

# Church Revival

Reverently reworked by Lisa Gray and Alan Organschi of Gray Organschi Architects, a 19th-century Baptist church in Greenwich, Connecticut, retains its only-in-New-England facade yet is fully transformed inside thanks to a space-age birch “pod.”

Project: Suarez Residence  
Architect: Gray Organschi Architecture  
Location: Greenwich, Connecticut  
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Photos by Juliana Sohn



*“After gutting the church and ridding it of its old ‘60s and ‘70s additions, the owner came to us and said, ‘Push yourselves—be creative.’ We’re always up for a challenge, but this was a pretty big rescue job.”*

—Architect Lisa Gray

BEFORE



## Here Is the Steeple

● The church’s original steeple was in trouble structurally, so contractors from the local firm Olson and DeBeradinis (now Olson Development) lifted it off its supports, removed it with a crane, and brought it to the ground, where they meticulously reconstructed it. “It was a real spectacle on crane day and a complex logistical process that they handled with economy and enthusiasm,” notes Organschi. “It was an expensive feat,” adds Gray. [olsondevelopmentllc.com](http://olsondevelopmentllc.com)

## Door of Perception


● The undulating door—specially designed by the architects—was inspired by one the owner had admired at a sushi restaurant in Japan. “It replaced a ghastly aluminum sliding-glass door,” says Gray. Comprised of an aluminum-tube frame and clad in ship-lapped cedar “tiles” made by local firm Breakfast Woodworks, the door has no particular historical relationship to the original building, says Organschi, but offers a whisper of modernity, a counterpoint to the ecclesiastical exterior. [breakfastwoodworks.com](http://breakfastwoodworks.com)

## Lofty Goal

The upper-level choir loft became the master bedroom and bathroom. To bring light in, the architects sliced a chunk out of the birch for a window opening, in which they added a frosted pane that brings in light yet allows privacy. “Initially I wondered if the birch pod would feel like too much, too alien,” says Gray. “But it has a light, floating quality.”

## Birch Goers

● The laminate birch-plywood pod was fabricated in place by the firm, which is well versed in the ways of the material. “Bending birch plywood, when each lamination is thin enough, isn’t hard,” says Organschi. To create the illusion of a solid lamination, the architect arranged curved battens into an internal structure and laminated the edges of the shell. The architects note that the material is similar to that used in Eames plywood chairs in that it uses glue lamination to maintain the position of plies in the layup.

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See what Lisa Gray and Gary Organschi did to preserve their own Connecticut home.