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INTERVIEW WITH THE HOMEOWNERS; JACK FRANZEN, J.P. FRANZEN ASSOCIATES ARCHITECTS; CHRYSTAL TOTH, CHRYSTAL TOTH DESIGNS;
& STEVE + JOHN SEGERSON, TALLMAN SEGERSON BUILDERS | PHOTOGRAPHER AMY VISCHIO

A new build
MAXIMIZES space
and water views
while **FULLFILLING**
a family's wish list

built to order

BEGIN AGAIN

BUILD NEW



opposite: This new build, incorporating New England, Scandinavia and California influences, has red cedar shingles on the roof and red cedar on the siding. Landscaping is by Outdoor Design & Living; the concrete bench is from Lillian August. **above:** The pool cabana features a pair of Joshua Tree lounge chairs from Ralph Lauren and artwork from ARC Fine Art; the outdoor light on the side of the garage door is from Hubbardton Forge.

What compelled you to build a custom home?

Husband: My wife and I had lived in Southport for eight years, and we did a relatively small renovation on our home. We had approached Jack Franzen, asking if he knew anyone who would take a project that small. He said he would do it, and we couldn't have been happier with it. We then had the opportunity to move to Switzerland, and we were there for three years. Once we knew we were coming back here about a year before we did, we realized that we had always wanted to build a house. So the first thing we did was call Jack.

How did you find the right property? **Husband:** Since we were living in Switzerland, I came back to the U.S. every now and then, and Jack came around with me and the real estate agent to look at properties. My wife and I really wanted something on the water, and we found some land in

Westport with an old tennis court on it. When my wife came over and looked at it, we decided that was it—we loved it.

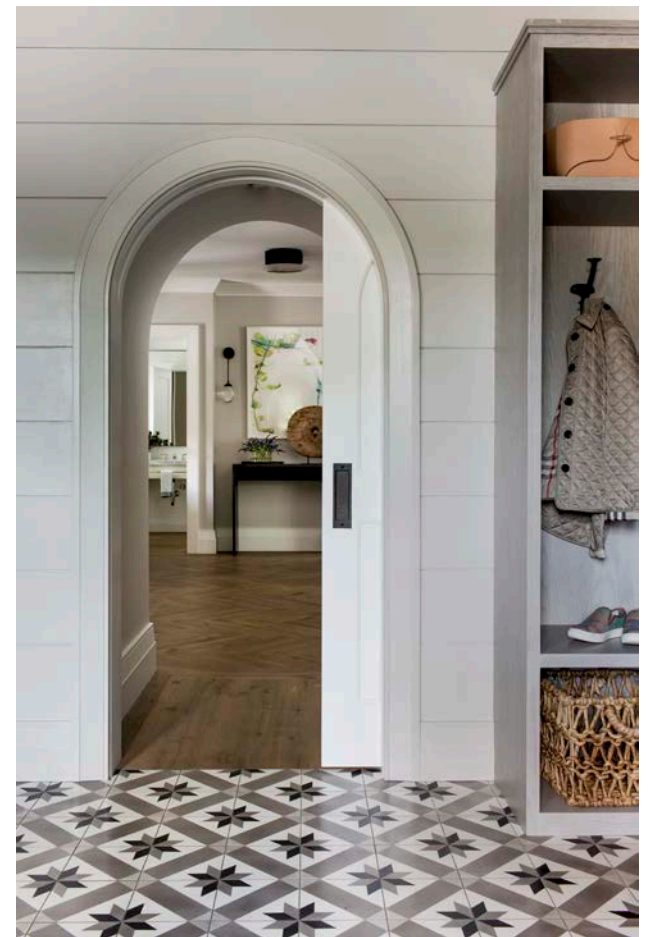
Jack Franzen: Because it was a tennis court, it was built up high. The town measures the height from the existing grade, so we were able to use that to our advantage.

Since you were still in Switzerland at the time, how did you kick off the project from overseas? **Husband:** We had our architect, but we needed a builder. We asked Jack about anyone he had worked with who had expertise building on the water, and we loved Tallman Segerson the most. Aside from the reference Jack gave them, they were the best equipped to work with us while we were in Switzerland for another year.

Wife: We used GoToMeeting while we were there to collaborate on the project and get everyone in the same room.



top: A runner from J.D. Staron travels up the staircase, with Cove sconces from Kelly Wearstler lighting the way; a peek into the first-floor powder room. **bottom:** A console table and sconces from Ochre greet visitors in the foyer; the planks in the mudroom are painted in Classic Gray by Benjamin Moore. **opposite:** In the mudroom, a QLOCKTWO wall clock by Biegert & Funk tells the time while also making a statement, and a lamp from Axel Interiors and a stem vase from Dubokk rest on the console. A custom walnut coat rack by Chrystal Toth Designs organizes the family's coats.



“Our **INTENTION** is not to resell this house. We knew we may do things that may not work for resale, but it’s the **WAY WE LIVE**, so we wanted to do it.”

—THE HOMEOWNER



Steve Segerson: John was in communication with the homeowners in Switzerland, and I dove into the project when it was ready to start.

How did you assemble the rest of the team? Wife: We went to another property that Tallman Segerson built, and that’s how we found Chrystal. We walked into the house and thought, “If she can do this, she absolutely can do our house.” We also hit it off personality-wise, but I think you can see that pretty easily!

Husband: Chrystal was our second designer. One of the things I love about her, and one of the reasons it didn’t work out with our first designer, is that

she understood the building side of things, so the team worked really well together. They all spoke the same language, even though my wife and I didn’t. They would be talking about molding, and we would look at each other like, “Um...” [laughs]

How did you decide where to site the house, pool and gym?

Wife: Gray’s Creek is in the back, so that’s our big water view, and the Sound is across the street. It was really tricky, and that’s why the pool is in the front yard.

Husband: Which is a credit to Jack. It’s why working with him is amazing.

this spread: A wall of doors in the back of the great room opens up to showcase peaceful views of Gray's Creek for an indoor/outdoor feel. The sofa and custom ottoman were made by Brownstone Upholstery, and the armchair is from Verellen. The seating area is centered on the clean-lined fireplace, which has a custom mantel of AKDO white ash and a surround and hearth of soapstone. The reflective ceiling, painted in Benjamin Moore's Chantilly Lace, conceals a TV above.



One of my favorite Jack moments was when we first got the property: He was standing on a ladder in the middle of the tennis court—he said he was checking out the views from the “second floor.”

I heard there’s a story behind the stone front on the exterior.

Wife: When you say “custom build,” these guys are custom builders all the way. The stonework was a labor of love, and I appreciate it every day. Husband: The base of the home had to be elevated, but we didn’t want it to look like it was on stilts, and Jack did a wonderful job designing it so it doesn’t. We wanted to cover the area underneath with stones, so we all

drove around and took photos of stone fronts we liked and sent them to each other. Then they found a mason to get it just right. It’s the perfect example of a team effort.

What was the design process like? Husband: We had the chance to go through every room and work out a lot of details. Jack said this was the most cost-efficient renovation he’s ever done because we redesigned the whole house on paper before we built it. As far as must-haves, there were things my wife and I came up with, and John and Jack would push back a bit and say, “When you go to resell this....” But our intention is not to



this spread: Painted in Farrow & Ball's Down Pipe, the bar is the perfect place to watch TV, play pool or catch up over cocktails. The walnut pool table is by District Mills, and the walnut sconces are by Cerno.

resell this house. We knew we may do things that may not work for resale, but it's the way we live, so we wanted to do it.

Wife: One requirement was that there couldn't be any unused space.

Husband: We wanted the home to be really open, and we wanted every space to be functional. The biggest leap we've ever done was putting the pool in the front, but you never really use your front yard.

Wife: And God forbid we have a space that's wasted, even if it's the front yard! *[laughs]*

Husband: It maintains the view of the creek in the back of the house, and it created an extra entertaining space.

What inspired the home's look and feel? Husband: We've lived a lot of places. We both grew up outside of Chicago, and we've lived in Newport Beach, Dallas, Australia for a year, Zurich. There were things from all of these different places that we really liked.

Wife: For me, Melbourne and Zurich were absolutely the most influential.

Husband: We brought in Scandinavia as well as some California. While we live in Connecticut, we still wanted indoor/outdoor living. It's really a Scandinavian-New England-California home.

Did you stick with the established design plan? Husband: We stuck with the *spirit* of the design plan. *[laughs]*

JF: Once you get approval, you really can't mess with the envelope—the spaces were the spaces. But we tweaked a lot of things.

Wife: We made the bar bigger and the dining room smaller, but we didn't drastically reconfigure anything.

How did you balance an open plan with a cozy feel? Husband: We wanted a great space for entertaining but also one that felt comfortable. It was a lot of challenges to throw at the team. We knew it was going to be a big space, but we didn't want it to feel like one, so scale was really important.

Chrystal Toth: Your inspiration photos were these Belgian concrete boxes.

They were sterile, plaster boxes with a single flower and a single low chair. [laughs] But they would say, “We need to watch TV and hang out,” and I was like, “None of these are comfortable!” None looked like Connecticut, and none looked like the beach.

Wife: We’ve had a lot of homes and done small renovations, so when you’re building new, you really want it all. Chrystal had to be a bit of a magician, but she found pieces that filled the space, made it feel comfortable and functioned in all of the ways we wanted.

Husband: We have three kids and two dogs, so it was going to get lived in.

Where does everyone tend to congregate? Husband: It depends on what we’re doing. The bar has a big TV, so that’s a great place to watch a game.

CT: The bump-out accommodates a sofa and makes it a den as well as a pool table room. It’s multifunctional.

Husband: When you’re not watching the TV that comes down from the ceiling in the great room, that is...

So there’s a TV concealed in the great room ceiling? Husband: My wife didn’t want a TV just sitting on the wall that you stared at all the time.

John Segerson: It was built into the bedroom above.



A view of the great room from the kitchen offers a chic study in contrasts, with the darker bar on the left and the lighter dining room on the right. Plenty of windows and doors throughout the home bring in the outdoors.







this page: In the light and airy dining room, Thibaut chairs by Verellen are seated around a custom live-edge table. A Kelly Wearstler light fixture hangs above, and the custom antique mirror in a float frame is by Westport Glass. The views outside are framed by drapes in a Cowtan & Tout fabric.

opposite: Pillows covered in a Mark Alexander plaid dot the great room sofa. Large glass sliding doors can close off the kitchen from the great room when needed.



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JF: And it was a challenge because it was after the fact. We had to redesign the millwork in the bedroom to fit in the machinery.

Wife: It's in our older son's room, but we said, "He'll be going off to college—he won't mind!" [laughs]

CT: But with the way it's designed, it looks intentional.

Did you incorporate existing furniture throughout the house?

Husband: For the most part, we started fresh. Our furniture wasn't the right scale for this house, and we thought, why build this house and then not properly furnish it?

CT: We took their old dining room table and put it in the office, and we put a Balinese chest in the guest bedroom. We also took their old bed, cut it down and made it into a new bed.

Your master suite looks like a great escape. Wife: The idea was to never have to leave that room if we don't want to, which is why we have the built-in coffee bar, the fireplace, the view and the soft chairs.

Husband: When we were in Switzerland, we traveled all the time. We pulled a lot of influences from the different hotels we stayed in, so the coffee bar was something I think we saw in Geneva.

JF: And that's not unusual. A lot of things people ask for are from hotels.

CT: The track of the coffee bar is insane. I wanted a sliding door, but we couldn't have it open because there wasn't enough room. We also needed that open slat so the fridge could breathe, so that was the another trick.

Husband: The other thing my wife pushed for—and she was spot-on—was separate bathrooms. I thought we would miss the alone time in the morning, but she said, "That's not the quality alone time we need!" [laughs] When we designed them, we worked with Chrystal on the aesthetics and got to put our own personalities into them.

Wife: It really brings you closer together; you can come out looking lovely for your partner. The secret to a happy marriage is separate bathrooms!

Did your children have input into their rooms? Wife: We asked them to name one thing they'd like for their rooms.

CT: I had a little design interview with each of them, and they chose one thing they wanted, and we surprised them with one.

Wife: So one got crazy lights, another got an expression wall and another got sports paraphernalia.

The flooring varies throughout the house. Tell me about the material used and those decisions. CT: I think most of the character aesthetically comes from the flooring.



The expansive kitchen features a Calacatta marble backsplash and countertops, with custom bleached ash topping the generous island. Stools by Arteriors offer plenty of seating for family and friends.









left: Outside the kitchen, a set of Wüd chairs are pulled up to a custom concrete-and-walnut table—designed by Chrystal Toth Designs—for game nights. **right:** The kitchen pantry backsplash is tiled in a pick from TileBar, and the Waterstone faucet and countertop by Concrete Encounter are elegant elements. **below:** The breakfast area is furnished with a dining table from RH and Verellen chairs in a Holland & Sherry fabric. The cardboard pendant is by Graypants.



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It’s really a
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NEW ENGLAND-
CALIFORNIA**
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this page: The laundry room marries form and function with custom tile from Creative Tile and a Shaws Original sink and Rohl faucet. **opposite:** A hanging light by Ochre lights up the foyer below; a custom carved wood sculpture graces the entry to the master suite.

JF: People underestimate how important flooring is. It's one of the first things I notice when I go into a house.

Husband: We spent a lot of time on it. We wanted to have the feeling of reclaimed wood, but with the scale of the house, finding that much reclaimed wood was a challenge.

JF: We went with center-cut white oak, which was good because the center is the whitest part of the tree.

Husband: And you're going to see us all shudder when I say this, but... the color of the wood! When they did the floors, they left the product on a bit too long. The floors looked really white, like they were covered in powder.

CT: The product we used was a bit temperamental, so we did many things to modify that stain to get it just right. We did twelve or thirteen samples.

Husband: And we got it to where it looked pretty good, and over time, it's weathered beautifully. That's another example of a team effort.

Wife: It was a lot of pain and suffering for a floor, but it was worth it. Everyone who comes to our house says, "I'd love to know what color that is." And I say, "I can't tell you. We don't know!" [laughs]

Husband: Then we had to figure out the tile in all of the rooms.

The mudroom was inspired by Morocco when we went there, and for the laundry room, my wife found a tile she liked through a designer in London. But we wouldn't get it here—they forgot to put it on the boat it was supposed to go on.

CT: And they kept sending the wrong color—it wasn't the right blue. We had to do three Pantone colors, and then it was perfect.

Any other challenges you faced? JF: There were two things that came up, almost at the end of the job, where we had to raise the cabana six inches, and we had to put the electric meter up to a certain height. It was like the two smallest things on the property were the biggest problems. There was also a lot of engineering on this job.

Husband: We had a couple of fun little challenges, like the letter we got saying there *might* be a protected species on the property, so they said we couldn't do anything. A week later they came back and said, "Oh, we were wrong." But for a week, we're sitting there saying, "What do we even do?"

SS: We also reworked the main staircase after it was installed. We changed it from an open Colonial to a box system. Since it was curved, it was a little difficult, but we took care of it.



this spread: The serene master bedroom is a true retreat, anchored by an upholstered bed custom-designed by Chrystal Toth Designs. Coffee is ready at any time thanks to the custom built-in wet bar made from bleached ash.







It's obvious that every detail was considered carefully.

Husband: We tried to be thoughtful with everything.

JS: The planning that went into some of the cabinetry, like her closet—the sunglasses here, the necklaces there.... When I was there a day or two after you moved in, I was amazed to see that you had everything exactly where it was supposed to be.

CT: Remember we found the perfect hangers for you, and the kids have their own colors? And there isn't one exposed lightbulb in the house except for the guest bedroom bathroom. Every single decorative light fixture has a lens or is fully enclosed, and they're all the exact right color temperature.

JF: There's a lot of technology in the house, like geothermal and audio/visual features.

SS: We weren't going to do as much of a smart home, but it evolved into a very serious smart home.

above left: With views of the Sound, comfortable Verellen Duke chairs in the master bedroom are perfect for both lounging and working from home. A ficus tree from Terrain brings a touch of nature inside, and The Frame TV from Samsung functions as a work of art when not in use. **above right and opposite:** The couple's separate baths showcase their personalities, with a Hans Wegner valet chair and Sonneman vanity light in the husband's, and Ochre pale horn pulls and marble floor tile from New England Tile in the wife's.





this page: In her bedroom, the couple's daughter can showcase fun mementos and books on custom plumbing-pipe-and-ash-wood shelving designed by Chrystal Toth Designs. A Rebecca Atwood pillow tops the bed, and a bone inlay bench sits at the foot. The hanging chair is from RH Teen.



this page: In one of the sons' bedrooms, custom bleached ash shelves by Chrystal Toth Designs display his Lego creations. A desk from West Elm is set up for homework, and a woven leather bench from Room & Board sits beneath the window. The custom built-in bed with LED lighting was a special request.



Husband: We put solar panels on the house, and the first floor has radiant heat—that was a Switzerland thing. And there were little things, like how we didn't want a TV in our bedroom, but these guys were smart enough to say, "You might want a TV one day." And we said, "No, we won't." And we now have a TV in our bedroom.

What do you feel when you come home every day? Wife: I feel joy.

Husband: And I get that feeling all the time because I work out of state. Every time I come home, it's so nice to come back to this house because we got to design and pick everything. It's "us" through and through.

JF: It's also a beautiful property. The street, to me, is the best street in Westport, or anywhere in quite a radius.

CT: You two were some of the only clients I've had who, when I asked how you wanted the house to feel, said, "We want it to feel like us." When we sat down with the plans and went room by room, I asked, "How do you want this room to feel?" And sometimes, it wasn't even words—it was pictures or a feeling.

Husband: The nice part about working from home is that I can work in any room, and they each have a different feel. If my wife's working from home, she's upstairs in the bedroom, kicked back in those nice chairs up there, with a good view.

Wife: And sometimes I'm in the dining room. There's a huge table in there and all of these windows to the backyard, and there's so much light. You can work and enjoy the view—it's so peaceful.

Any last thoughts? Wife: What sums it up for me is that when we travel to different places, it's really hard to leave—I feel like we have everything we want here. It brings me such happiness every day, and it was a labor of love. I loved everybody on this team, and we worked so well together. It's hard to leave because I think, Oh, I could be at home! I could go to the gym, swim in our pool or sit on the deck and look at the Sound while I read a book.

Husband: At the end of a vacation, most people say, "Oh, I have to go home." And we're like, "Oh! We get to go home!" We can't wait.

—INTERVIEW BY LAUREN FETTERMAN

Resources:

Architect: J.P. Franzen Associates Architects, Fairfield; 203-259-0529; franzenarchitects.com

Interior designer: Chrystal Toth Designs, Westport; 203-429-4227; chrystaltothdesigns.com

Builder: Tallman Segerson Builders, Fairfield; 203-254-1971; tallmansegerson.com

Landscape designer: Chris Palmer, Outdoor Design & Living, Fairfield; 203-259-9630; outdoordesign.com





The home opens up in the back, seamlessly blending indoors and outdoors. White Label outdoor furniture surround a Sutherland coffee table on the patio, and a custom concrete ping-pong table below is always at the ready. Landscaping is by Outdoor Design & Living.