

## Special Advertising Feature



Beyond NYC

PHOTO COURTESY OF HOULIHAN LAWRENCE

In just a month, the interiors of this stunning residence were updated to the neutral colors and natural floors today's buyers want.

## Behind the Scenes of 'Turnkey' Sales

by Julie Bennett

Sheila Garelik purchased a large house with a pool on a secluded lot near the center of Bedford, New York, 41 years ago. She just sold it this summer, above her asking price, in eight days — but it wasn't easy.

"I'd been living here alone since my husband died, and the timing was right," she explains. "But when I called in a real estate agent, Angela Kessel from Houlihan Lawrence, she said the interior was not what young people like today. I had carpeting in some of the rooms, and some rooms were painted in dark colors."

With Angela's help, Garelik found people to take the carpeting out, refinish the floors, repaint the walls to neutral colors and refresh the kitchen cabinets. "It looks stunning," she says. "When Angela closed the bidding, I had five bids, all



PHOTO COURTESY OF SARAH BLANK DESIGN STUDIO, LANDINOPHOTO  
A Connecticut farmhouse, built in 1750, now sports this modern kitchen island, thanks to the efforts of designer Sarah Blank.

at or over the asking price. You can't do better than that. It's so different today. Real estate agents don't just sell houses. They prepare you and the house for sale and help you get the best price."

### UPDATING A PRE-REVOLUTIONARY FARMHOUSE

Rehabbers are also purchasing older homes, redoing them to suit the desires of contemporary buyers and selling them into the hot market, Kessel explains. "We have builders here who are renovating and reselling smaller, older homes quickly."

In Greenwich, Connecticut, Sarah Blank, who owns her own design studio, and her husband, Charles Karas, also purchase historic homes, but they invest months in "bringing them up to a more modern aesthetic," she says. "We know the buyer today wants a turnkey home, one they can bring their modern furniture into and start living. We usually have to spend a great deal of time and money to get the plumbing, electrical, insulation and ventilation systems up to current building codes. Then, we make design changes, like modernizing kitchens and bathrooms, while still maintaining the historic character of the home."

Four years ago, the couple bought a house in Ridgefield, Connecticut, that had been built in 1750 by a farmer who had participated in the Revolutionary War. "He's even buried in the local cemetery," Blank notes. Their extensive renovations included transforming two old bedrooms into a new kitchen and making the former breezeway a laundry room. "The local realtor we chose, Karla Murtaugh of Karla Murtaugh Homes, embraced what the home represents and, when we were ready, sold it in a week."

Old farms are so popular that Kevin and Michele Fox, agents with Julia B. Fee Sotheby's International Real Estate in Larchmont, New York, are soon moving into a renovated barn they bought "sight unseen" last winter, Kevin says. "We

wanted a house with character," Michele adds, "and when a 1910 cow barn came on the market in Old Lyme, Connecticut, we put in a bid based on our realtor's photos. We wanted more space in a location where our adult children and grandchild would want to visit. This is close to the Long Island Sound with views of a mill pond and a river."

"The house has all the original beams from its days as a barn," Kevin reveals, "and there's even a rail from the old hay-loft." Previous owners had renovated the interiors and added a new kitchen, but the couple are updating the bathrooms before moving in. "The biggest surprise," Michele says, "was when the snow melted, we found a magnificent garden that's been blooming all summer. We had no idea it was there."

### DESIGNING FOR TODAY'S FAMILIES

Homebuilders are just beginning to bypass such renovations by designing houses to suit the new pandemic living desires. Architect Reid Balthaser, owner of RTB Design Services in New York, is overseeing a new construction on a 2.49-acre lot in Amagansett, in the Hamptons. The site adjoins a horse farm and golf course, and its eventual owners will enjoy expansive ocean views from their third-floor bedroom balconies. "We did create the house to meet the demands we were seeing from prospective buyers," Balthaser agrees.

The listing agent, William Stoecker, with Town & Country Real Estate in the Hamptons, says, "We've priced the house at \$11.5 million. Even though it won't be finished until summer of 2022, we are already getting calls about it. And once every couple of weeks, someone requests a showing of the construction site. It has everything buyers want today, plus a beautiful setting."

Julie Bennett is a freelance writer specializing in franchising, small business and lifestyle issues.



RENDERING COURTESY OF RTB DESIGN SERVICES, RES3D

An architect designed this house, now under construction in Amagansett, to match the desires of the luxury homebuyer.