



It is no accident that Melanie Charlton Fowler's country retreat, nestled at the base of a forested mountain in northwest Connecticut, retains an unmissable storybook quality. Its narrative potential is what initially drew Fowler, founder of the organizational design firm Clos-ette, and her husband, a health care executive, to the 200-acre estate that encompassed a main house, horse barn, and pondside fishing cabin. It's also why they chose to take the more arduous and costly route of painstaking renovations instead of simply tearing things down and rebuilding. "I knew that this was going to turn into more than we bargained for," she confides, "but I really wanted each part of the property to be special."

The pastoral setting, as well as a hint of the unexpected, inspired AD100 designer Virginia Tupker's brief, which to date has included an overhaul of both the barn and cabin, as well as an ongoing years-long renovation of the primary residence. "Melanie loves to ride, and they saw this place as a gathering ground for the kids and the family to spend time together," the London-raised, Connecticut-based decorator says of her clients.

Fowler realized early on she wanted to convert the barn into a space that would house not only her two Irish Draught horses but also the couple and their blended brood—one girl and four boys, ages 12 through 18—indefinitely while the main house was completed. Fowler, who splits the rest of the year between homes in Manhattan, Palm Beach, and Dallas, had one architect in mind for the job: Michael Goldman, a veteran of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill and the office of Thierry Despont, who had a portfolio of residential projects in the area she admired.

Fowler loved the Adirondack-style vibe of the existing barn and cabin, but she ultimately longed to "go inside and almost feel like you could be lost" in Scandinavia or the Cotswolds. With this in mind, Tupker looked at ski chalets and English country houses—along with a trove of clippings Fowler had been saving over the years—to set the mood. Both structures also had to be stripped down, fortified, insulated, wired, plumbed, and equipped with central air and new windows.

"When I started, it was timbers—there were holes in the floor," recalls Tupker of the antique barn. The plans called for creating state-of-the-art stalls, hay storage, and a tack closet, as well as adding an eat-in kitchen and sitting room onto the ground floor. Fowler is an avid cook, and Tupker knew