

# CTC&G

Connecticut Cottages and Gardens

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MEET THE ARCHITECT

AS SEEN IN  
CTC&G  
Connecticut Cottages and Gardens

# John P. Franzen



A SPECIALIST IN PRESERVATION, planning and new construction, John P. Franzen, FAIA, is a former member of the Fairfield Historic District Commission and is involved in many regional and community boards and design juries. His firm, J.P. Franzen Associates, operates out of offices in Southport's historic Tide Mill Building and in downtown Fairfield.



**Site Lines** This compound (RIGHT), designed by John P. Franzen, FAIA, is sited on a bluff oriented toward an island in Long Island Sound. With both main and mudroom entrances facing north, the new Colonial Revival-style home is connected by a porte cochere (TOP RIGHT) to the barn beyond. The barn (THIS PHOTO AND ABOVE) was redesigned and reconstructed using materials from an existing barn on the property. See *Resources*.



**After growing up in Ohio and studying at Cornell, your wife brought you to Connecticut. What was your impression?** The look of the house here is unique, totally different. It's called New England for a reason. Trained as a modernist, I didn't think I'd ever be designing homes that looked Federal style, Greek Revival or Colonial, but that's mostly what was here. So I had to dust off my history books and become fluent in traditional architecture.

**And now you're a proponent of Connecticut buildings?** I would hate to see the New England character evaporate or become homogenized. I think that if you're in a historic district where all the homes are older or a certain style, you have to have a good reason to depart from that—out of respect.

**The preponderance of your practice is in this state. Does that give you an advantage?** The 169

towns in the state are all very different in terms of zoning, conservation, historic districts—and it helps to have a lot of local knowledge. For instance, to calculate height in Fairfield, they create a polygon on the ground 10 feet away from the outside of the building and plot the grade changes every foot or two to create an average ground plan. In another town, it might just be measured at the foundation where the concrete hits the dirt.

**What are some other regional challenges?** The climate and landscape are tricky. There are a lot of rocks, and with an average 45 inches of rain, there are engineering issues to get rid of the water—sometimes regulations require providing storage on the site for water coming off the roof so it doesn't cause erosion or flooding.

**Before preservation became a concern in the**

**1960s, people would modernize their homes by sticking on a Bauhaus-style addition. How are homes revised today?** You still need to differentiate to see where the old and new are happening, but without such a shock to the eye. If the old part was clapboard, on the new part you do shingles. Or you change the spacing on the clapboard or alter the trim around the windows. In a brick addition, you can change the type of bond.

**You're part of an AIA committee listing the state's most interesting buildings. What are some of your favorites?** The Sturges Cottage, an enormous Gothic "haunted" house on the Fairfield green, and the Hotchkiss Library on the Sharon green, all stone and very compact. It hasn't changed since Bruce Price designed it, even the toilet paper holder in the bathroom is the same as when it was built, it's pretty amazing. —Sharon King Hoge

STACY BASS (EXCLUDING HEADSHOT)