





Story by
THOMAS DIMOPOULOS

SARATOGA ARCHITECTS

REINTERPRETATING THE PAST—
PUTTING THEIR STAMP ON THE FUTURE

Above: A modern interpretation of the Italianate style that overlooks the Italian gardens in Congress Park, this John Muse design on Spring Street includes a retail store on the first floor with a residence above.

Opposite: This one-family residence on North Broadway restored by Frost Hurff Architects features many historic details as well as modern elements that were inserted into the house without disturbing the historic fabric.

There was a time when the Saratoga skyline was distinguished by the Grand Union and United States hotels, when residences along North Broadway served as summer cottages for the well-to-do, and Congress Park sat in the afternoon shadow of Convention Hall, where as many as 5,000 members of the community would gather for special events.

Some of the historic architecture of a bygone era still stands and has helped define Saratoga as an extraordinary community. In their own way, modern day Saratoga architects continue to honor and collaborate with the design work of local architectural predecessors such as S. Gifford Slocum, R. Newton Breeze and Frelin C. Vaughan.



Top: An environmentally conscious home in Wilton by Phinney Design Group is integrated into its natural surroundings, with timbers and natural stone used densely throughout. Bottom: Inspired by Long Island cottage homes, this sustainable residence in Saratoga Springs by Phinney Design Group integrates modern open floor plans with traditional cottage features, and was certified as LEED Silver by the U.S. Green Building Council.



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A contemporary deluxe residence by SD Atelier Architecture features a large living room window overlooking Lake George.

“All of our work is heavily informed by the rich 19th century historic fabric of Saratoga Springs,” says Matthew Hurff, a junior partner working alongside Thomas Frost at Frost Hurff Architects. The majority of the firm’s work is performed in downtown Saratoga Springs, a community uniquely known for its historic architecture. Much of the residential work involves the renovation and adaptive reuse of main houses and carriage houses on North Broadway.

“The trick is developing and adapting that tradition to new buildings and uses, keeping the character of the place alive, fresh and growing, without losing a connection to its powerful past,” Hurff says.

If collaborating with history is one consideration, the climate in the Northeast is another addressed by area architects. “We’re in a tough place in the country where the temperature can be 30 below zero, or 105 degrees,” says Mike Phinney, who grew up in the Lake George area before founding the Phinney Design Group in 2003, now headquartered in a “green” building on the west side of Saratoga Springs. Responsible design takes climatic opportunities into consideration.

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An arts and crafts home in Saratoga Springs by SD Atelier Architects was designed with a front porch to wrap around the corner lot and blend in with the neighborhood.





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“We’re known for a lot of our buildings being sustainable, and responding to the environment when designing houses,” Phinney says. “That’s something we carefully consider in the Northeast.” Natural ventilation, passive heating and cooling, and placement of glass are all taken into consideration. “We have a diversity of styles and we try to interpret what our client likes and dislikes and blend those things into a unique composition,” he says, adding that local trends point toward the use of natural materials. “What it’s really about is using beautiful materials in an elegant way.”

John Muse began his architectural career in New York City in 1979, and moved his practice to Saratoga Springs in 1990. One of his passions is working with natural light. It is a style exhibited in the architectural drawings of his projects that line the walls of the carriage house where he works. When mirrors are placed along dormers, he explains, the natural light floods through windows, illuminating the residence inside.

“That’s a big part of what I bring,” Muse says. “How I respond to the sun is the essence of my work. Some of the more challenging work involves transforming older buildings for re-use, in a modern



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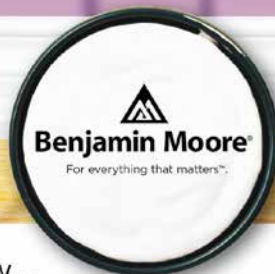
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way.” Muse has lived in Saratoga Springs long enough to see some of the region’s older buildings razed, rather than being restored and transformed. “You can save anything you want,” he offers. A building’s condition can sometimes play a secondary role to the money it would require to save it, he says, particularly in affluent communities where revitalizing a building provides less of a financial incentive to the owner than does reclaiming the land it occupies.

One of the most important things an architect can do is communicate extensively with a client. “I ask a million questions,” Muse says.

The best projects are the ones where there is a lot of collaboration between owner and architect, says Sue Davis of SD Atelier Architecture. The resources available via the Internet and cable television shows have built a home owner’s knowledge of design possibilities. “We’re getting a more educated consumer,” says Davis, who met her husband and business partner Donald Davis while doing an architecture internship in Connecticut.

The Davis’ purchased an old Saratoga “fixer-upper,” put “sweat equity” into the project, and turned it into their home. They opened their office in Saratoga Springs in the 1990s and have performed a variety of residential projects around the city and in the Adirondacks, including historic house additions, house transformations, Adirondack camps, carriage houses and new custom homes.

Even in a historic community, the market is changing. “Our profession is directly impacted by the economy, so in 2008-2009 [new] residential came to a screeching halt,” Davis says. As sales for new houses dropped off, the workload changed, with people staying put, and the remodeling market picked up. New residential work has been coming back of late, albeit in fits and starts, says Davis, adding that the most recent trends focus on energy efficiency and sustainability. Homeowners are now less interested in massive amounts of space and are growing more interested in a design of high quality. **SL**

Thomas Dimopoulos was born in New York City and has resided in the town of Saratoga since 2004.



Architect John Muse in his carriage house studio.
Photo by Thomas Dimopoulos



A residence on Caroline Street is influenced by the Shingle style in this design by John Muse.