

Story by Nancy L. Claus | Photography by Thomas Moore

an american rustic

AGED WOOD AND NATURAL STONE SET THE TONE IN AN ADIRONDACK-THEMED HOME FILLED WITH PRIMITIVE ART AND TOUCHES OF WHIMSY. WELCOME TO CAMP SINGER.

Call it kismet. Call it karma.

Whatever you call it, it was clear that Amy and Henry Singer were fated to find this uncommon (and unparalleled) Adirondack hunting lodge-style house, set into 6.5 acres of woods and rock outcroppings in Pound Ridge.

For 30 years, the Singers lived in Harrison, in a traditional center-hall colonial with contemporary furnishings so kid-unfriendly that one of their daughters asked the name of the “white room no one ever used” (it was the living room). Their four children were grown and the couple wanted something simpler, more rustic, “an indestructible” place for their grandchildren to run around without worrying about muddy footprints on the floor or fingerprints on glass tables. Amy, a senior vice president at Corcoran Group, a leading residential real-estate company in Manhattan, had been looking for just such a house for years. But nothing quite clicked.

Then, on her first visit to Pound Ridge in 1995, a realtor showed her a house belonging to Ted Sorensen, JFK’s chief speechwriter. It was love at first sight. Built in 1979, the house had beautiful stone floors, cedar tongue-and-groove paneled walls, high-beamed ceilings, and windows just about everywhere. Indestructible...and strangely familiar. “When we were first married, Henry built a model of what would be our dream home,” Amy explains, “and it looked just like this one!” Their offer on the home was accepted and their Harrison residence sold immediately; they had simultaneous contract signings and harmonious closings. Karma indeed.



Good bones: Beautiful stone floors, paneled walls, high-beamed ceilings, and windows overlooking the woods drew the Singers to this house. They've made it home with comfy furnishings and souvenirs from their many travels. The bookshelves are filled with puppets from Burma, flea market finds from Israel, sculptures from Tanzania, and more.

“Of course, she thought

the house was perfect—until we moved in,” Henry, a founding partner at the Manhattan-based law firm of Morrison Cohen, grouses good-naturedly, noting that at first he wasn’t too keen on the move. “My country club used to be five minutes away; now it’s thirty.” They started the renovation right away, adding 1,300 feet to the 2,300-square-foot house. Outdoors, they enlarged the stone terrace, redid the pool, fixed up the tennis court, and, for those active grandchildren, added a treehouse.

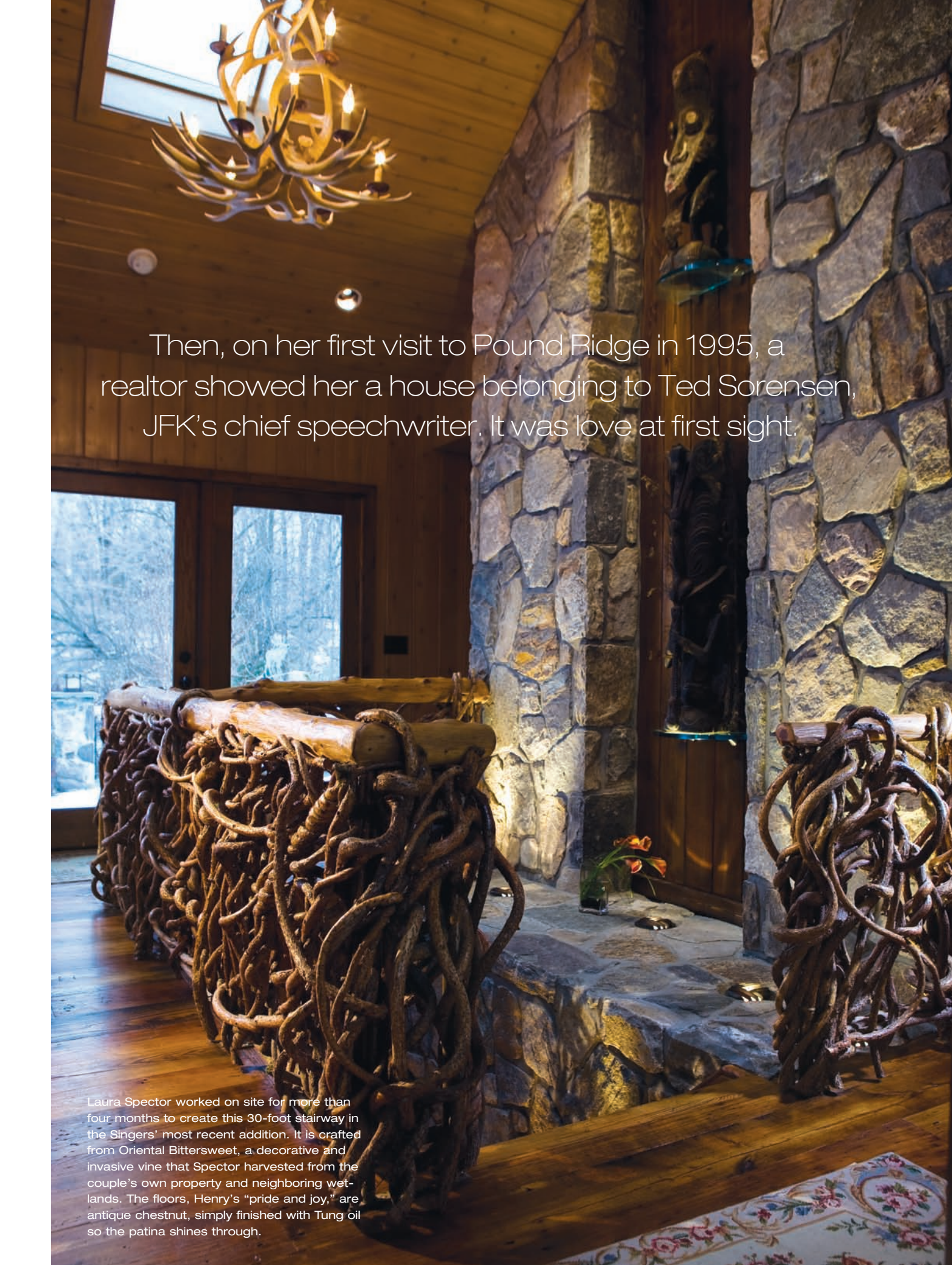
Amy loved the feeling of the house from the very beginning, particularly its good bones and country charm. “But it was just too small. The kitchen was a shoebox, it seemed like it was two feet by two feet,” she explains. “And there were two horrible spiral staircases to the second floor. They had to go.” In the first renovation that the Singers did, a dramatic stone and natural wood staircase was created by rustic artist Daniel Mack. “I watched every piece of wood and where it went as it was going up,” Amy says. “Basically we gutted the upstairs and enlarged the house—but kept the integrity everywhere we could, matching the stone floors, keeping the copper bar in the kitchen, using aged wood for flooring.”

The dining room is the couple’s favorite room in the house. Two walls of glass doors fold accordion-style to completely open the room to the terrace; skylights flood the space with light from above. Special touches—a moose antler chandelier, a mounted deer head, and a hutch filled with vases, salt and pepper shakers, decorative plates, and other memorabilia—help lend the room its distinct character.



Henry and Amy Singer pose on artist Dan Mack’s dramatic stone and rustic wood staircase, which replaced a “horrible spiral staircase” to the master suite. Underlit tribal masks from New Guinea accent the walls.



A photograph of a rustic interior. In the foreground, a staircase with a railing made of intertwined antlers leads up to a stone fireplace. The fireplace is built with large, irregular stones and has a wooden mantel. Above the fireplace, a large chandelier made of antlers hangs from the ceiling. The walls are made of wood paneling, and there are windows in the background showing a snowy landscape. The floor is made of wood.

Then, on her first visit to Pound Ridge in 1995, a realtor showed her a house belonging to Ted Sorensen, JFK's chief speechwriter. It was love at first sight.

Laura Spector worked on site for more than four months to create this 30-foot stairway in the Singers' most recent addition. It is crafted from Oriental Bittersweet, a decorative and invasive vine that Spector harvested from the couple's own property and neighboring wetlands. The floors, Henry's "pride and joy," are antique chestnut, simply finished with Tung oil so the patina shines through.



While the Singers, who live in Manhattan during the week, are collectors of museum-quality rustic art and furnishings, Amy admits she loves to hunt for treasures at flea markets, and junk and antique stores, including shops right in town. "I love to dream up different uses for things, like using old ice tongs or horse stirrups to hold towels or turning an old leather trunk into a bedside table." The lady of the house is credited for creating all of the home's intriguing vignettes, including the pair of snowshoes leaning against the entryway wall, the rusty copper deer ornament and bells hanging off light fixtures by the front door, and the antique mirrors and brushes in the master bath. Even the chandelier in the kitchen is covered with a dizzying array of ornaments, tiny dolls, and a tiny moose head. "I think of it as my Christmas tree," Amy explains. "Every time we go on a trip, I bring back a souvenir and hang it here."

And souvenirs of their many travels are everywhere you look: tribal masks from New Guinea are scattered liberally throughout the house (they brought back half a container full of New Guinea primitive art from a productive trip). A wall of bookshelves in the living room is brimming with an amazing collection: puppets from Burma, flea-market finds from Israel (including a menorah made from a mortar shell), sculptures from Tanzania.

(opposite page, clockwise from top) The kitchen was expanded to include a granite island with sink (the copper counter is part of the original house); an antique highchair with the Singer's first daughter's silver spoon; antler hardware accents; a lovely copper faucet, with the patina of age. (below) The dining room has two walls of glass doors that open the room completely to the outdoors.



the high ceilings,

ample light, and unique décor of the house make it an editor's top pick for photo shoots. Victoria's Secret shot one of its Christmas catalogs in the house and, for two days, scantily clad models pranced about, posing on the staircase, and draped over furniture. "Henry loved it," Amy says, noting dryly that a later Saks Fifth Avenue photo shoot didn't hold his interest quite as much.

As the grandchildren grew, so did "Camp Singer," the property's apt nickname. Last year, the Singers enlarged the terrace and added an exercise room, media room, office, and downstairs quarters for kids. "The kids used to sleep in our bedroom, lined up like in the *Madeline* books, with their Batman or Barbie sleeping bags," Amy recalls. "Hank would tell them scary ghost stories." Now that many of them are teens, the grandkids are quite partial to the new addition. And why not? They have their own separate space with flat-screen television, Internet access, video game systems, and Adirondack-style bunk beds with trundles that can sleep eight. A path to the pool and hot tub is just outside the sliding glass doors.





(opposite page) The children's downstairs bath features a burl wood vanity and a glass shower; bunk beds arrived in 14 crates weighing 2,600 pounds; it took six men eight hours to assemble.
 (this page) The master bedroom, with its seating area facing a fireplace, is open to the living room below. "You can lie in bed in look out all the windows and sky lights," Amy says. An old Singer sewing machine is re-purposed as a bedside stand.

As the grandchildren grew,
 so did "Camp Singer,"
 the property's apt nickname.

The focal point of the new addition is a massive, hand-crafted 30-foot staircase designed and built by Laura Spector, with Oriental Bittersweet vines harvested from their own property and adjoining wetlands. "The first thing I saw when I met the Singers at their home was the magnificent signature Dan Mack stairway," says Spector, whose staircase recently won *Design Journal's* "Powerful Project Award." "I'm a great admirer of Dan's work, but just as every writer, painter, or artist has his or her own unique voice, designers do, too. My work is very lyrical and graceful—European in style."

When it comes to style, Camp Singer has got plenty of it. 📍

Nancy L. Claus is a features editor at Westchester Magazine and frequently writes about home décor and gardening.