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Michael Crichton

A DINO-SIZE HOUSE FOR THE
JURASSIC PARK AUTHOR AND HIS WIFE

Architecture by Charles G. Kanner, FAIA/Interior Design by Judith Kanner

Landscape Architecture by Pamela Burton

Text by Gerald Clarke/Photography by Peter Aaron/Esto



ABOVE LEFT: "This was major reconstruction, beyond plastic surgery," designer Judith Kanner says of the Bedford, New York, residence she renovated with her late husband, architect Charles Kanner, for Michael Crichton and Anne-Marie Martin. LEFT: A new staircase accesses the second-floor guest wing.



Before beginning one of his best-selling novels, Michael Crichton usually spends months in preparation—reading, interviewing and traveling to the spots where his action takes place. It was no surprise, then, that when it came to choosing a place where he wanted to live, he and his wife, Anne-Marie Martin, took their time—five

years, to be exact. Their goal was to find an area less hectic than Los Angeles, their home for several years. The new location had to have enough land for Martin's horses. But it also had to be close to a major city and the libraries, museums and universities Crichton needed to research his scientific thrillers. They looked on the West Coast and on the East Coast, and even in

Canada. But no place, however beautiful or charming, struck the proper chord. "A place has to feel right for Michael to be creative," says Martin.

What finally felt right was Bedford, New York, a haven of rural civility an hour or so north of New York City. In that tony enclave they found just what they had been searching for: a large house, over 100 years old, with

In the living room's central seating area, two Barcelona chairs and the sofa and armchairs, covered in a J. Robert Scott cotton, rest on a Serapi carpet from Ariana Rugs. "It dictated the colors of the room," says Kanner. "Always start with a beautiful rug and work up." Magritte's *L'Usage de la Parole*, 1928-29, hangs at rear.

Like all the doors, the one connecting the living room and library is high enough to accommodate Crichton's six-foot-nine frame. "Michael's so tall," jokes the designer, "he doesn't need a ladder." Picasso's *Femme à la Robe Rose*, 1925, is behind a round table and Poul Kjaerholm chairs.





sweeping views of hills and trees. With 80 wooded acres, the property had more than enough space for Martin to indulge her passion for Icelandic horses. Not only would she have room for a riding ring and a nine-stall barn—it now is home to seven of the hairy beasts—but she would also be able to ride the many horse trails that are in the region.

What was good for her and the horses was equally good for Crichton, who would have a quiet place to work not far from Manhattan. No less important for him was the old house's large rooms and high ceilings. At six feet, nine inches—three inches taller than Michael Jordan—Crichton has to stoop like Gulliver in less generous spaces.

To say that the house had problems, however, would be an understatement. "Your typ-



ABOVE: "Most houses look as if a decorator has been there," says Kanner, in the sunroom, "but this one looks as if it's been in the family." Andy Warhol's *Mao*, 1973, is at rear.

ical Tudor Adirondacks hunting lodge," was how someone humorously described it to Crichton. But Judith Kanner, his friend and longtime interior designer, had more pungent words of description. "It was such a bastard," says Kanner, "so poorly put together that I personally thought it was hopeless." Much as she liked the land around it, even Martin thought the house—"a big brown thing on a hill"—was uncommonly ugly. A distress call went out to Kanner's husband (now deceased), a well-known Los Angeles architect, and the next day Charles Kanner arrived from California to decide if the bastard could be transformed into a respectable country gentleman.

Logic said no. In its 100 or so years the house had been remodeled five times. Windows had been punched hig-

gledy-piggledy into walls, rooms had been oddly positioned, and the exterior had acquired two different skins—part clapboard, part shingle. The landscaping, if there had been any, had also been botched. So much soil had been removed from the grounds that it looked almost unstable, as if it might slide down the hill. But if logic said no, the heart—and Charles Kanner—said yes. With time, work and money, he said, the house could become everything the couple desired.

Crichton wanted to keep as





OPPOSITE: A pair of pocket doors in the central hall open to reveal a spacious dining room. *Women and Children*, 1961, by Picasso is reflected in the mirror. A French table and a group of side chairs are set on a rug originally owned by George Burns. Roy Lichtenstein's 1993 sculpture *Day and Night* is in the corner.

ABOVE AND BELOW: A large space was reconfigured to create the winter garden, which has a glass ceiling, and the breakfast room. "The house was dark," explains Kanner, "so at the center of it all I put a room where flowers can grow year-round." Dividing the two spaces is a custom-made wood-and-glass wall.

much of the old structure as he could. "We largely restored it, as best we could understand, to what it had previously been," he says. Since no one knew exactly what it had previously been, however, such a resurrection involved some shrewd guesswork. The haphazard arrangement of the windows was regularized, and the windows themselves were enlarged. The skin of the house was made whole, and the cedar shingle roof was replaced with slate. Porches were added front and back, and gables were adorned with a cheerful sunburst design.

Inside, the house was all but taken down to the studs. Like the windows, the oddly positioned rooms were reconfigured into a coherent pattern. "We thought about the flow of the house very carefully," says Martin. "Even though it's a big house, it feels cozy." To accommodate

Crichton's height, doorways were pushed up to eight feet, and the counter in his bath was elevated to what seems like a towering 42 inches. "I finally have something that fits," he told the Kanners.

An unexpected problem was finding the proper way to light his extraordinary collection of modern art—almost a museum of Picasso, Magritte, Johns, Hockney, Lichtenstein and Warhol—"because the old ceilings were just a mess of crisscrossed beams," says Crichton.

The author of a score of techno-thrillers—thanks to *Jurassic Park*, he now even has a dinosaur named after him, the 180-million-year-old *Bienosaurus crichtoni*—Crichton maintains what he calls his office-office in a house at the bottom of the hill. But he also has a small study on the third floor of the main house. There he wrote his last nov-





ABOVE: "It was like decorating for a museum," Kanner says of the master bedroom. "I didn't put up wallpaper because it would have detracted from the art." *Two Apples*, 1972, by Roy Lichtenstein is at left. A Jasper Johns monotype and his *Flags 1*, 1973, are near a leather Egg chair by Arne Jacobsen. Ariana rug at right.

el, *Timeline*, and there he is completing his newest one. Still untitled, the book, as he describes it, is "extremely odd, the strangest thing I've ever written. I'm working on it and holding my breath."

As much effort as went into the house, perhaps even more went into the landscaping. A sloping meadow was leveled to create Martin's riding ring—"It looked as if they were moving Mount Everest," says Judith Kanner—and the excavated dirt was trucked to the house to build up the series of terraces Crichton had designed with landscape architect Pamela Burton. After that,



OPPOSITE: Pamela Burton, who landscaped the grounds, designed the lily pond and the terraces leading to the north entrance. LEFT: The air-conditioned barn—which houses Martin's seven Icelandic horses—and the residence "look as though they were made by the same hand," says Kanner.

Martin took over, searching out evergreens in different shapes and shades so that the garden would be as beautiful in winter as in spring.

Like a novel, a house is a creation of the imagination. But in this case the authors have been able to write their own reviews—all raves. "I think of it as a kind of dream place," says Michael Crichton. "To be surrounded by so much space is, in the context of the modern world, a bit unreal. In the front there are some huge and very beautiful oaks. Sometimes I go out just to watch the trees. In the fall it's better than any movie you'll ever see." □

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