

A Great Escape

A tennis cottage proves to be a charming addition to a New York couple's house in the Hamptons.

By Eliot Nusbaum

When Ellen and Larry Sosnow want to get away from it all, they pack up their tennis racquets and swimsuits and head out to their home in the Hamptons and the little escape they've built behind their house. There, they've put in a pool and tennis court and built a guest cottage that also serves as a sort of private tennis clubhouse.

As great as the cottage is, it was really something of an afterthought. When a piece of land adjoining their property came up for sale a few years ago, the Sosnows bought it with the idea of putting in the

tennis court. At the time, however, their home, which has since been remodeled and enlarged, was a rather modest, undistinguished ranch house. It occurred to them that because the main house was so small, it might make sense to build a guesthouse.

The new piece of land offered plenty of room, so Ellen and Larry hired architect Anthony Di Sunno to design the new quarters.

The original plan called for a two-story, four- or five-bedroom shingle-style cottage. But, says Ellen, "We went out one day

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Left: Entertaining friends at tennis is a typical weekend pleasure for Larry and Ellen Sosnow. When they bought the land behind their existing home, it was to build the tennis court. The cottage was an afterthought. **Above:** A gated arbor leads to the cottage.



Above: The guest bedroom, one of two bedrooms in the cottage, is a small, charming space that looks out to the gardens through two sets of windows.

Left: A fanciful old tramp-art mirror, pedestal sink, and sconces set the perfect tone for the only bathroom.

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fall. There's a rich mix of lavender, catmint, hydrangea, loosestrife, Russian sage, sedum, and butterfly bush, plus clematis on the arbor gate and climbing roses on the trellis attached to the cottage. Hardscaping includes a wonderful arbor gate that the Sosnows bought at an auction, a handsome green-painted fence designed by Hollander, and an antique iron urn filled with green plants and blooming flowers.

The interior of the cottage, which Ellen decorated herself, is every bit as charming as the outside. She says that designing for herself is much easier than designing for a client. "I'm so lazy that I'm just not that fussy about fabrics and things. I have clients who want to see a lot of samples before they make their choices. But I already know what's out there in the market, and I know what I like, so I can just go out and get it. Also, I love mixing old and new things together, and inexpensive things if they look good."

The main attraction inside is the living room, which runs the length of the house. It offers sitting areas at each end and, between, there's an antique Anglo-Indian table that can be used for dining. The hip roof translates into pitched ceilings in the living room that reach 20 feet in height and are punc-

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Left: This living room sitting area is a rich blend of relaxed furnishings and materials, like the Anglo-Indian daybed, Indonesian cabinet, folk-art Pennsylvania Dutch trunk, kilim-covered chair from England, and Gothic-looking wicker chair, all sitting on a dhurrie rug. The paintings are Dutch watercolors. The sconces are antique. **Below:** A bare-bones kitchenette, ideal for morning coffee or afternoon tea, is tucked into a convenient corner of the main room.



The porch is really the heart of the house. Everyone congregates there to watch tennis or sit and have a drink. The main house has a patio, but there's just something wonderful about a porch.

—ELLEN SOSNOW



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"The porch is really wonderful," says Ellen. "It's the heart of the house. Everyone congregates there to watch tennis or sit and have a drink. Even though a patio and a family room—with the same wonderful cupola and pitched roof line as the cottage—were added to the main house, they just don't have the same charm that the cottage and porch do."

Some of that charm comes from the gardens that flow from the main house to and around the cottage. A delightful garden walk leads from the house to the cottage. Designed by Ed Hollander in what used to be a potato field, the gardens are very low maintenance and are designed to bloom in blues, pinks, and purples from spring to
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Left: Gauze curtains in a second seating area in the living room frame a view of the gardens. Casual touches include a dhurrie rug and an old painted bench/table.

The living room, which runs the length of the small cottage, opens to a porch that overlooks the tennis court. At the center of the room is an antique Anglo-Indian table from England. The white-painted copper fixture above the table is English. The trunk to the right of the table is also an antique.



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after they started to build it and were overwhelmed by its size. So we had them take off the top floor. What we were left with was a charming 32x32-foot cottage with two small bedrooms, all on one floor. We changed the top floor into a cupola with eyebrow windows and a wonderful shingled roofline.”

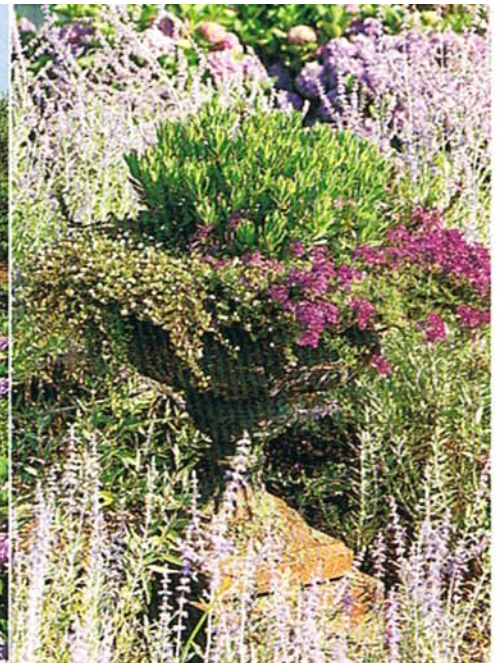
The reconfigured guesthouse consists of a living room that runs the full length of the house, a tiny kitchenette that is just large enough for fixing drinks or making snacks, two small but charming bedrooms, a small bathroom, a basement (which they use for extra storage), a

garage, and an outdoor shower. In short, everything a guest might need for a weekend of tennis and swimming.

Among the more frequent guests are the Sosnows' children. "Our married son and daughter love it," says Ellen. "They bring their friends and spend the weekend with us, yet still can have their privacy."

But the most frequently used space in the house is actually just outside. The porch, which opens into the cottage through double French doors, runs the length of the house and overlooks the tennis court. In fact, the court sits at the bottom of the porch steps.

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Above and below: The small blue and purple circular garden outside the Sosnows' tennis cottage was designed by Ed Hollander. Planned to bloom from spring to fall, the garden starts out silver and blue with lavender and catmint, then turns shades of purple, pink, and blue with climbing roses, 'Nikki Blue' hydrangea, clematis, loosestrife, sedum, and butterfly bush as the summer progresses. **Right:** An old-fashioned outdoor shower set behind siding topped with a decorative border offers cool relief from a hot game of tennis or a quick washup before a dive into the swimming pool.



Above: At the center of the garden is an antique iron urn planted with green plants and purple flowers and surrounded by Russian sage.

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tuated by eyebrow windows and beige-painted beams and crown moldings.

Knowing the kind of use the cottage would most likely be put to, and especially the kind of dirt that would be tracked in by tennis players, Ellen chose her materials carefully, with low maintenance in mind. For the floor, she picked inexpensive 16-inch beige tiles, which she had laid on the diagonal.

The cottage is furnished with a mix of new and antique items, all finished in casual, easy-care materials. Colors are a mix of cool blues, creamy whites, and the warm brown tones of the wood. Cotton fabrics, tile floors, country-style furniture, and rough-hewn folk-art pieces give the cottage the lighthearted, welcoming feel of a weekend beach house, but without the drive. ■

Architect: Anthony Di Sunno
Landscape Architect: Edmund Hollander
Interior Designer: Ellen Sosnow
Regional Editor: Bonnie Maharam

For more information, see the Readers Resource on page 238.

