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Home by

A shoreside property becomes
a contemporary retreat filled
with light, air, and art



the *Sea*

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There's one kind of Maine coast view that makes me catch my breath every time I find it: a wide-open expanse of water, reaching off to the horizon. It's not the most painterly of scenes; for those, better to seek out the sharp, dark cliffs, the soft curves of salt-marsh, the hush and hum of pebbly beaches. But spending time by the open water, hearing it whisper the secret movements of wind and weather from day to day, might nurture an artist's soul. One such artist has found her way to such a view, and to a permanent home in Maine. "I always considered myself a Mainer," she says. When she was 14 her father, a navy pilot, retired, and the family joined his mother at her house by the ocean. "This was the first place I'd ever lived for more than two years, the only place I felt emotionally connected to," the homeowner says. "I really have considered it home." Yet, after she left for college, career and marriage kept her in other parts of the country for all but visits until a few years ago. Then, at last, she decided to make Maine her full-time home and to build a house where the windows are full of sky and sea.

Opening spread: Carol Laboissonniere of CL Design and Landscape replaced an overgrown tangle with a sustainable landscape, exposing natural ledges and removing invasive species in favor of native plants. "Nothing looks forced or self-conscious," says the homeowner. "It's as if it had been here all along."

The great room (right) is divided into two areas, with a cozy flat-ceilinged sitting area to the left and a cathedral ceiling over the dining room.







The house her grandparents had built on the family land was a midcentury ranch. "It just didn't suit the property," she says. "It's such a majestic property, it deserved a great house." To design something more fitting, she engaged Rob Freedman, Paul Gosselin, and Mike Bedell of Salmon Falls Architecture (the firm has since closed; Freedman and Bedell are now the owners of Kennebunk River Architects). The team worked with project manager Norm Laliberte and site foreman Joel Ewer of Spang Builders and landscape designer Carol Laboissonniere of CL Design and Landscape to create a contemporary shingle-style residence based on crisp, clean lines. "It's not fussy," says Freedman. "Just clean and comfortable, warm and welcoming." The aesthetic emphasizes subtlety but doesn't eschew grandeur. From the ocean side, a tall central gable draws the eye, while a second, smaller gable and the pitched roof of the garage echo its shape and anchor the ends of the home. Similarly, a stone chimney creates a strong vertical element in dynamic

relation to the horizontal lines of the stone facade on the lower walls. "You want to basically glue the house to the ground," says Freedman. Laliberte describes the effect more fancifully: "There's parts of that stone facade, when it comes down the ground, where it sweeps out of it. It's as if it's climbing out of the ground, like a tree trunk."

For the benefit of visitors not arriving by boat, the leeward sides of the three gables feature a wavy shingle pattern and slightly protruding peaks that create intriguing shadow lines. "When guests arrive, they'll look at this house and say, 'This is really cool; it's a house that has a lot of interesting elements,'" says Freedman. It's when the door opens, though, that the real drama begins. The entrance faces a wall of windows, filled with whatever show the ocean is presenting that day. "When you come in you see the ocean. That's really the point, isn't it?" says the homeowner. "Why would you compete with this? People don't want to wander off. They come and stand at the window."

A reading loft over the kitchen (above) offers another angle of the coastal view through a ship-shaped cutout.

The architects designed a stone facade (opposite) that flares out at the bottom and anchors the home to the landscape.







Office shelves hold ceramics made by artist friends, the homeowner's grandfather, and the homeowner herself, along with ships in bottles made by the homeowner's father. The doorway frames a constructed wood piece by Natalie Galyon and a small bronze figure by the homeowner. The couple's art collection also includes works by Maine artist Ingunn Milla Joergensen, Dallas-based artists Juliet McCullough, and Michael O'Keefe, among many others.

If you can pull yourself away from the view, you'll find yourself in the seating area of the great room, where a comfortable couch faces the stone fireplace. To the right, the ceiling rises to cathedral height over the dining area and kitchen. In contrast to the walls' pale, cool gray (Benjamin Moore's Titanium is used throughout the home), the vaulted ceiling is paneled in the same gray-stained red oak that covers the floors. The effect is open and airy without feeling cold or empty; there's a restful sense of space and time to observe both the beautiful outdoors and the works of art and design that fill the rooms inside.

The homeowner designed the interior herself, relying on her artist's instincts to create a harmonious space. "I wanted things to not compete with the natural landscape," she says. "I've been through cottagey, beachy, jewel tones, full of color—I'm done with it. I wanted it really calm, with the things that we love, not stuff just to fill spaces." The decor can fairly be called nautical, but its colors are the soft tones of driftwood, sand, and stone, not the crisp blues and whites of a yacht club. The shapes of ships and shells appear in unexpected ways—a semicircular cutout in the high wall above the

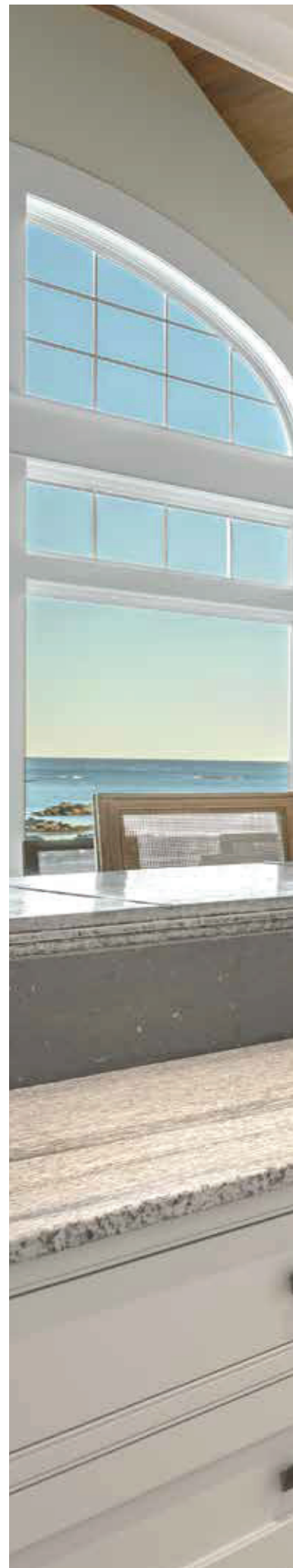
kitchen evokes a hull; tables in the dining room double as pedestals for elegant sculptures of sea creatures; a bathroom displays the transom of a wooden boat that washed up on the beach. Naval influences appear as well: the ceiling fans recall old-fashioned airplanes flown by the homeowner's father and grandfather, and a spiral staircase leads to a reading loft above the kitchen. Particularly striking is the kitchen counter, custom made of weathered-looking zinc. "I wanted to give a nod to that nautical history without being cute or overt," says the homeowner. "I wanted a zinc bartop, but welded and soldered so it would look like part of a ship. I wanted the patina to change over time with use." Leathered granite countertops and a tiled backsplash that evokes ocean waves complete the kitchen, which is oriented so that the homeowner can face the sea while washing dishes and chatting with guests.

The home is spacious but has only two bedrooms—one for the owners, with a cathedral ceiling and a modest size that puts the bed close to the ocean view, and a suite over the garage that offers a separate private space for visitors. "When my grandmother built the house, she only had two

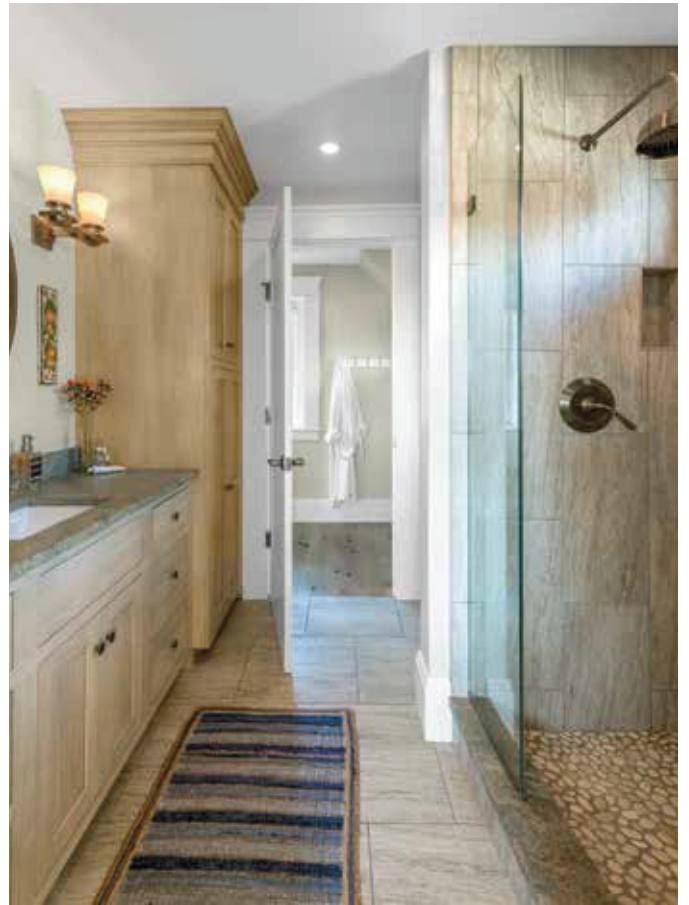


The leather couch in the great room, from Hurlbutt Designs (above), was chosen in part because it could stand up to use by the owners' dogs. A "barking ottoman" in the dining room window lets the canine members of the family enjoy the view.

The kitchen (opposite) is anchored by wave-patterned tiles from Distinctive Tile. Leathered granite counters and a unique zinc bartop evoke the textures of ships and stones.



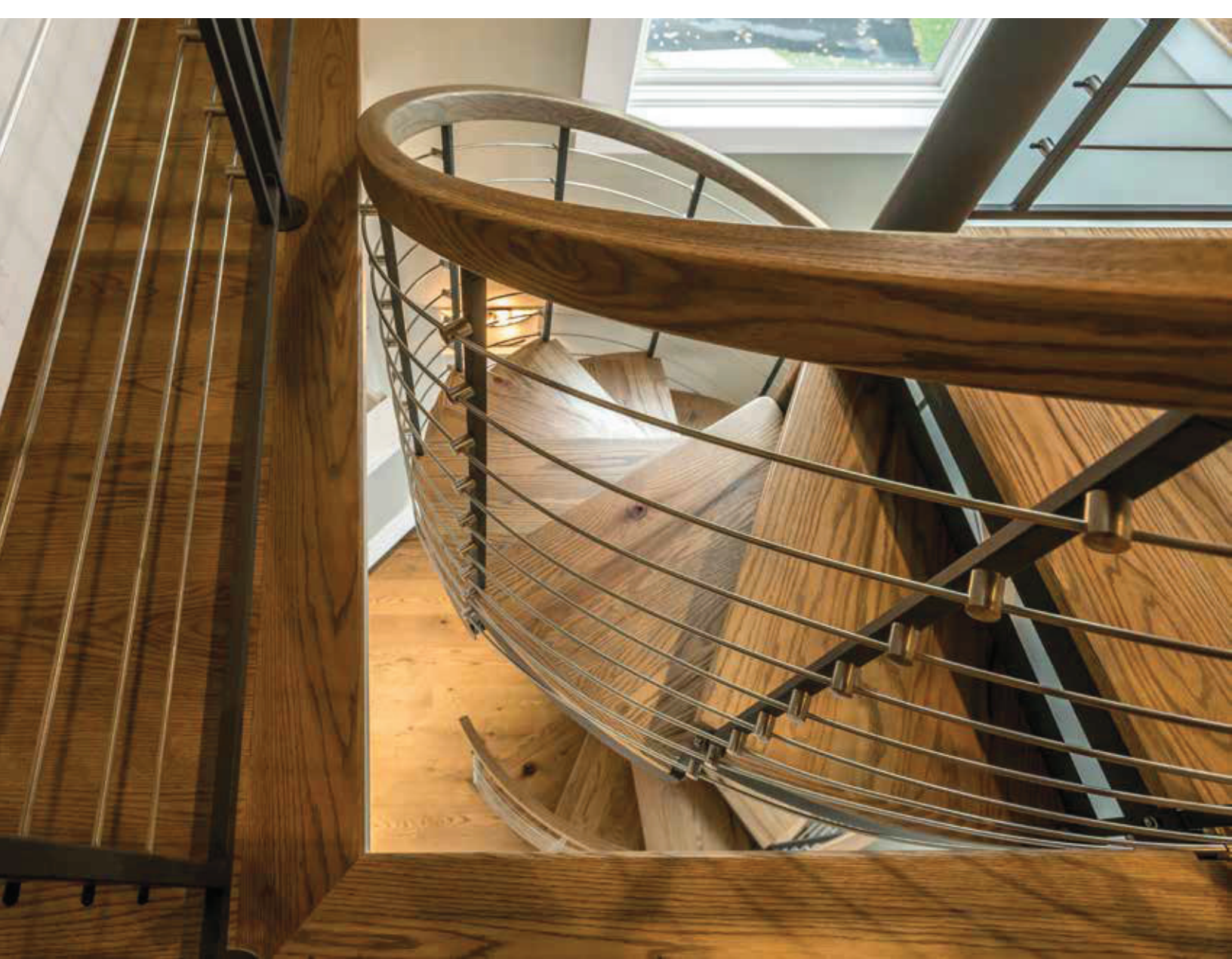






(opposite, clockwise from left) The teapot by Texas artist Catherine Mansour was a gift to the home owner from her mother, and was in the original house; In the guest bathroom, the shapes and colors of beach rocks are echoed by the leathered granite vanity and the pebbles embedded in the shower floor; The artist's studio features a curved wall of windows that bring in lots of light and wrap the space in ocean views.

The homeowner chose the cobalt blue in the pantry window (above) because it reminded her of hunting for sea glass with her grandmother in the cove below the house. "In those days we would come back with handfuls, not just the rare piece of this generation," she recalls. "The blue glass was the most coveted, and was considered a great find."



bedrooms,” the homeowner recalls. “We’d get invited over two by two. I kind of continued that tradition.” Instead of sleeping space, much of the home’s square footage is dedicated to making room for the owners’ pursuits. The artist has her studio, with brick floors and a rounded wall of windows to bring in light and the sea view, while her husband has a large bookcase-lined office, complete with a conference table and a separate entrance for clients (it’s also used by the couple’s dogs, who have their own shower in the mudroom area inside the door).

Creating their own space to live and work on the old family property didn’t begin easily. “Tearing down the old house was the hardest decision,” says the homeowner, recalling the sadness and tension inherent in letting go of a long-loved home. Once the process began, however, the project team put her at ease. “The architects were so thoughtful and thorough. They came to the property and stood in different places for

a long time, really considered the placement. I relied a lot on their experience and their expertise. And I can’t say enough about the Spang team. Honestly, knowing that Norm had our backs made the whole thing very low stress,” she says.

The homeowner feels that the positive effects of the collaborative design and build have lasted long past the completion of the project. “When you get that kind of energy going, it sticks around. When people come to this house, they say it’s very calming,” she says. “That’s one thing that was important to me, coming from living in a very stressful city. My husband’s in a stressful job. There’s a lot of pressure in the world. I wanted this to be a retreat—a place where people could come and take a breath.” And when I visit, I feel that it’s true: standing at the tall windows, feeling the breeze through an open door, one can’t help but breathe more slowly, finding a moment to take in the light, the air, the presence of the sea. **MH+D**

Details throughout the home, like the spiral stairs (above) that lead to the reading loft above the kitchen, were inspired by her family’s naval history.