabinets showcasing antique stemware. An antique Provençal walnut door connects the anteroom with the wine cellar.

18th-century orangerie, maximizes the home's panoramic views.

Comfortable large-scale upholstered seating and an Oriental-style lacquered table from the 1920s anchor the generous room, while exquisite Louis XVI bergères lend sexy Gallic flair. The color palette of predominantly blues and neutrals is calming; Oriental rugs add warmth. A clever doorway concealed in a bookcase opens to a staircase winding down to a surprise directly below the conservatory—a jewel-box of a room fitted with wall cabinets displaying an impressive

collection of Venetian wineglasses.

The room leads to a wine cellar with such eye-catchers as a massive Provençal farm table, a rare 18th-century French painted-linen wall hanging, and wine storage niches entered through arched doorways. The space was inspired by the architect's visits to European wine cellars. It features white oak ceiling beams salvaged from old barn timbers and antique heart-pine flooring in random widths. "Some of these boards are as broad as 20 inches," Milner says. "They have a depth and richness of color not found in newly milled material."

Not surprisingly, Janice and Cortright, who are active supporters of charitable, civic, and cultural endeavors, often entertain and are happy to have rooms that do justice to their causes. But the everyday comforts are just as rewarding. The couple enjoy the calm of their restful bedroom suite, distinguished by floral chintz, early American quilts, and such sentimental touches as a pair of pillows fronted with the needlepoint panels they crafted for each other while on their honeymoon. For them, it's blissful to gaze out the windows and contemplate the wide rill running through their land, knowing the reinvention of their old house has surpassed their expectations. ■

Architect: John Milner

Interior designers: Bill Brockschmidt and Courtney Coleman

For more information, see sources on page 212.