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DESIGNERS' KITCHENS

one farmhouse and a
black barn

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PERSONAL STYLE
BLACK BARN

AT HOME WITH MARK ZEFF

TEXT CHRISTINA VALHOULI
PHOTOGRAPHY ERIC LAIGNEL



To stand out in the **Hamptons**, a home has to go beyond the traditional cedar shingle style to be the black sheep of the community – or in this case the **Black Barn**.



Fade to Black

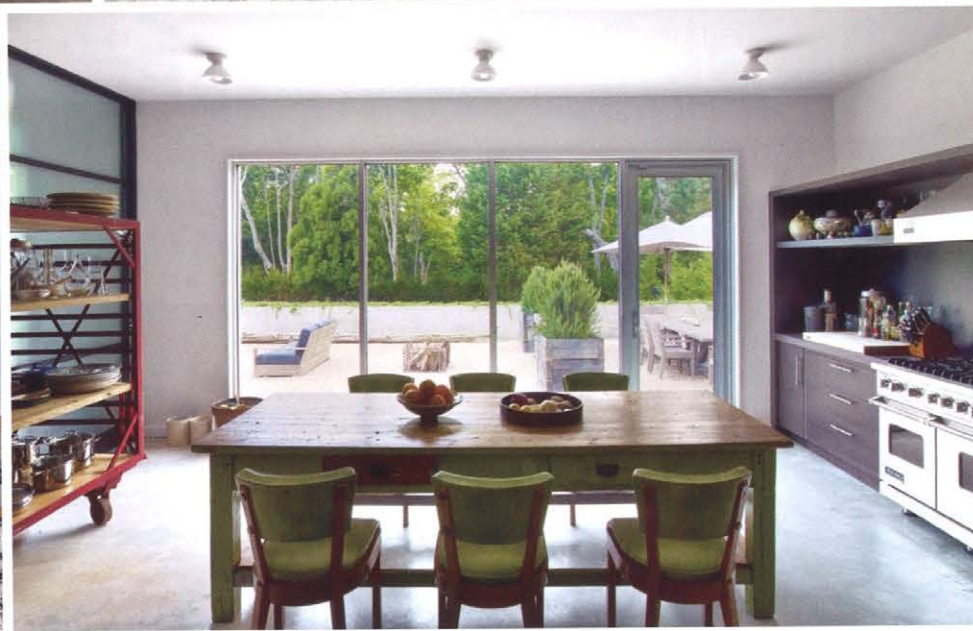
New York-based designer Mark Zeff of MARKZEFF DESIGN, who has been designing global residential and commercial properties for more than 30 years, was searching for a property with his wife, Kristen, to serve as their weekend home in the Hamptons a few years ago, but they couldn't find the right fit. So, they took a bold gamble; they purchased a plot of land near the beach where they got married along Gardiner's Bay in East Hampton and built a home from scratch. The result? The Black Barn.

"The barn is a beautiful confluence of many things," says Zeff, who has designed homes for Hilary Swank and Annie Leibovitz, and will also be working with Hilton Hotels on their new luxury boutique brand, Canopy. "It's modern with an industrial twang."





The ground floor houses the additional bedrooms, while the enormous master suite takes over the second floor. The barn theme continues here, with a pitched roof and exposed beams that are offset by the dark walls of the bathroom. The stand-alone shower is contained in a glass cube and is lit by barn-style lights.



Think of it as a modern, minimalist barn, with clean lines and an interior decorated in "Gypset" style, via Moroccan poufs and worn dhurries. The barn, almost Shaker in its simplicity, borrows from the vernacular of a farmhouse in a modern, industrial way. The black exterior draws the eye in, while outdoor barn lights are a nod to the farming community. The property wraps around a courtyard and is flooded with natural light, and the 12-foot-wide hallway lends a feeling of airiness.

The interior blends industrial touches, such as a poured concrete floor, with earthier materials, such as wood, and bright pops of color to warm it up.

Zeff decorated the home with furniture and accessories curated from his global travels, including Moroccan rugs and stacks of old National Geographics. The barn has an eclectic, Boho vibe, thanks to an artful mix of decor that ranges from a display of Le Creuset enamelware on the open shelves of the kitchen to vintage water skis and surfboards propped up casually against the wall.

Zeff positioned the building in a way so that no neighbors can be seen and the view is of uninterrupted trees. Though they would only be minutes from the beach at Gardiner's Bay, visitors will feel as if they are in the middle of the forest. ■

BB

The Black Barn Grows

Zeff's Black Barn made quite a splash when it debuted in the Hamptons. It was so impressive that it ended up becoming much more than a second home: It became a new business opportunity, as well as a lifestyle brand.

Two of Zeff's friends, orthopedic surgeon Dr. Jerry Lubliner and real estate agent Robert Dankner, decided to team up with him to develop more Black Barns in the Hamptons. While Zeff is keeping his own home, construction of a second barn is currently underway in Sag Harbor. The second barn is slightly larger and will have hardwood floors in lieu of poured concrete, as well as a finished basement. The Black Barn brand will expand to include a Manhattan restaurant, a book, a retail store and furniture.

The team is planning to build a handful of barns a year, but it all comes down to finding the right plot of land, where the interior and exterior can seamlessly blend.

Manhattan orthopedic surgeon Dr. Jerry Lubliner doesn't see his leap from medicine to real estate as a big deal. "I use my hands to build knees and shoulders every day," he explains. "Orthopedic surgeons are known as the carpenters of the medical world."

Lubliner is being modest. In addition to being the chief of sports medicine at New York's Mount Sinai Beth Israel hospital, he has been building and selling homes for over 20 years.

Commenting on the style of the barns, Lubliner adds, "I didn't want to go straight up modern with this. At the end of the day, it is modern, but it's a barn. It's a different type of living experience."

departure of his career. Lubliner recalls that most of the homes he's built in the Hamptons have been classic and traditional, but once he saw Zeff's barn, he leapt at the opportunity.

"You just don't see barns being built in the Hamptons, and I think that market is being underserved," he states. "People are ready for something different. Everything in the Hamptons is shingles and gabled roofs."

"The barns are for people who want to come in and have that wow factor without being superficially hip," notes Zeff.

A native New Yorker with homes in Manhattan and Southampton, Robert Dankner worked as a banker and a trader before launching Prime Manhattan Residential, a leading real estate brokerage firm, in 2008 with business partner Jonathan Anapol. However, with his hipster style (black skinny jeans and chunky silver jewelry), he looks like an additional member of U2 or an artist rather than a typical broker. Still, he serves an A-list clientele, and his annual sales average well north of \$100 million per year in Manhattan.

Dankner says that he fell in love with the Black Barn as soon as he saw it and that he found the overall design and vibe of the Black Barn inspiring. "It felt like an art project rather than a house," he remembers. "As soon as I saw it, I said, 'I want one for me.' You can't manufacture an emotional connection to a house. It is a very hard thing to achieve."

While more Black Barns are in the works, he mentions that he and his partners have no desire to mass produce them, as it's a unique product and specific to its surroundings: "We're trying to create a brand with a strong sense of style, for people who will appreciate its artistic sensibility." ■

— Christina Valhoulis

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