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# Bridging The Gap

TWO LINKED STRUCTURES  
ON THE BANKS OF THE  
SAUGATUCK RIVER MAKE FOR  
A NEW DEFINITION OF HOME

BY DAVID MASELLO | PHOTOGRAPHS BY PETER BROWN

**I**t's not an easy task to add more beauty to the Saugatuck River as it flows through Fairfield County on its way to Long Island Sound. But architect Robert Cardello and project manager/senior architectural designer Rui Pedroso-Luis designed two buildings so unconventional and striking that anyone coursing the waters can't help but slow down or let the sails go slack in order to take in the sights. "The moment I might mention this project when I'm in the area, people tell me right away that they know exactly which house I'm talking about," says Cardello, whose namesake firm has been a Westport mainstay since 1999. Of the bridge that vaults the property—an element that links a new stone barn to a renovated modern guest house—Pedroso-Luis calls it "the magical moment. By designing a wide steel bridge, glassed on all sides, it allows these two structures to become, and function, as one." And that was the directive, not only from the client, but also from the town, for local zoning laws are such that two dwellings cannot be erected on one site. To meet that town code and honor the client's wish for there to be two buildings with distinctive functions, the architects adhered to the laws to create structures that meld. The three-bedroom guest house occupies the identical footprint of a former century-old boathouse, though it's been raised 15 feet above the river to meet FEMA codes. The dwelling's



**Party Central**  
The great room in the barn is furnished with a pair of tables from Holly Hunt able to seat 35 and large Verellen sectionals through Eleish Van Breems, all illuminated by a pair of 66-inch-diameter Moooi chandeliers. Interior designer for the project, Robin Liotta, had the ceiling beams treated to a dark stain so as to stand out against the white ceiling. See Resources.





#### Eat-In Style

The island in the kitchen of the property's party barn is lit with four Arteriors pendants through Schwartz Design Showroom. Palecek natural-rope stools are positioned at the island; the surface, cabinets and backsplash were designed by the Westport-based Karen Berkemeyer Home. See Resources.

Modernist purity is enhanced, however, by surprising details, including expanses of *shou sugi-ban*, an ancient Japanese technique of charring wood for visual and practical effect. Cardello and Pedroso-Luis describe the material as being especially repellent to insects, and that the charring seals the wood against the elements. Meanwhile, a green grass roof visually softens the hard rectilinear lines of the house.

The client's directive for the property's other building was that it be a "party barn," meaning that no cows or horses, bales of hay or parked tractors were allowed. While the origin of that specific term is debatable, this may be the quintessential example of such a structure. The architects, along with interior designer, Robin Liotta, chose the handsome, multihued grade of Connecticut field stone. Liotta's task, among others, was to furnish the interior of the barn, three-quarters of which is open to the ceiling, while the remaining portion contains a raised seating/loft space and game area for the client's often visiting grandchildren.

In a space that large, Liotta had to solve numerous decorating challenges, among them lighting the vast room. From the Dutch company Moooi, she chose two 66-inch-diameter pendants that radiate like moons inside, providing an even, soft, cheerful light throughout the open space. "John Desmond Builders even constructed prototypes for me before the client and I committed to using them there," she says. Since the client wanted the party barn to accommodate as many as 35 people at a time for a dinner, Liotta found Holly Hunt tables large enough for the task, and chose stackable chairs so as to allow the space to be cleared for the occasional dance. (The client is not your average grandmother.) One end of the stone barn features a kitchen and an island seemingly acres in size, while the other end focuses on a stone fireplace that rises 26 feet.

To keep to code stipulations, Cardello and Pedroso-Luis had to design an especially wide bridge corridor—eight-and-a-half feet. Originally, the white oak boards that lined the glass-walled structure were set to be laid lengthwise. But Liotta had the sudden idea to configure them crosswise, so as to visually lessen the length of the bridge. Then, she furnished the bridge with simple benches that become respites for contemplative views of the river.

Cardello and Pedroso-Luis are still haunted by the final construction moment, when both structures, each going up simultaneously, were to be connected via the bridge. "The builders had to be sure everything was exactly accurate and on line," says Pedroso-Luis, "but when the last piece was put in place, it fit like a glove. All the connections had been made." ✨



**Inside Views**  
(CLOCKWISE FROM THIS PHOTO)  
The guest house living area has a pair of Lee Industries swivel chairs from Eleish Van Breems. A glassed bridge connects the barn to the guest house. The bed in the primary suite is dressed with Serena & Lily bedding. See *Resources*.



**“By designing a wide steel bridge** — glassed on all sides — it allows these two structures to become, and function, as one”







**Water Attractions**  
The front (ABOVE) of the stone barn shows the river beyond. When seen from the river (LEFT), the relationship between the barn and the Modernist guest house becomes visible. The project is unified by a novel tiered landscaping design by Wesley Stout Associates with plant selection and plantings by KD&J Botanica. See Resources.

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