

AMERICAN FARMHOUSE

At Teaneck, in Bergen County, New Jersey, part of the New York metropolitan area, the reformulation of an 18th-century farm combines contemporary solutions with enhancement of the original material and structural characteristics.

project by Fuller/Overby Architecture – Emma Fuller and Michael Overby

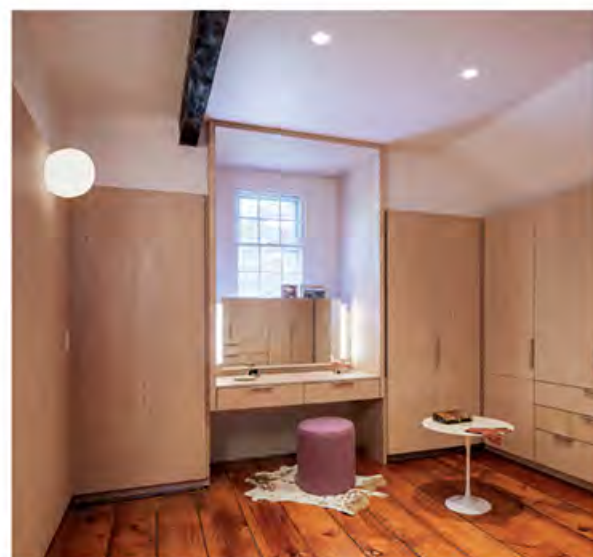
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Views of the new staircase connecting the first floor and the attic, formulated as a pale volume with a parapet and steps in perforated steel, supported by a metal structure of minimal thickness.



After liberating the rooms from planks and dividers that had been added over time, on the first floor the project has focused on new potentialities of spatial quality



IN AMERICA A CONSTRUCTION FROM THE 1700S, like the farmhouse examined on these pages, is seen as historical heritage to be protected and carefully conserved. Therefore the farm of the Ackerman family, among the first settlers of New Amsterdam who arrived in 1734 along the Hackensack River (where the farmlands were more abundant and widespread than on the nearby island of Manhattan), is a work of architecture listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Initially composed of a single room with a pitched roof, the construction was expanded at the end of the 18th century with the addition of a large barn with the typical double roof slope. What can be defined as a small farm complex, whose present configuration combines a low volume (originally built in 1734) with an annex of larger proportions (the barn, transformed over time) – both featuring tall chimneys – has conserved its thick walls in blocks of local sandstone over the centuries: the same material, now depleted, used for the famous brownstones of New York City. The project by Emma Fuller and Michael Overby concentrates on the radical refor-

Two views of the new rooms on the first floor. Above, the daytime zone, with Womb Chair by Eero Saarinen for Knoll International, is connected to the bedroom with a custom door set into the masonry partitions. Ikea bed and Paulistano chair by Paulo Mendes da Rocha. Upper right, the closet zone clad in pale wood paneling, containing the custom wardrobes. EQ3 pouf and side table by Eero Saarinen, Knoll.

mulation of the first and second levels below the eaves, while on the ground floor the large unified space of the older volume has been approached with a cut in the back façade towards the river. Here a big new window with sliding doors in slim steel frames opens the internal space towards the view of the sunset, filtered by the greenery of the trees, part of a rural landscape that has remained to a great extent intact. For the interiors, the Ackerman farmhouse is a sum of elements added over time, functional adjuncts, disparate material solutions and details, the result of an inevitable lack of overall orchestration. The new refurbishing of the upper levels has cleaned up the original spaces, with the aim of finding a virtuous balance between history and contemporary style. After liberating the spaces from planking and partitions, the first floor now presents a functional layout in relation to the new qualitative potentialities of the rooms. The central block of the quadrangular plan of the house (the former barn) contains the staircase for the three levels, flanked by an auxiliary bathroom available to the new living area, which in turn is con-



nected to the master bathroom that separates the bedroom from the large custom closet with accessorized walls in pale wood. The night zone fills half of the space on this level. The other available portion, set aside for study and relaxation, takes the form of a two-story space that thanks to the removal of part of the upper slab reveals the wooden structure of the original hand-hewn beams. These beams, together with the flooring planks, stand out in an expressive way from the walls, including the custom doors set into the white, neutral background. In the new dialectic between the original architectural features and the contemporary compositional grafts, the new staircase joins the path begun by the existing one below, and leads to the eaves where a second bedroom/playroom has been created, boasting its own bathroom. The staircase has been conceived as a light volume, in white like the walls. The parapet and steps made in perforated steel are supported by a metal structure of minimum thickness, to underscore the apparent fragility and transparency of its painstaking and striking design. ❶

Above, on the rear front of the small original construction a large window opens toward the lawn and the river. LC1 chair by Le Corbusier, Cassina. To the side, view of the house with the older volume in the foreground and the barn added at a later date.



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