

Residence

THE HAMPTONS REAL ESTATE, HOME AND DESIGN WEEKLY

The Hiram Sanford House at 13 Egypt Lane. KYRIL BROMLEY PHOTOS



HISTORY PRESERVED

Timber-frame law put to use on Egypt Lane

BY BRENDAN J. O'REILLY

It was six years ago when East Hampton Village adopted its timber-frame landmarks law to protect historic buildings and incentivize their restoration. Now, the village is seeing the fruits of that legislation — the first of its kind.

The Hiram Sanford House, a Cape Cod-style dwelling at 13 Egypt Lane that was once the home of the man who ran the Pantigo Windmill, has been restored, with its surviving historic details preserved. The work has been done in conjunction with the ongoing construction of a modern home on the same piece of property.

While having two houses share such a small parcel — just under a half acre — is prohibited, the timber-frame law carves out an exception: If a privately owned property lies outside the village's four historic districts but is the site of one of about two dozen designated landmarks built between 1700 and 1850, the owner can choose to preserve the original house and also build a second house there.

Before the timber-frame law, these houses, including the Hiram Sanford House, did not have landmark designations and thus had no protection from demolition. The law grants them landmark status.

"This project does perfectly illustrate the reason for this program, in that there is no

doubt the house would have been torn down without this," said Bob Hefner, the village's director of historic services, who conceived of the law. "It was a very small house, and even by adding onto it by the allowable gross floor area, the little house would be dwarfed by the addition."

The Hiram Sanford House instead will become an accessory building to the new main house: a modern built from eight modified shipping containers.

Robert Strada and Richard Ward Baxter's historic preservation firm, Strada Baxter Design/Build, based in Amagansett, oversaw the preservation work on the Hiram Sanford House, starting with identifying which structural elements and details are original on the 1882 building.

The architect for both houses at 13 Egypt Lane is Tom Morbitzer, a partner in Manhattan-based firm Ammor Architecture LLP. While Ammor does not often do work in the area, Mr. Morbitzer is familiar with East Hampton. "My first job was with Robert A.M. Stern, so my very first projects were Guild Hall and East Hampton Library," he said last week while standing inside the Hiram Sanford House.

Aside from some paint and a few finishing touches, the work on the historic house is done, and it's already received recognition: The Village Preservation Society of

'We restored the house to its original footprint.'



East Hampton presented the project with a Preservation Award last month.

"So, this is the original structure that we have, and we've uncovered a lot," Mr. Morbitzer said as he began a tour of the house. "We restored the house to its original footprint, and improved it where you can't see the improvements — so it's insulated now, for example. When our owner bought the house, there were a series of additions off the back that we've removed."

That owner is Eric Ellenbogen, an entertainment exec-

See **TIMBER**, Page R4

TIMBER:

Historic House Restored Under New Legislation

FROM PAGE R1

utive who, as of August, is the CEO of WildBrain, a Canadian children's television company; in the past he has held posts with Broadway Video Entertainment, DreamWorks and Marvel Enterprises. He bought the Hiram Sanford House in 2017 for \$1.6 million.

The house had been about 50 percent larger before the additions were removed, Mr. Morbitzer said. It's thought that the additions, which included two bedrooms and a bathroom, were built about 100 years after the original structure was.

"We were estimating, just from the things we found in there and the type of wood, that it was probably in the 1920s," Mr. Morbitzer said. "But they weren't high-quality builds, so it was in very poor condition." He added: "And it didn't smell very nice either."

That smell may have something to do with the area the house was built on. Mr. Strada said it is a "very swampy, wet area" that was the first sheep pasture in East Hampton's history.

Over the years, every basement along Egypt Lane has had a buildup of water and silt, he explained. "At one point, you could probably almost stand up — in fact, you could stand up in the basement — but you can't anymore."

With the additions and a portico removed, the house is closer to its original look than it has been in nearly a century. "This is a traditional Cape-style house for Long Island, and the joinery is English style," Mr. Morbitzer said.

Where the structural elements and details could be preserved, they were saved. Where they could be repaired, they were fixed.

"Luckily, much of the original woodwork in here was intact," Mr. Morbitzer said. "So the original fireplace, the original detailing, all of that was intact. And where it wasn't, Strada Baxter was able to patch in and restore ele-



The rear view of the Hiram Sanford House.

KYRIL BROMLEY

ments that looked very much like the original. So that was a big deal for us."

In order to restore a landmark and keep its status on a local, state or national register of historic places, the U.S. Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Preservation must be adhered to, Mr. Strada noted. "Using like-kind materials, you can repair, restore or replace any material that's original that's failing." And he explained that in the case of the English-influenced historic houses on the East End, like-kind material means oak: "Everything out here that's tied to the traditional English background is built with oak."

The history can be seen in the fireplace mantels, the hand-hewn beams, the gunstock posts, the glass in the windows, and the molding.

Joists that had been covered in plaster before are now exposed. "We actually uncovered these and then in-filled in between with a traditional plaster method," Mr. Morbitzer said, pointing out that no drywall was used.

"You can see the history of the nail holes and just everything in there," he said of the joists. "So it's really pretty, and it adds some contrast and some beauty, which we're

very pleased with."

Because the original flooring on the first story had long ago been replaced with carpeting, new 13-inch-wide fumed oak planks were put down, reflecting the original oak flooring that survives on the second story.

Other than the floors, when it came time to install something new, it was deliberately designed to look new.

"The concept for the interior was to keep all the old things that were here, so we're not removing anything," Mr. Morbitzer said. "So we have original windows, we have original fireplaces, original details. And then anything that's new is specifically supposed to look new. It's supposed to look like an insertion. So we're not re-creating a doll house, necessarily. We're allowing this to be a new element — and consciously so."

Painted cabinets with granite countertops do a good job hiding all of the appliances, and there is no mistaking the cabinets for a historical element. The dishwasher, ice maker and cooktop are in the room visitors immediately enter when they come in through the front door. The refrigerator, storage and the A/V and HVAC equipment

are tucked away in a small room that Mr. Morbitzer has taken to calling a "larder," and that leads to a contemporary bathroom, one of two in the house.

The arrangement of the appliances not only frees up space in the main room, it allows for the gunstock posts to be seen.

"You see how it tapers down?" Mr. Morbitzer said as he pointed out a post in a corner. "That's a traditional building technique for stability. We didn't want to cover that up with something like a big fridge."

Another insertion is the large window at the rear of the house, giving a view of the shipping-container house. The six-over-six windows throughout the historic house lent the inspiration for the picture window.

"The motif of the six-over-six divided lights contributed to the design of one of the most striking features of the house that we did change and alter, which is this large glass window," Mr. Morbitzer said. "This is new, and this was purposely put in the back of the house so it is not visible from the road, but to get light in. ... You have this wonderful stream of light that just pours into the house from the southwest."

Because the house had been modified in that spot by the since-removed additions, they used the opportunity to create a window that makes the house seem larger, he said.

Maurer and Shepherd Joiners, a Glastonbury, Connecticut, company that creates custom reproduction millwork, manufactured the window and made the replacements for elsewhere in the house.

"It really adds to the character and the ambiance of the house, and it brings the landscape into the house, too,

which is really nice," Mr. Morbitzer said.

They never had to lift the house to complete their work, but they did repair the foundation where the additions were removed. The gaps were filled with concrete blocks, and then a rubble foundation was put back around the perimeter, which Mr. Morbitzer said feels more authentic.

Mr. Baxter noted that they also found a cornerstone dated 1822 during the work. "So we put it back in the corner of the building," he said.

On the second story, walls that had divided the space into small bedrooms were removed. There is now a larger living area with a wet bar, and a bathroom has both a tub and a separate shower. New cabinets in the eaves offer storage space.

In all, the Hiram Sanford House is now 1,020 square feet, while the new house will be 1,600 square feet.

The shipping container house, being built from eight new modified containers, stands in stark contrast to the historic house. "Just like in the interior of this house, where things are purposely new, we created a purposely new thing back there," Mr. Morbitzer said. "This house, by the means and methods at which it was made in its time, was very efficient. And that is a very efficient home now. So we're creating a dialog. And that house, when you're in it, frames this house beautifully. So we really wanted to create a background piece that frames this and allows this jewel to shine. We didn't want anything that was large and hulking and overpowered it. We didn't want anything that repeated it or imitated it — because you can't imitate this."

Mr. Strada was the one who presented the plans to the Design Review Board in January 2018, and he said it was

well-received. "Kudos to the board members who voted to support this vision of old and new on a historic site," he said. "It takes an element of, you might say, 'governance with understanding' to make things like this happen."

Mr. Strada noted that since East Hampton Village adopted its law, the towns of Southampton and East Hampton followed suit. In Southampton Town, it's known as the "carriage house law," and in East Hampton Town, it's the "special historic landmark" law.

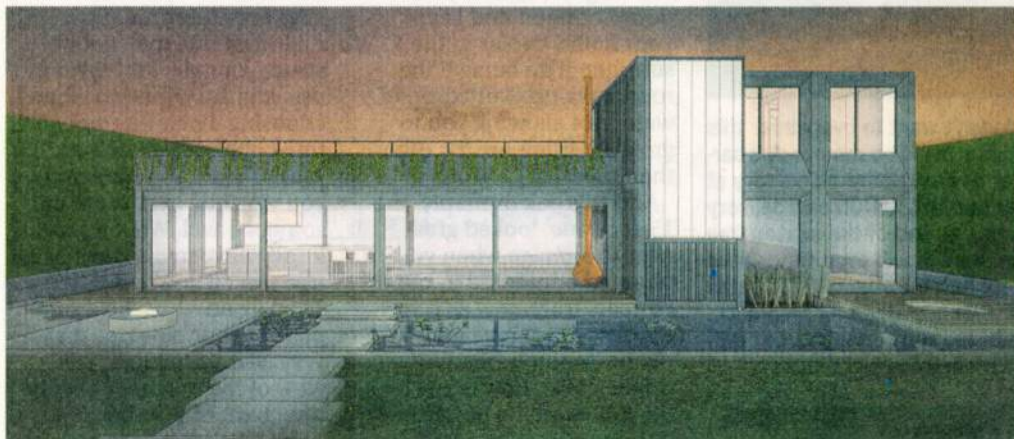
While such laws allow a second house on a property, the total allowable gross floor area remains the same. So after the historic structure's square footage is accounted for, the unused balance can be applied to the second house.

"For three or four years, we were looking at all sorts of different bonuses that would accompany a landmark designation of individual properties," Mr. Hefner recalled. "So this is actually a pioneering program in the village."

The ingenuity of the East Hampton Village law earned the Design Review Board the 2014 Commission Excellence Award from the National Alliance of Preservation Commissions.

Mr. Hefner said it is one thing to have a historic district where everyone in the neighborhood is subject to the same restrictions that benefit the whole character of the street, and another to designate an isolated landmark.

"If you go out and you designate an individual property where that person has certain responsibilities to preserve his house, but his neighbors don't, that's a little different situation," he said. "This was a way of sort of giving these properties owners something that their neighbors didn't have."



Ammor Architecture LLP's rendering of the modern home under construction at 13 Egypt Lane using shipping containers.