

Design and Proportion

A well-designed house, like the ones made in 1910, according to Donaldson, “has rooms that are human-sized and looks and lives like a big house, but fits you comfortably. You can get from one end to the other in less than a day and call across, without an intercom, to your wife or kid. Everything is proportioned to be cozy, comfortable and gracious.”

Says Paul Brennan, broker at Prudential Realty’s Bridgehampton office, “A friend of mine says, ‘what they build now is appliances with walls.’ Because real estate has gotten so expensive, people want very big, with more light than old houses generally afford. If a house needs renovation, the thought is, ‘can we tear it down?’”

Brennan was born with a passion for historic homes. Built in 1854, his antique house in Bridgehampton has been in the family for three generations. The home was originally built for one of Suffolk County’s most illustrious citizens, Judge Henry Parsons Hedges, an attorney, judge, historian and founding member of the Republican Party of New York State. Hedges lived there until his death in 1911 and the property was bought soon after by an immigrant farmer from Ireland, William Brennan, Paul Brennan’s grandfather.

“My grandfather came out in 1919 from Brooklyn,” says Brennan. “He left a farm in Brooklyn when that area was developing. The same thing then is happening now,” which is to say farmland is giving way to real estate development. “My father continued to farm the land until the mid-seventies, when he sold most of the farm and kept the house and five acres.”

Brennan has seen a radical change in the quality of life in Bridgehampton. “When I was growing up I didn’t know the names of the roads. You always designated places by farms and who was living there. You’d say, ‘go down by the Brennan’s.’” The family is selling the house now, and it is distinctive for having had just two owners over its long lifetime.

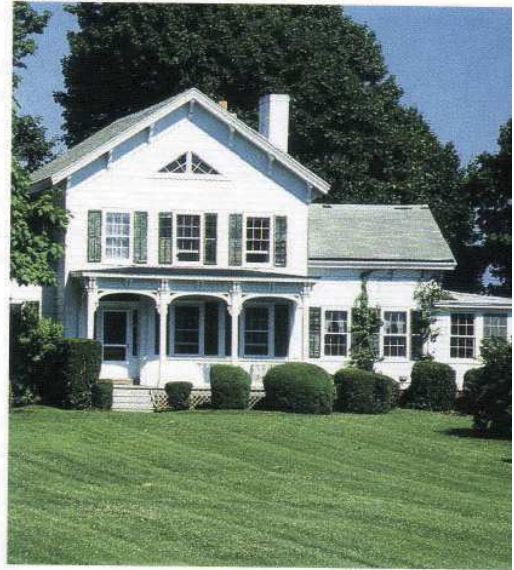
Architectural Influences

The Brennan house is a mix of the architectural influences of its day. The wide roofline cornices and pyramidal shaped window in the attic are Greek Revival, a popular style in rural areas through the 1870s, while the cornice brackets, paired porch brackets, decorative arch-topped porch columns and pierced railings are closer to the Italianate style in fashion in the 1840s and 50s.

“You see examples of every period of architecture in America in the Hamptons,” says Geoffrey Fleming, director of the Bridge Hampton Historical Society, “although this was a backwater place, so styles would move out here more slowly and were slower to change.” According to Fleming, “Greek Revival is most common because with money coming in from the whaling industry, people at the time had the money to build and Greek Revival was the popular style.” Indeed, the style is one of America’s most influential and enduring, as early America was eager to identify with the democratic ideals of classical Greece. By 1830 every sort of building adapted the style. The Greek Revival house might have the look of a windowed Greek temple or a simple Colonial with a large columned porch over the front door.

The oldest houses on Long Island and all of the Northeast are Colonial style, built from 1680 to 1776, in such variations as the Cape Cod, Saltbox and Georgian. Typically a two-story wood-frame house with narrow clapboard siding, the style includes simple windows with small panes, a center entrance and a chimney. The Saltbox had a steep, short roof in the front and a longer one in back.

After the Revolutionary War, Early Republic styles emerged as architects professionally trained in Great Britain and France, influenced by English Georgian architecture, constructed homes for the wealthy in America. A more restrained Federal style developed, retaining the symmetry of the Late Georgian style, but with less ornamentation. These homes, built from 1780 to 1830, were often brick, three



Above: Brennan Estate in Bridgehampton, NY, completed in 1854 in the Greek Revival style, was formerly Judge Henry Parsons Hedges House.

A large, white, three-story antique house with a prominent porch and a large evergreen tree in the foreground. The house features a wide porch with white columns and a large bay window on the ground floor. The sky is blue with scattered white clouds.

Antique Homes

By Steve Cutler

As the market for luxury property continues to roar, newly constructed homes pushing ten-thousand square feet scream for the homebuyer's attention, with massive master suites, greater "Great Rooms," sky-high ceilings and IMAX cinema centers in the basement.

Meanwhile, with steady, calm assurance, another type of home calls through the ages to a homeowner with a different sensibility. The antique home offers a different brand of riches: comfort, character, craftsmanship — and a place in history.