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SEPTEMBER 2020

GOOD BONES, GREAT RENOVATIONS

TALL HOUSE, SMALL TOWN:
A REIMAGINED COLONIAL

in Cape Porpoise

Day Trip:

5 LIGHTHOUSES, 1 STOP
FOR BLUEBERRY PIE

+

AN ESSAY BY
JENNIFER FINNEY
BOYLAN

Homeowners: **Sarah Madeira Day & Wesley Day** Builder: **Beau Voisine**
Floors: **Jimmy's Express** Countertops: **Layton Day, Bangor Wholesale Laminates**

right Sarah Madeira Day and Wes Day outside their Freeport fixer-upper. Sarah says of Wes, "It helps that he has a very scientific brain. He has a plan. He has all the things laid out, cut, and measured, whereas I'm like, 'All right! Let's do this!'"



FREEPORT FIX-UP

words: **Allison Paige** photos: **Erin Little**

A young couple turn a South Freeport fixer-upper into a renovation sensation

A painting by Sarah, *Parkman Mountain*, 40 by 60 inches, acrylic on canvas. Custom floating frame by Wes. *opposite, top*
Growing up with boats inspired Sarah to use every square inch of interior. A bench built by Wes provides dining seating and storage. Tucking the washer and dryer under the stairs further lightened the space.



photo: Sarah Madeira Day



If you think a background in fine art and pharmacology isn't the stuff of DIY dynamos, you haven't met the Days. Sarah Madeira Day is a full-time painter, and her husband, Wes, is a pharmacist, and with their particular admixture of artistry and chemistry, the pair have not one but three renovations under their belt, the latest being what they call a "fancy fix-up" in South Freeport.

This acumen for DIY fearlessness is less surprising when you consider their upbringings. Sarah grew up at the historic Claremont Hotel in Southwest Harbor, and as whimsical as that sounds, she also witnessed firsthand the upkeep required to maintain a circa-1884 building. "It was a summer hotel and had maintenance during the winter," she explains. "Living through it, I learned how to do a lot of those things." Wes, meanwhile, was raised helping his father with the family business, Bangor Wholesale Laminates. Sarah notes that her father-in-law, Layton, once built a log cabin from scratch. Wes seems to have inherited this talent.



PRE-FIX-UP

A glimpse of the original kitchen's lemon-yellow walls and harlequin painted floor. While cheery, it was not the streamlined interior the Days were aiming for.



To start, the Days renovated their first home in Portland, and later, their current residence in Cumberland Foreside, keeping an eye out, all the while, for an affordable property to turn into an Airbnb. Sarah says, "It was more of a pipe dream than anything else. The market had become so expensive over the past few years." Then, in 2018, a promising South Freeport property cropped up on the market.

The 1920 gambrel-roof house on Sandy Beach Road was a bit out of their price range, but they decided to look anyway and were instantly smitten. "We fell in love with the location and the land," Sarah recalls. "The little lot was made up of beautiful, tall trees, well-maintained and protected, just a mile from the marina and a hundred steps from a little tidal beach. The house reminded us of our house we currently live in (and love), a bit overlooked due to the magnitude of the work, but sweet and in need of the right kind of attention."

"Attention" translates to beaucoup renovation—something the Days don't shy from, as followers of Sarah's Instagram already know. @ThisMaineHouse details both the Freeport fix-up and the renovation of the 1729 cape they share with their young daughter, Elle, and Hartley, a Kentucky hound dog. (Sarah's bio? "Painter by day, questionable Renovator by night.") "If only they showed

KITCHEN REDUX

Perhaps the most stunning transformation was the kitchen, where special attention to updated finishes turned it from shabby-chic to classically sleek.



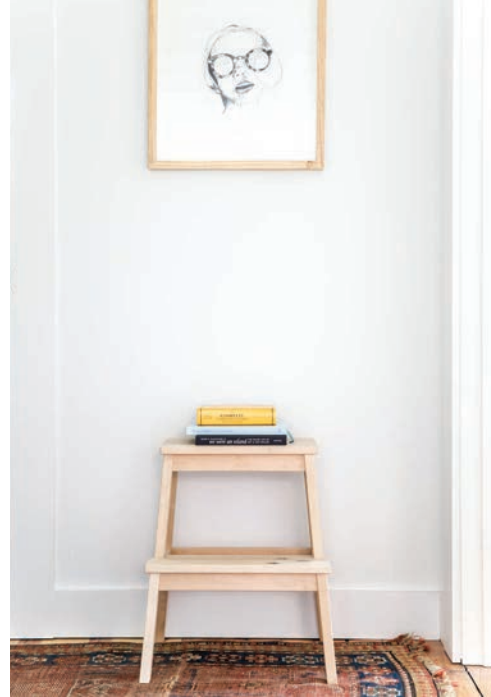
FROM MEH TO YEAH!

The Days uncovered the rafters hiding under the dropped ceiling and updated the brick hearth with soapstone scraps from Bangor Wholesale Laminates.

Indeed, a live-action snippet on @ThisMaineHouse, #fancyfreeportfixup, shows a dangling hunk of yellow insulation literally **buzzing with bees**.

top In the living room, the soapstone-clad mantelpiece makes a sleek focal point. *opposite, bottom* In the kitchen, quartz counters from Bangor Wholesale Laminates top IKEA cabinets painted Benjamin Moore Calico Blue. Cabinet fronts by Semihandmade provide a customized look. The brass pendant lights are from Industrial Light Electric.





the crying on TV home improvement and a disclaimer notifying 'likelihood for graying hair,' Sarah quips on the account. But not only do she and Wes have the charm of HGTV hosts, they also managed to complete this project unscathed, with no gray hair to speak of.

They hired out plumbing, electrical, insulation, drywall, some framing, and demo. "The rest we did ourselves," says Sarah, "with the help of our friends and family." They maintained the original two bedrooms, one bath, opening up the common spaces to maximize the building's 1,003 square feet. "We wanted to make the most out of the room available while still keeping the house simple and open," Sarah says.

Sarah's painter's eye led her to choose a limited color palette, which gives the home visual continuity. "We seem to lean toward a lot of wood, white, and stone," she says. "We both like a mix of modern style with traditional aspects and try to design spaces that will stand the test of time but also be in step with the current trends."

In the kitchen, open shelving over the cabinets makes the room feel more spacious, while brass pendant lights and quartz counters look crisp and classic.

YELLOW MELLOWED

Sarah wasn't exactly opposed to the yellow, "but it did seem to transform the house when we painted it white. It just seemed fresh and bigger."

top A view of the new all-white exterior and the shade trees that first drew the Days to the property. *opposite, top left* A framed charcoal drawing by Sarah of daughter Elle hangs in the hall. *opposite, top right* Sarah and Wes did their own hardscaping. "It's really hard," notes Sarah, "but it saved us big bucks." *opposite, below* A bench provides outdoor seating.





In the dining area, a bench built by Wes doubles as storage, and the washer and dryer are tucked beneath the stairs. The serene simplicity of the bedrooms accentuates a few carefully chosen antiques.

As far as challenges go, Sarah says they faced “all of them.” “With each new layer, we discovered a new project. New electrical, new insulation, a water meter located in the middle of the house (totally weird), a water heater located six feet from the main electrical panel, and so on. We left the exterior and painted the clapboard, but the interior was such a strange layout and mix of many years of ‘Band-Aid fixes’ that in the end, everything was brought down to the studs.”

A trio of unexpected tenants also slowed their progress. “As the walls came out, so did the ant, bee, and black mold infestation that had been quietly sitting behind the paneling,” Sarah says. Indeed, a live-action snippet on @ThisMaineHouse, #fancyfreeportfixup, shows a dangling hunk of yellow insulation literally buzzing with bees.

“The hardest pill to swallow was being 90 percent done with the project and the pipes burst in a freeze and ruined a chunk of the work. That was sad,” Sarah

admits, with true Yankee understatement. “We caught it in time, but it had done some damage. It happened to occur just after Wes had surgery and our daughter, Elle, had a fever of 103.”

But fortune favors the brave. That adage comes to mind as I take in the sheer amount of sweat (both equity and otherwise) the Days poured into their project. And while some might be exhausted after such an undertaking, the whole process seems to invigorate the pair. “I really love Wes and I love working with him,” says Sarah. “It feels like a creation that we did as a team. It’s hard to work with your partner, but it’s also really rewarding.”

The result of all their effort certainly feels like a prize—a fixer-upper that more than lives up to its potential. “We feel really proud of it,” Sarah concludes, with obvious pleasure. “It’s like another art piece for us.”

opposite, top left An antique console and mirror grace the second-floor landing. *opposite, top right* The Days. “I really love Wes, and I love working with him,” says Sarah. *opposite, below* An open space upstairs became a serene bedroom. An antique wardrobe provides storage. *above* Benjamin Moore’s Eggshell white unifies the interior.