



THE HOUSE WHISPERER

ON THE MARKET: KATIE BROWN'S NEWEST RENOVATION

It's no secret that house and garden guru Katie Brown, host of the *Katie Brown Workshop* on PBS, likes to bring her domestic skills to renovating Hamptons properties. Known to her friends as "The House Whisperer," she has put her current Hamptons home—her third in 13 years—on the market. Listed for \$1.9 million with Lori Barbaria of Prudential Douglas Elliman, the four-bedroom, four-bath Amagansett property is nestled at the end of a private drive and comes with a heated pool, lush lawn and artist's studio. The home is also featured in a future episode of her show, scheduled to air in October.

"Katie's first request is always, 'Find me the ugliest, least expensive home that no one wants to buy in the best area.' I do, and she turns them into masterpieces," says Barbaria, who has worked with Brown since the beginning.

Brown first came to the Hamptons to share a house with her close friend, chef Bobby Flay. "I fell in love with the area," she recalls. "It reminds me of the Michigan resort town where I grew up, which is also on the water." Her initial foray into the Hamptons was a property on Bridgehampton's Butter Lane, which she bought in 1998. "It had two old barns and a butcher shop," she says. "I knew I wanted a project, and it was all I could afford: lots of character, but a total mess. Bobby stood there and said,

Design Diva | Katie Brown turned this ho-hum home (RIGHT) into a hip haven (BELOW AND OPPOSITE). Prudential Douglas Elliman's Lori Barbaria has the \$1.9 million listing; 516-702-5649.



'Please tell me you're going to tear all this down.'"

Brown's second project: renovating a studio and a couple of cottages on the Bridgehampton/Sag Harbor Turnpike. The plan was to create a complex where she could work and shoot her show, and then later convert it into a weekend home after selling the Butter Lane property. But with a growing family, Brown decided it was time to find the next ugliest house on the best property . . . this time farther east, in Amagansett.

The Amagansett buy, for which Brown paid around \$500,000, presented the ideal challenge. "The house was two apartments with two kitchens in a chopped-up layout," she says. "I had to look past how the current tenants used the space. It wasn't only about knocking down some walls. I removed a closet and turned one of the kitchens into a master bath."

When the house is perfection, it is time to let a new buyer appreciate her talents and move on. "I'm a bit of a junkie," Brown admits. "My husband and I are always looking—we get so excited when we see a wreck on a good piece of property. But we have to sell this one first."

Katie's Keys to Success

1. Look for decent land. "Not necessarily in terms of acreage," she says, "but something with pretty trees that's a bit set back from the road. And at least one thing in the house has to give it the 'it' factor, even if it's a hidden element—something that's special and romantic, like the fireplace in my Amagansett house."

2. Gravitate toward open, airy spaces. "If you're buying a smaller house, you'll want at least one of its rooms to feel cathedral- or loft-like. It's where you'll entertain."

3. Hide inconsistencies. "There's always some way to cover up flaws. For example, if wood finishes don't match, paint all the wood in the house white."

4. Spend time in the home. "There are things you just won't notice when visiting a place just once or twice. When I'm working on a house, I live in it while I renovate—and learn about it as I go along."

