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Coastal Classic

Architectural embellishments add nautical character to a vintage seaside retreat.


WRITTEN BY FRED ALBERT
PHOTOGRAPHS BY MICHAEL PARTENIO

THIS PHOTO: Multipane sidelights add a traditional touch to the picture window in the dining room, which gains additional illumination from glass-block skylights set into the deck floor above. Antique Chippendale chairs elevate the farmhouse table. OPPOSITE: The scalloped shingles are original to the 1928 house, as are portions of the river rock foundation. The old front door didn't feel substantial enough, so the owners had a new one custom-crafted from mahogany.

When a Connecticut couple went looking for a weekend house on the water, they never imagined their three-year search would lead them to a home only 20 minutes from their own. But as they soon discovered, getting away from it all isn't necessarily a question of distance.

With Long Island Sound lapping at its foundation and shorebirds circling overhead, the house on Bell Island is a far cry from their suburban estate, and as close as one can get to living on a boat without having to wear a life preserver. (Some guests claim they can feel the place rocking.) Unfortunately, a succession of remodels had squandered much of the home's 1920s character, leaving behind an all-white interior devoid of detail and coastal charm. "It was just a little too contemporary for me," the wife says, "and it wasn't as cozy as I like."

A veteran remodeler, she joined forces with architect Roger Bartels and Hemingway Construction to update the home's amenities while reclaiming its traditional style. The team enlarged the window openings on the south and west facades to take better advantage of sun and views, and replaced picture windows and sliding glass doors with



An original river rock fireplace dominates one end of the living room, where maritime images underscore but don't upstage the antique Heriz rug and cheeky leopard-print chairs.





THIS PHOTO: Porcelain and ironstone china adorn mirror-backed shelves at the end of the living room that adjoins the kitchen.

OPPOSITE, TOP LEFT: The bar, which is open to the living room, features a cherry wood counter with a marine finish that recalls the interior of a boat. The ceiling-mounted shutter is a vestige of the days when the living room was a porch.

OPPOSITE, TOP RIGHT: The butler's pantry a few steps up from the kitchen keeps clutter hidden when the homeowners entertain.

OPPOSITE BOTTOM: Painted Shaker-style cabinets and a beaded-board backsplash give the refurbished pantry and kitchen retro charm and provide a neutral backdrop for the owners' extensive porcelain collection.



more period-appropriate multipane units.

The cramped kitchen was gutted and outfitted with painted paneled cabinets and beaded-board backsplashes. "I like whatever [I] do to look like it's always been there," the wife says. To compensate for the kitchen's modest size, she turned an adjoining utility room into a spacious butler's pantry, repeating many of the kitchen's amenities.

Although the attic study offered stellar views, the room was cramped and could only be reached via a spiral staircase in the master bedroom. Architect Bartels replaced the attic's boxy shed dormer with a broad bowed bay, adding headroom and floor space while drawing in panoramic vistas that stretch from Manhattan to Long Island's north shore. Stealing space from a spare bedroom, Bartels installed a proper staircase, making this scenic aerie (dubbed the "crow's nest") a magnet for awestruck visitors.

Once she got the floor plan in order, the wife beefed up the baseboards, crown moldings, and trim to give the rooms greater architectural interest. She added beaded-board wainscoting throughout the interior, thickened some of the walls so she could line their portals with paneling, then painted all the millwork a creamy, coastal white.

Maritime references abound, from the corals and sea-shells adorning tabletops, fabrics, and glassware, to the seascapes and schooners embellishing walls and toiles. By



Combating the Elements

Coastal homes need protection from salt air and from heightened exposure to weather. Architect Roger Bartels and Hemingway Construction's Peter Sciarretta offer the following advice to those building on the shore.

- To reduce maintenance, use aluminum- or vinyl-clad windows instead of all-wood units. The replacement windows in this house were fitted with laminated glass to withstand impact caused by flying objects in strong winds.
- Masonry or wood (particularly Western red cedar) works best for siding; to minimize maintenance, apply stain instead of paint.
- Slate, shake, and composition (asphalt) roofing all work well on the coast. When using composition shingles, stick to heavier ones warrantied for 40 years or longer.
- Avoid hardware or exterior lighting with a shiny finish, such as polished brass. Bronze or stainless steel are better; look for the words "lifetime finish" on the package.

A photograph of a dining room. In the foreground, there are three dark wood chairs with yellow patterned seats. A wooden dining table is set with glassware and a vase of pink lilies. In the background, there is a window with a view of trees, a wooden chest of drawers, and a wall-mounted lamp. The floor is made of reddish-brown tiles.

The homeowners wanted a beautiful



house on the water, not a beach house.



hewing to a backdrop of creamy fabrics and sand-color walls, interior design consultant Chris Gulotta made sure the seaside references would not overshadow the view or the owners' treasured antiques. "I didn't want the house to scream, *You're at the beach! You're at the beach!*" the wife says. "I wanted it to be a beautiful home on the water, not a beach house."

Collections contribute a touch of color and history, and the sense that the interior has been assembled over time. At one end of the living room, shelves filled with porcelain and ironstone are backed with mirrors, adding a bit of sparkle to the windowless wall. "It reflects the light from the water and makes the room come alive," the wife says. A fireplace made from river rock (allegedly used as ballast on 19th-century trading ships) and one of the husband's beloved Heriz rugs anchor a second seating area at the other end of the room. In the adjoining dining room, antique Chippendale chairs surround a reproduction farm table illuminated by skylights in the deck floor above. "At night, the deck lights filter down so there's no need for a chandelier," the wife says.



TOP: In the master bedroom, new window seats flank a TV cabinet built around an old chimney flue. The reproduction Maine captain's bed feels right at home facing out to sea.

ABOVE: Downy comforters adorn faux-bamboo beds in the guest bedroom. Maritime toiles and sea-horse-embellished pillows add a covert coastal touch. OPPOSITE: A lamp with a base resembling a shell reminds guests of the magnificent ocean view beyond.





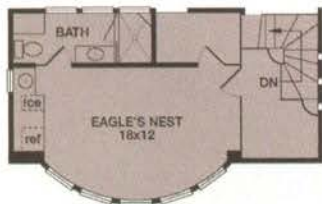


The Change

A Connecticut couple restored period character to a much-remodeled 1920s waterfront house, expanding cramped spaces and creating a backdrop for antiques and collectibles.

What It Took

- Replacing picture windows and sliding glass doors with multipane windows and doors.
- Installing new baseboards, crown moldings, wainscoting, and trim.
- Enlarging the attic study by replacing a boxy shed dormer with a larger, bowed dormer.
- Borrowing space from a spare bedroom to add a new staircase to the third floor.
- Transforming a utility room into a well-equipped butler's pantry, effectively doubling the available kitchen space.
- Choosing neutral colors for walls, fabrics, and window treatments so collections stand out.



OPPOSITE: Once a cramped attic study, the third-floor crow's nest gained a new bowed dormer that improves floor space, headroom, and the view of Long Island Sound. The owners come here to read and often invite guests up to enjoy the scenery.

RIGHT: In the crow's nest, an antique desk teams with nautical prints and a chair with a back that looks like the wheel of a ship.

ABOVE: The crow's nest, as seen from the rear on the house, where it looks out over the water.



It took about a year to complete the renovation on the 3,200-square-foot home. Because it's so close by, the owners can pop over whenever the mood strikes: to admire the sunset, putter in the garden, or entertain friends and family. No matter how often she goes there, the wife claims her reaction is always the same. "When I walk up the stairs and look out the windows, I still get weak in the knees."

FIELD EDITOR: KAREN LIDBECK BRENT
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