

Touch of Gray

THE SILVER LINING OF VILLAGE LIVING



BY ROBIN H. PHILLIPS // PHOTOGRAPHS BY JANE BEILES // AERIAL PHOTO BY HADLEY BEILES



COZY OPEN LIVING
Designer Emily Fuhrman found the ideal seating arrangement around the Robert James coffee table and Zebrino marble fireplace, blending Holly Hunt and Jessica Charles chairs with the brown velvet Vanguard sofa.



MODERN MODALITY There is nothing colonial about the Sloans' kitchen with its sleek tile backsplash, tray ceiling, Paramount Stone marble countertops, and Zuo modern chairs. The Sloan grandchildren—Sam, Katie (standing), and Caroline—love to visit. Cedar shakes and grey and white shingles; stone walls highlight the traditional New England look.



THE HISTORIC SILVERMINE AREA is a well-known Norwalk gem, but ask a resident if he knows why it is called Silvermine and you might see a blank stare. Not surprisingly, the name comes from lore suggesting there was a silver mine in the area, just waiting to be explored and make local residents rich. Of course, no silver was ever found, but the name stuck, and it later became a prosperous milling area, due to the proximity of the river, and then an artists' colony. It remains today the home of the Silvermine Guild Arts Center. In the late 1700s, at the center of Silvermine was a prosperous textile mill, a tavern, and a bustling stagecoach stop.

Fast forward 200 hundred years and most of us recognize it now as the GrayBarns section of Silvermine. Real-estate visionary and developer Andy Glazer of the Glazer Group reinvigorated the entire spot, finishing all the work in 2016, and naming it GrayBarns, including the old Silvermine Inn, tavern, mercantile, barn, and historic mill. It's a stylish stop, oozing with New England charm and a modern flair, for a dinner, event rental, or weekend stay, attracting New Yorkers and people from all over Fairfield County and beyond. Across from the Inn, near the big gray barn, is GrayBarns Village where Glazer designed and built four handsome homes, in a modern farmhouse style, and then sold each one.

"It was just a big field," says Glazer. "The economics of the project created the opportunity to build and sell some private houses and then put that capital back into the inn and barn." But besides that, having residential homes was important to Glazer. "A new and popular way of living is to build more residential dwellings around commercial areas, and it works particularly well for the empty nester." Glazer dubs it "the anti-suburban" mode of living. The homes are reminiscent of any 18th-century village, like a Sturbridge or a town in Vermont. "I love the historic look of those kinds of traditional New England homes, with different materials, textures



ART ABOUNDS The Sloans' treasured artwork graces almost every wall, creating eye-catching vignettes throughout the home. The aerial view, taken from above the Tavern, shows the village configuration.



and paint colors, inside and outside the home." The result are structures that blend seamlessly with the rest of the GrayBarns area. But what is it like living there?

Ron and Muffy Sloan adore their GrayBarns village home. "We were approaching retirement and wanted to be closer to our daughter Sarah and her children who live in New Canaan," says Muffy Sloan. The couple were Californians for 35 years with a home surrounded by a lot of trees. They were drawn to Silvermine because it was reminiscent of that northern California experience.

"We were looking for a smallish home of relatively new construction, and that was proving to be difficult to find in an area with estates that catered to young, active families," says Ron Sloan. "Luckily, we found the village around the restoration of the historic Silvermine Inn and Tavern—GrayBarns. It was a perfect solution." The Sloans are precisely who GrayBarns village was built for as Glazer explains it. "The empty nester doesn't need a monster-size house," Glazer says. "I designed the master bedroom on the first floor along with an open floor plan. It is how empty nesters want to live." Indeed being able to walk down the hill and go to the mercantile or the tavern, or have friends from out of town stay at the inn was a huge draw for the Sloans. "We also love that downtown New Canaan and Norwalk are only minutes away, and that virtually all of Fairfield County lies within 30 minutes." The Sloan grandchildren love visiting as well. "It's so fun to be able to walk right to the store," says Katie, age 13.

For the interior, the Sloans sought out the help of New Canaan designer Emily Fuhrman of Sage and Ginger Design to add some pizzazz to the décor. "We didn't really bring much furniture so were thrilled to meet Emily and find some solutions," says Muffy Sloan. "She had lots of fresh ideas and was excited about our project. We more or less gave her free rein to implement some of her ideas." Fuhrman started with window treatments from Mokum, then moved onto furniture and wall-paint colors before finally creating what the Sloans call, "the pièce de résistance"—the living-room fireplace renovation. Fuhrman enlisted Paramount Stone and A. Sillo Development to redo the focal point fireplace in the living room. She paired spectacular "stilettos" chairs from Holly Hunt with Jessica Charles swivel chairs, and a Vanguard sofa to create a stylish, cozy seating area around the fireplace. "It is fresh and modern, but also works well to complement their amazing art and personal touches," says Fuhrman.

The Sloans brought some of their favorite artwork from California for the house. "We have been influenced largely by San Francisco Bay area figurative artists like James Weeks and Christopher Brown," explains Ron Sloan. "This school, initially popularized in the 1950s and '60s, mixes realism with large blocks of color to create suggestions of movement." They especially liked the juxtaposition of the New England stateliness of their home and the area versus their abstract modern art.

Says Sloan: "We love the house, the little neighborhood, and think Emily did a great job. It's the perfect place to welcome people into our home, and have our children and grandchildren visit." ■



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