

# ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

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**SPECIAL ISSUE**

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Richard Cameron of the Brooklyn architecture firm Atelier & Co. spearheaded a dramatic transformation of Ravenwood, M. Night Shyamalan's Pennsylvania estate; the gardens were designed by Barbara Paca, and the interiors were furnished in collaboration with decorator David Kleinberg. Here, the new gatehouse frames a view of the original 1937 Georgian Revival residence.

**Opposite:** The rear façade of the main house. For details see Sources.



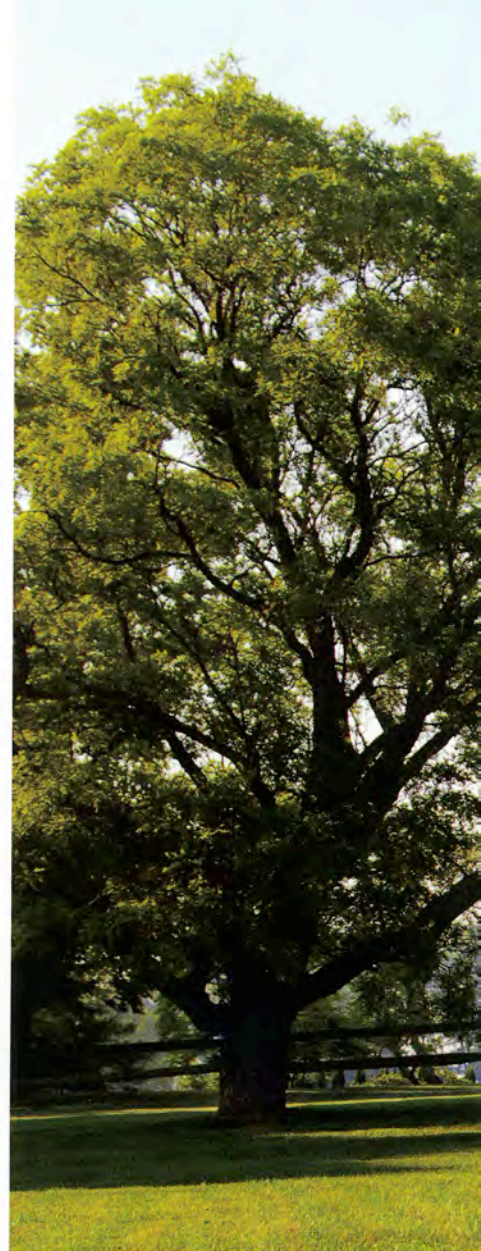
# SPECIAL EFFECTS

Filmmaker M. Night Shyamalan enlivens  
a storied 1930s Georgian Revival estate near  
Philadelphia with a romantic array  
of English architectural styles

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**OME FILMMAKERS**, especially those known for uplifting dramas or screwball comedies, would no doubt be happy for their lives to imitate their art. But M. Night Shyamalan? His eerie works, filled with unthinkable monsters and unshakable frights, do not exactly go hand in hand with domestic bliss. So it may be surprising that, not long after completing *The Village*, his unsettling 2004 thriller, the writer/director/producer chose as his home a property rather reminiscent of the movie's setting.

Eight years ago Shyamalan and his wife, Bhavna, bought Ravenwood, an idyllic 125-acre estate in the rolling horse country west of Philadelphia, not far from where he grew up. Clad in aged red brick, the handsome 1937 Georgian Revival residence felt centuries away from the modern world, and yet a major turnpike snakes by just a mile down the road. *The Village*, for those unfamiliar with the plot, takes place in a seemingly preindustrial hamlet whose inhabitants are unaware that beyond the fearsome woods and the wall that surround them are (spoiler alert) present-day suburbs.

Seated in Ravenwood's oak-paneled library, Shyamalan smiles at the parallel. "It seems so obvious now, but we didn't think of it at the time," says the youthful auteur, whose cheery manner is quite at odds with the ominous bent of his work. (He is currently filming *After Earth*, starring Will Smith.)

In fact the couple's real-estate quest began with a humble goal. For years they had kept a weekend retreat in the

**Clockwise from top left:** Shyamalan and his wife, Bhavna. Boxwood-edged parterres define the kitchen garden. The brick-and-half-timber gatehouse is connected to the main residence by an orangerie. A trio of pendant lights in an outdoor dining area. The poolhouse. Cameron added the double-height library wing, at left; the bench in the foreground is by Munder-Skiles.









**From top:** In the living area, the sofa is by Anthony Lawrence-Belfair, the walnut armchairs are Flemish, and the rug is from Patterson, Flynn & Martin. The Shyamalans purchased the dining table and chairs in South Africa and upholstered the latter in a Duralee fabric. **Opposite:** The oak-paneled library's antique French table is grouped with mahogany side chairs clad in an Edelman leather.

Pennsylvania countryside, but they needed a larger, year-round house for their growing family (they have three daughters). When Shyamalan happened upon Ravenwood, a deal was under way with another buyer; nonetheless he fell instantly in love with the six-bedroom home and declared to his broker, "I am going to buy this." Miraculously, the sale fell through, and buy it he did.

"We just wanted to do a little renovating," Shyamalan recalls of their initial plan for the house. They also wanted it to feel more romantic. Film producer Scott Rudin introduced the couple to Richard Cameron of Atelier & Co., a Brooklyn architecture firm specializing in historically mindful projects, and before long "a little renovating" mushroomed into a total reinvention. Cameron had just returned from England, where he had marveled at the charming tradition of what might be called architectural accretion—that is, the piecemeal process by which many country manors were expanded in the style of the day. He suggested to the Shyamalans a chronological reversal of the process: joining what looked like a 17th-century structure to the 18th-century-inspired one already there. They went for it. →











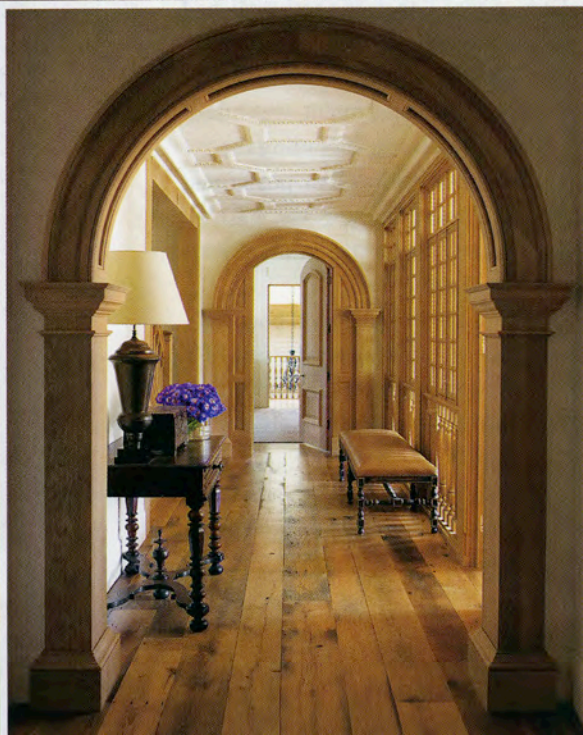
That was in 2004. Over the next four and a half years, 12,000 square feet were added to the existing 15,000-square-foot residence, most of it in the form of a two-story gatehouse. Linked to the original structure by an orangerie (also new), it contains Shyamalan's office, a gallery for displaying movie props, and a duplex guest apartment. The new construction itself is a kind of coup de théâtre, with a half-timber façade, turrets, and an arched passageway leading to a courtyard. All that's missing is a moat.

The interiors of the main house were extensively renovated to harmoniously blend Anglophilic architectural elements and styles. The foyer, once curvaceous, now possesses a rectilinear Elizabethan mien; the kitchen has an Arts and Crafts influence, with hand-hewn beams crisscrossing the ceiling and a rectangular bank of windows along one wall; and the library wing, which Cameron created at the end of a long, formal stair hall, is classically Georgian in spirit. Despite all these historic allusions, Ravenwood still has plenty of playful touches, including a

**Above:** Crisscrossing ceiling beams and wide-plank floors lend an Arts and Crafts feel to the kitchen; the sink fittings are by Kohler, the hood and range are by Viking, and the barstools are by Ann-Morris Antiques.







**Clockwise from top:** Shyamalan's gatehouse work space features white-oak bookcases and a vaulted ceiling with hand-troweled plasterwork; the globe light fixtures are by Remains Lighting, and the antique Swedish desk chair is from Dienst + Dotter Antikviteter. A Louis XIV writing table and a 19th-century bench in an upstairs corridor. The stair hall's chandelier is from Treillage.





**Above:** A 19th-century Swedish daybed occupies the master bath; the tub and fittings are by Waterworks. **Opposite:** The master suite's painted four-poster is by Gregorius|Pineo, the curtains and coverlet are of a Brunschwig & Fils linen, and the rug is from Patterson, Flynn & Martin.

swimming pool, a basketball court, and a billiard room, the entry to which is hidden behind a white-oak bookcase. There's even a capacious home theater in the basement (much more Old Hollywood than Olde England).

Outside, New York-based landscape architect Barbara Paca devised an impressive scheme, which, like Cameron's, references English manors. Among the traditional spaces she conceived are a field bordered by an allée of fruit trees and a sunken flower garden. Fashioned as a haven for the resident young princesses, the latter is a fairy-tale delight, with three distinct "rooms"—one circular, one rectangular, and one oval.

Though it's hard to believe, given all that was accomplished, part of Shyamalan's master plan was to leave Ravenwood unfinished. Interior designer David Kleinberg, with whom the couple had worked on their Manhattan apartment, was hired on a casual basis to bring in key furnishings, including the library's upholstered seating, the master suite's four-poster, and the stair hall's gilded chandelier. The family, however, wasn't interested in rooms that were "done." What they wanted was a house they could decorate over the decades.

"Night really thinks of this as a kind of ancestral house," Cameron notes. "He'd say, 'I plan to stay here for the rest of my life. This is my home, and I want it to be my daughters' home.'"

Says Shyamalan, "My hope is that someone will visit us here one day and just see two old people living in peace."

It's certainly not a difficult scene to imagine. On the most basic level, Shyamalan's mission was to make Ravenwood a sanctuary—a word he is fond of using. And what is a sanctuary but a place that keeps the specters out and the happy endings in? □





