

Seaside Aesthetic

On a frigid February day five years ago, two friends nosed their car down a narrow lane not far from the village of Woods Hole. The road ended abruptly at the top of a bluff overgrown with scrub oak, pitch pine, *Rosa rugosa*, and other indigenous plants—a wild tangle, for sure, but not quite thick or high enough to obscure the view. Here, from 27 feet above sea level, was a vista that took the men's frosty breath away. The steel-blue expanse of Buzzards Bay stretched out in every direction toward the horizon, fringed by the Elizabeth Islands to the south and Mattapoisett to the north. After nearly a decade of searching for a place to build a second home, one of the men had just found it, and the other, a friend who knew the region well, backed the decision wholeheartedly.

“We were sold on the shape of the land and its west-facing orientation,” say the husband-and-wife homeowners, experienced renovators who were building a house from scratch for the first time. “What really drew us to this particular parcel,” they add, “was the contour of the land, the natural ‘bowl’ shape that frames the view of Buzzards Bay.”

With the idea that they wanted their house to “look like a rambling Cape, one and a half stories high,” the homeowners approached architect Steve Hart of Hart Associates Architects, Inc., in Belmont, whom the couple found by word of mouth after admiring other projects he'd completed in the area. “The site moderately sloped from top to bottom,” explains Hart. “The owners were sensitive to this and to the scale of the house. It was really important to them that the house blend into the environment.”

Commanding sea views take center stage in a new home in Falmouth.



by janice rohl | photos by eric roth



Above: The pantry offers ample storage for dishes.

Opposite above: The kitchen and dining area are separated by a colonnade.

Opposite below: A bay of three windows offers views to the sea while the family is dining.

Indeed, the team comprised of the homeowners, architect Hart, and M. Duffany Builders, Inc., of Falmouth achieved their goal of nestling this large Shingle-style house into its surroundings, looking for all the world like it's been there forever. A second challenge was constructing the house so that, despite the sometimes harsh elements, it would also last forever.

"The foundations are enormous, very well engineered," says Mike Duffany, who has been at the helm of his family-owned and -operated business for more than 20 years. "All the materials we used were selected to increase the structure's longevity in difficult weather conditions," Duffany explains, pointing out the taper-sawn (thicker than normal) cedar shingles, zinc-coated copper flashing that will weather attractively, and water-resistant mahogany outdoor trim. Gutters are built into the eave trim, which not only gives a cleaner appearance but also increases the structure's longevity. Interior details, like invisible molding seams, also reveal the high level of craftsmanship exacted by Duffany, the grandson of a cobbler and a blacksmith who apprenticed with an old-school carpenter. "His finish detail is amazing," say the homeowners, who were smitten with Duffany and his team after seeing a 100-year-old house they had painstakingly renovated.

Overall, the handsomely proportioned house evokes "a New England aesthetic," says Hart. "It strives to have a feeling of evolution about it, which is what often gives grand old houses their charm." If you didn't know otherwise, you might think this was a house that had started modestly and been



added onto over the years, with its interesting mix of gables and dormers animating the roof and sections of the house set at different angles.

In contrast to the traditional notion of the exterior, inside, the house is all about flowing space, natural light, and water views. "We wanted the house to be open enough for entertaining," say the homeowners, who had spent many summers in this area living on their 42-foot powerboat with their three children. Throwing open the front door and seeing the ocean—the view that had hooked the homeowners in the first place—is intentionally dramatic. "We spent a fair amount of time with a compass, aiming the house toward the sweet spot of the view," says Hart, who, wherever he could, made sure that "the view goes right on through." In place of a long, dark hallway from the entryway to the living room, for example, he designed a "screen" wall with large openings and



A compass rose was incorporated into the hall just before the master bedroom. Opposite: The master bedroom and bath offer serene clean spaces to relax.



space for display. Hart describes one of the central design objectives as accommodating numerous rooms and spaces while keeping the height low and the volumes to scale.

Nowhere is the impact of space and openness to the outside more powerful than in the flow from the spacious kitchen to the sun-porch and on to the bluestone patio and pool. From a seat at the huge hand-planked teak kitchen island, it is easy to watch kids splashing in the pool. On the other side of the kitchen, the north side, a turret-shaped hallway with a compass rose on the floor acts as a round transition piece connecting the master bedroom, dressing room, and living room.

The master bedroom and office space are on the first floor so that, looking toward the future and retirement, the second floor housing the children's bedrooms and guest room can be closed off. When there's a full house in the summer, the second-floor common room provides a gathering space for kids apart from the adults. It also happens to have one of the best water views in the house.

When it came to choosing a color palette, the seaside setting held sway. Susanne Csongor and her team from SLC Interiors in South Hamilton, Massachusetts, drew on the nature-colored glass tiles in the bathrooms and the homeowners' fondness for teal blues to create the palette for each room. "The location and natural setting of this house are the real focal point," says Csongor. "Our goal was to choose fabrics and furnishings that complemented the surroundings while also creating a comfortable, relaxing home for the client."

The project has taken longer than anticipated, but husband and wife agree the wait has been well worth it. "We had a lot of items on our wish list," they say, "and we think we got them all."

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The screen porch is set up for dining with views out to the sea. Below: Steeply pitched rooflines punctuate the front of the home.



Hart opens the hall to the spectacular views with a screen wall. The staircase offers classical flourishes.

These items included a geothermal air conditioning system that the husband, who has an engineering background, had placed high on his wish list. Using the earth as a heat sink, not only is this system at the leading edge of technology, but also its energy efficiency makes sense from a practical “green” standpoint. This design takes advantage of the moderate temperatures in the ground to boost efficiency and reduce the operational costs. “It intrigued me from a long-term perspective,” the husband says, explaining that the setup costs are higher than for conventional systems but that the difference is usually returned in energy savings in three to 10 years. Another plus is that this closed-loop system does not use Freon or other hazardous materials.

Aesthetics were important, too. Without air condensers outside, there was no visual or noise pollution, plus there was no equipment that could fail due to the salt air. With similar respect for the environment—and the neighbors—noisy pumps for the pool and a battery back-

up system in lieu of an exterior generator are housed in the basement, behind sound-deadening concrete walls.

In fact, there is very little to interfere with the soothing sound of the waves lapping up on the beach 50 yards away. “I didn’t expect the pace of life to be so comfortable, so relaxing,” says the wife. “We get into a nice rhythm here.” Happy children, gorgeous sunsets, charming Quissett Harbor, the interesting science community nearby—all is contributed to the feeling of contentment, but above all is the suitability of the house. “It’s designed for today’s lifestyle,” observe the homeowners. “It works so well.” *h*

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