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this page: A jellyfish-inspired chandelier, sourced through Tusk Home + Design, cascades down the stairwell. The foyer is painted in Rhinestone by Sherwin-Williams. **opposite:** The home's façade was inspired by the Scaleras' favorite place. "We melded the idea of Ocean House with the idea of a beach house in Fairfield County," says builder Gina Schapiro of Grace Design Build. "We didn't want to copy it; we wanted this very much to be a house that looked and functioned in a way that suits their family."




INTERVIEW WITH REBECCA TIMLIN-SCALERA, HOMEOWNER; GINA SCHAPIRO, GRACE DESIGN BUILD;
& SARAH WEILAND, TUSK HOME + DESIGN | STYLING BY LESLEY MARLAN | PHOTOGRAPHER AMY VISCHIO

THE SOUND HOUSE

A Fairfield **BEACH HOME** is an actual dream come true

Rebecca, we're sitting in your dream home on your dream property. When did it all begin? I've been coming to this beach since I was 8 years old. My cousin went to Fairfield University, and I would visit her at college and thought it was so cool that she lived in a beach house on the beach. I then went to Fairfield University as well, and I met my husband, Tom, at a party several houses down from here that, coincidentally, was a house my cousin had lived in ten years prior. Before my husband and I moved back to town, I used to walk the beach and always thought this property was the prettiest one. It had these dunes next to it, and you could still walk to town and be part of a neighborhood. I used to write letters to the previous owner and told him that if he ever wanted to sell the property to please let me know. We couldn't even have afforded it then, but I



this spread: The home's open floor plan and color palette capitalize on the view of the Sound out back. "There are so many different shades of blues and greens that come off of the water and the sand, and the colors change throughout the day," says interior designer Sarah Weiland of Tusk Home + Design. "The palette reflects that." The pillows on the family room sectional are from Serena & Lily, and the kitchen's blue cabinetry sidesteps the usual white. "This particular blue, with a little bit of gray in it, is a color Rebecca wears all the time," says Schapiro. "Her eyes just shine with that color."





above left: "Rebecca wanted to feel like she was in a mermaid's grotto," says Weiland, so the mirrored kitchen backsplash, sourced by Tusk Home + Design, resembles scales for an oceanic feel. "That backsplash was one of the most important decisions we made in the kitchen. It has the feel of movement, and it's reflective of the water. It's amazing."

The pillows lining the banquette are from Kerri Rosenthal.

above right: Hanging swings make the alcove in the kitchen a cozy place to catch up and enjoy a cup of coffee. The pillows on the swings are from Serena & Lily.

opposite: A large wall of bifold doors blurs the line between inside and out. "The Scaleras wanted to completely open up the back of the house so they could have that sense of bringing the outdoors in," says Schapiro.



thought we'd figure it out, that maybe we'd rent it. We ended up moving back to town about fifteen years ago, and we lived in a beautiful house on a marsh with wonderful neighbors. It was a perfect place to raise our kids, but in my mind, it was always my dream to move to the beach someday—I love the water and find it to be so peaceful.

When did the idea for this house first take hold? About three and a half years ago, I was diagnosed with breast cancer, and it changed our lives. I had a number of complications and was in and out of the hospital quite a bit for the first eighteen months. I had ten major surgeries and underwent chemotherapy and radiation. Once we got through all of that, we were on vacation in February 2017. We were at a point where we thought there was a chance the cancer wouldn't come back because it was at an early stage then—it was stage 3C—and I had gotten through all of the surgeries. But we knew life was short and that the cancer could come back, so we decided to move up our plans to build our dream



house sooner rather than later. We had our friend call the previous owner, and lo and behold, though the house wasn't even on the market, he was thinking about selling. It all just worked out—we bought the property that I had dreamed about all these years, and we started making plans to build. Then, a few months later, the cancer did come back. It had metastasized to stage 4, which means it's terminal and there is no cure. When it returns, the average prognosis is only about eighteen months, so we really didn't know if I would still be here to move into the house. We were already in the middle of building, but we decided to keep going, build our dream house and make it a place that, for whatever time I had left, would be a sanctuary and a place we loved.

What inspired the vision you had for it? We decided to model it after Ocean House in Rhode Island, which is our favorite place in the world. It's beautiful and has history to it, and it's set in a quiet, quaint beach town. We love everything about it—the design, the location, everything—so we

decided to recreate it with our home. We wanted the turrets and little spaces that just felt carved out and cozy. The front of the house is very much inspired by Ocean House, with the round portico and mansard roof. I like historic homes, and I wanted this to look like it had been here for 200 years, but just redone. I wanted it to feel accessible but not stuffy. The exterior looks a bit formal, and I wanted the interior to feel very livable.

What is it about the beach that speaks to you? I love this beach so much. You can walk for miles on it, horses come in during the off-season, and I love watching the boats in the summer. Even in the middle of a storm, there's never a bad day here. I feel like I'm in the middle of a painting, because every time you look out the window there's something different to see, and we tried to make the view the focal point of the house with no window treatments in the back and not much art. With the dunes right here, I didn't want much separation. I wanted it all to be integrated with as many natural materials as possible.



this spread: From the front door back to the family room, the Sound is always in view. "Almost anywhere you stand in the home, there's a sightline to the water," says Weiland. "That was very important to the family." The rattan lanterns by the fireplace, several of the books on the coffee table and all of the pillows in the family room are from Serena & Lily.



“Rebecca has this **OLD-WORLD, WISE-SOUL** sensibility. We didn’t want to build a house that felt like new construction. We wanted it to have **WARMTH.**”

—GINA SCHAPIRO





this spread: The dining room, located off of the foyer, bears a coastal palette and flows directly into the family room. Getting the details just right throughout the home was important to the design team. "You won't see this house anywhere in Fairfield or Westport—it stands on its own. Everything about it is special," says Weiland. "We didn't follow the trends or make sure it appealed to the masses. This is Rebecca's house. Every detail is what she wanted." That was very apparent during the reveal. "The Scaleras went away on vacation when the house was about 85 percent complete. It was like one of those home makeover shows," says Schapiro. "While they were gone, we finished the house, and Sarah did the install. When the Scaleras got home, they sent a video of themselves walking into the house. It was really special to see their reaction, for them to share that with us. I got chills."





How involved were you during the design and build? I was here two or three times a day throughout the project. It was great to have a design team that was all-encompassing, where everybody worked together. Gina Schapiro of Grace Design Build and Sarah Weiland of Tusk Home + Design made it easy—it didn't take them long to learn my style, and because we had Ocean House to base the style on, it was so much fun picking out everything. I wanted a classic house with a few surprise elements, and I didn't want cookie-cutter. Gina had experience with really detailed, higher-end custom homes, so I knew she'd be great with the finer touches and details, and Sarah was great at including pops of different things. I know what I like when I see it, and I make quick decisions. Sometimes when the three of us would meet, they would have a selection picked out, and they'd have a game to see which one they thought I would pick!

You also founded The Cancer Couch Foundation. Can you tell me about that? Before my cancer had metastasized to stage 4, I learned that almost

no research funding goes to metastatic breast cancer, which is stage 4. When your cancer metastasizes, your prognosis is often only a couple of years because no one has put any funding into it. I just couldn't believe that, that you're just left to die—that didn't seem right. I had been working as a neuropsychologist at Norwalk Hospital, and I stopped practicing once I was diagnosed. Since then, I've dedicated my life to raising money for metastatic breast cancer research through The Cancer Couch Foundation. We fund two labs that only focus on metastatic breast cancer, and we give 100 percent of the proceeds. I run the foundation on a volunteer basis, and it's privately funded, so every dime goes to a lab at Dana-Farber and a lab at Memorial Sloan Kettering. We're in a really fortunate position where every dollar we give is matched. I started the foundation three years ago, and we've put more than \$2 million into metastatic breast cancer research, and they've already published three studies that we, in part, have funded. It's been really incredible to see what's been able to happen, and we're still going full force.



opposite: The Scaleras had a media room in their previous house, so a media room in the new home was a must. "Rebecca has a brain like no one else—she's incredible," says Schapiro. "She had very defined ideas about how to improve the spaces in their previous home and had the functionality of everything so well thought out." The room is painted in Farrow & Ball's Stiffkey Blue, and the pillows on the bunk are from Kerri Rosenthal (except for the yellow pillows and the pillows with fringe, which are the Scaleras'). The front pillows on the chairs are also from Kerri Rosenthal. **left bottom:** The powder room is wrapped in a York Wallcoverings paper sourced through Tusk Home + Design. **right top:** In the downstairs office, the wallpaper depicts the actual nautical chart of the property, with the home marked on the map as well as all mile markers and depths. Oversize rope knots were sourced for the drawer pulls, and floating shelves keep the focus on the paper. **right bottom:** Originally selected for the kitchen cabinetry, Benjamin Moore's Slate Teal was used in the mudroom instead for a fun pop of color when entering the home. The rattan accessories are from Serena & Lily.



this page: Installation day for the "jellyfish" chandelier in the foyer fell during a snowstorm. "In the midst of this storm, we're building scaffolding, we were there for seven hours getting the jellyfish at just the right height, and we're watching as these men with big, burly hands are unwrapping these itty-bitty glass balls," laughs Weiland. "That was my favorite day—the day we hung the jellyfish." **opposite:** The master suite spans the entire length of the back of the house, but that wasn't initially the case. "In one of the earlier versions, the kids' bedrooms had the best views in the house. But we told the Scaleras that this was their dream home; it's OK to take up the entire back of the house," says Schapiro. The wallpaper, sourced through Tusk Home + Design, looks like the ocean when reflected in the glass balcony doors opposite the bed. "The second Rebecca saw it, I didn't have to convince her," says Weiland. "It has the color gradation that you see throughout the day. Instead of competing with the view, it seemed like the perfect fit for that space."



“This project was a **LABOR OF LOVE**, and we wanted to make it perfect.
Rebecca was so happy and easy to work with—
she made everyone on the job want to do their **BEST.**”

—SARAH WEILAND





top left: All tile throughout the home was sourced by Tusk Home + Design, including the floor in the master bath. "That tile mimics the sand on the beach, like the entrance to a grotto," says Weiland. The two painted leg stools in front of the tub are from Serena & Lily.

opposite: The beachy tones throughout the home continue in the master bath, with its clean lines and serene feel.



You moved into the house this past March. What has life been like since then? My cancer grew aggressively last summer, and it went to my brain, liver, adrenals and bones. Once it goes to your brain, you usually don't have that long. So, again, we didn't know if I would be here to move into this house; it was a really difficult year. I have a very rare mutation that there happened to be a clinical trial for and, miraculously, I qualified for it. We moved into the house on March 17, and two weeks later on April 1, I got the news that my last scans showed no evidence of disease. That doesn't mean the cancer is gone—I still have a terminal illness—but right now, it's in remission. We don't know how long that will last—it could be weeks, it could be a year—but it's amazing. Being in this house, now having a chance at life...there are

just no words. It all feels like a miracle. Even though I thought this property was amazing, I never thought we'd actually live here, that we'd be able to build a house like this. It all came together at the right time. Plans that we were putting off until retirement, we pushed them up, decided to go for it and live our life now, and here we are. The fact that my husband and I met at a party just houses away...it feels like it has all come full circle. It's definitely a different feeling than last summer and fall, when the house was feeling tragic in a way. It was a labor of love, and I didn't think I'd ever be living here; it was gut-wrenching. We had moments where we thought we should abandon it, that we should build it and sell it, but it couldn't have worked out better. From the style of the house to the location, it's a dream in so many ways.

this spread: The Scaleras' daughter helped design and accessorize her bedroom. "She really wanted it to be her own space," says Weiland. "We chose the bed, bedside tables, draperies and the light, and then she had free reign." The pillows on the bed and the heart plexi art on the wall shelf are by Kerri Rosenthal.





“Rebecca is the most driven person I know. So many people wanted this property, and she said, ‘No, this is **HAPPENING.**’ And it all came together. She’s **AMAZING.**”

—GINA SCHAPIRO





You named your new home Sound House. What's the story behind that? We named it Sound House because it's based on Ocean House, because it's on Long Island Sound, and because, as a psychologist, "sound" to me also means a sound mind, a feeling of calm. We're also really into music, so "sound" relates to that as well; it has a lot of different meanings. Sound House is our version of Ocean House.

How does it feel to be living here every day? There was a period of time, with everything we were going through, when as a family we closed in a bit, taking care of ourselves. Now it feels like life has become more expansive in every way. We've opened up our home again, and I feel well enough to entertain and bring other people in. I feel like people were taking care of us for a while, and now it feels really good to be able to host and take care of other people. It feels very peaceful, it feels like I've arrived, and I always have the feeling that I'm exactly where I'm supposed

to be. I've never felt that way my entire life. I love the beach so much. My heart was always wanting to come here, and I came as much as I could, and now, I live here. This is a nice, new chapter for us. It's a good new beginning. —*INTERVIEW BY LAUREN FETTERMAN*

Resources:

Builder: Grace Design Build, Stamford; 917-446-8214; gracedb.com

Interior designer: Tusk Home + Design, Westport; 203-319-0001; tuskhomeanddesign.com

Architect of record: Donald William Fairbanks Architect, Southport; 203-345-6307; dwfarchitects.com

Interior millwork design and architecture: Marybeth Woods Architect, Westport; 203-856-7406; marybethwoodsarchitect.com

The Cancer Couch Foundation: Rebecca Timlin-Scalera, PhD, founder and executive director, 203-820-8692; thecancercouch.com

this spread: To complement her son's sports-themed bedroom, Timlin-Scalera wanted him to have a soccer-themed bathroom, which was inspired by one she saw on Pinterest.

