

SAGAPONACK SANCTUARY

MID-CENTURY MODERN MEETS COUNTRY

By **Heather Bryce** - June 25, 2018



Interior designer Gideon Mendelson designed his Sagaponack house before he and his husband had their three children, ages five through seven. Yet, despite their penchant for entertaining large family gatherings, it still looks like it comes straight out of the pages of a glossy shelter magazine. They might have banished a few fragile accessories and added ottomans to be moved around for family gatherings. And, yes, the library has been taken over by Legos, but otherwise their home is the embodiment of stylish refinement.

Let's start at the foyer, a generous space anchored by a pair of traditional English Demilune console tables presided over by French shell sconces. The essence of old world elegance – except for the amusing drawings made by an eccentric relative of Mendelson, which add just the right note of levity.





Down a step is the sunken living room – very ‘60s – which has been divided into two seating areas to keep a clear view from the front door to back garden. On one side are a pair of smart tailored sofas, which he designed for the room and which are now in his own furniture collection, made by Mendelson, where they are called Slope Arm Sofas. In fact, all the upholstered furniture in the house was designed by his hand and is mostly available through his line.

For a beachy feel the sofas are upholstered in nubby linen, but the same sofa in Miami was covered in patent leather while one in New York got velvet. “I like the buttons on the back,” he says. “They’re a nod to the ‘50s.” Indeed, there is much in the house either directly from or referencing that decade.

Between the sofas is a “primitive countrified” coffee table made with reclaimed wood and sitting on a modern-y base. “Countrified” items show up elsewhere such as in the convex mirror that hangs over the fireplace. Almost a piece of sculpture, it is framed by large bronze the drapery panels branches, which relate to both the botanical pattern in the drapery panels and the natural world outside.



Probably Mendelson's favorite piece in the house is a lovely curvilinear art nouveau chair, a gift from his husband. "It's like a piece of art," says Mendelson. It is also quite comfortable. "I sit in it all the time. I'm not afraid of it."

The living room's other seating area features a grand piano, chic sofa and kooky cocktail table designed by contemporary artist Nada Debs. It is made of an articulated brass base holding up multiple small table tops at varying heights so that "everyone gets their own table."

The library is an octagonal refuge that Mendelson has furnished with a round table surrounded by a pair of custom curved benches upholstered in an ikat pattern. He astutely did not want to crowd the room with "a bunch of chairs." While the shelves are filled with design books, the table is awash in toys.



The large open kitchen is where all meals take place. A long table is accessed by a banquette built into the bay window and a scattering of cane and kid-friendly synthetic leather chairs based on a design by mid-century designer, Edward Wormley. "It's a little grandma but I love cane," says Mendelson. A Sputnik-style chandelier hangs above.

The bay is lined in two fabrics: "If only one it would feel too massive." The darker hue is on the bottom "to hide messes better." The café curtains that cover the lower half of the sash windows allow the control of light while letting Mendelson see out over the top as he prepares meals – with the help of a trove of Ina Garten's cookbooks.

In the family room a quirky built-in cabinet holds the TV but is mainly a display for Mendelson's colorful collection of Red Wing pottery. In another nod to a country theme,

there's an antique bobbin chair. But it's given an edge by its location next to an industrial filing cabinet. Mendelson fixed the "imperfect" ceiling in this room by building a cove into which is painted a trompe l'oeil skylight.



The stairwell that leads upstairs is a prime example of the dictum that Mendelson offers his clients: to take risks with a pass-through space. In this case the designer asked his decorative painter take lavender paint and "go crazy." The result is a happy festival of purple swirls with lots of drips. "I didn't want it to look precious at all." To make things even more whimsical, Mendelson ran an olive zebra print runner up the stairs.

In the master bedroom where a large window overlooks the back yard, the designer played with "lots of horizontality" to mimic the view of the hedges and horizon line — from the stripes on the chaise to the banding on the drapery panels. A hair-on-hide ottoman completes the seating area at the end of the bed, an area created so that "the kids can come and hangout."

"I think what's happened in this house is because of family. It used to be about how things looked but what I've learned is it's not so much about filling space with stuff, but the design of the home has brought us together. Design can have an impact far greater than aesthetic."