

Old Port

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Sopo STYLE

A COUPLE'S FIRST HOME REFLECTS THEIR LOVE FOR
ENTERTAINING, MAINE, AND EACH OTHER.

BY **DEBRA SPARK** // PHOTOGRAPHY BY **MYRIAM BABIN**

In 2015, Margaret and Joe Ybarra's search for their first home was featured on HGTV's *House Hunters*. Watching the Ybarras reconcile their wishes and bank account, one is less likely to think, "Wow, they are going to find their dream house" than, "Wow, what a dream couple." They sweetly debate location and amenities while making clear that they love their chosen city of Portland, and each other to boot.

Because they both telecommute—she as a digital marketing consultant, and he as a web developer for Thinkbean in Boston—Margaret and Joe had the luxury of choosing, more or less, where in the country they wanted to live. Although Margaret grew up in Sanford, she met Joe, a Long Beach, California, native, when the two were students at San Jose State University. Though initially just friends, by the time Margaret got her first job in Colorado, Joe was ready, he says, to "chase after her." When they were thinking about more permanent roots—an actual house purchase—they considered other cities, but the chance to live near family and the water won them over.

They rented for a year on the Eastern Promenade, and then, to save for a down payment, lived for a subsequent year with family in New Hampshire and Colorado. When they returned to Portland, Margaret had the sense she'd like to live on the peninsula and Joe that he might like a garage and a little more land. Finances remained a concern, though, as their yearly budget has two important, non-residential line items: travel and fashion, which function as both passion and avocation for the pair.

Joe and Margaret Ybarra with their dog Hunter, a hound mix, on the front porch of their South Portland home. Margaret is wearing suede mules and a C/Meo Collective blouse. Joe's leather Oxfords are from Saks Fifth Avenue, and his shirt is from LL Bean.

SOUTH PORTLAND BECAME THEIR FINANCIALLY SAVVY COMPROMISE, WHICH FELT LIKE AN OPPORTUNITY IN THE END.

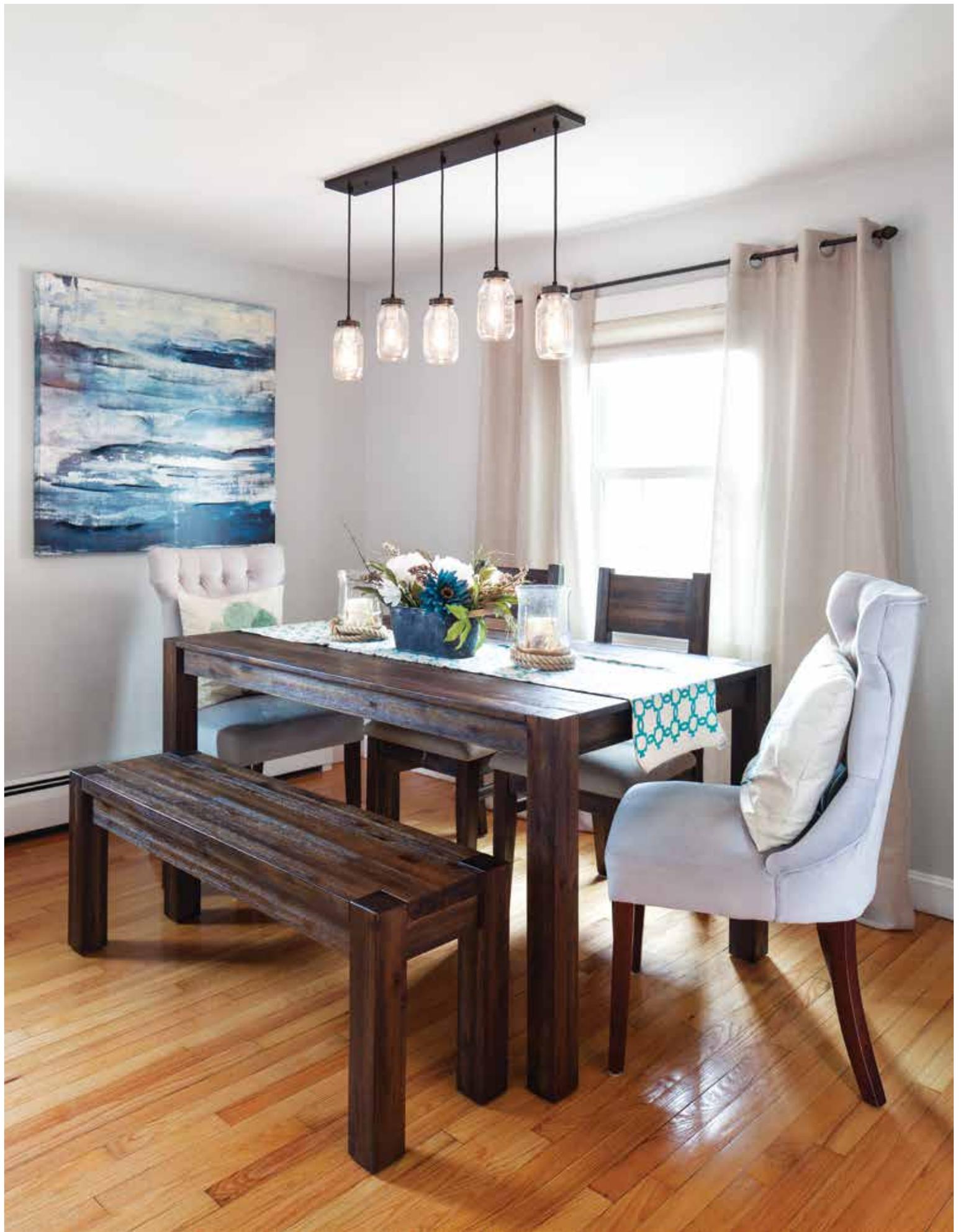
Margaret and Joe document where they are in the world (and what Margaret wore while there) in a blog titled *5th and Magnolia*. Joe serves as photographer and Margaret as writer. The project began as a way to share travel pictures with friends and family while abroad. Because friends inquired about their itinerary and Margaret's outfits, the private project morphed into a way to share Margaret's take on fashion, beauty, and fitness, as well as to chronicle their trips. It also became a way for Joe, who was a fine arts major in college, to use his digital photography skills.

Margaret is, in Joe's words, "a wizard with deals," and her skill has meant affordable trips to Paris, Iceland, Italy, Fiji, Australia, and New Zealand, among other destinations. She also keeps her clothing budget down by using Rent the Runway for her party outfits, including an ombre sequined sheath dress she recently wore to an Equality Maine gala. As for Joe, Margaret describes his sartorial style as "modern classic." In photos, he often appears in a sport coat or suit with a colorful pocket square.

For a home, South Portland became their financially savvy compromise, which felt like an opportunity in the end. Here was a new neighborhood to explore. Plus, the area was quiet, without the same tourist traffic as Portland proper. They liked the opportunity South Portland afforded them to be closer to the water and to take daily walks with their beloved dog, Hunter, at Willard Beach. Soon local favorites included Elsmere Barbecue, Otto, Foulmouthed

This page, from top: A backyard gathering with family and friends, from left: Margaret's cousin Laurie Sullivan; Rebecca Woll and Tom Kropf (co-owners of Shift Portland, where the Ybarras work out); Margaret; and Margaret's aunt and uncle, Betty and Roger Howes. Outdoor furniture is from Home Depot. Margaret in her home office with Hunter sitting where he always sits while she works. **Opposite page:** The main floor dining area has a custom-made lighting fixture from The Lamp Goods in Winterport, a painting from HomeGoods, and a dining table and bench from Macy's. The upholstered chairs are from Joss and Main.









Opposite page, clockwise from top left: On a wall in the dining area are a sign from LL Bean and an old ship's wheel that the Ybarras found at the Shop Next Door in Camden. A backlit wooden whale from Angelrox in Biddeford hangs above a wood and iron bar cart from Joss and Main. The owners' bedroom has an upholstered bench from Wayfair, drapes from Christmas Tree Shops, pillows from HomeGoods, and a dresser from Joss and Main. **This page:** The kitchen was largely renovated before the Ybarras moved in, though they added new lighting from House of Lights in Scarborough. They continued the nautical theme that appears throughout the house with a lobster sign from LL Bean, a lobster pillow from Day Trip Society in Kennebunkport, and a compass clock from Land's End Gift Shop on Bailey Island.

Brewing, the Cookie Jar, and Scratch Bakery. Bug Light Park with its greenery and mini-lighthouse, and Portland Head Light and Fort Williams Park, with Maine's oldest lighthouse, became favorite spots for fashion shoots for the blog.

From the outside, the Ybarras' home is unassuming, with white shingles and navy blue shutters that reference its location near the sea. The house was in move-in condition when the couple found it, which was shortly after a major renovation that had replaced the roof and windows and added a second-story (with recessed lighting, hardwood floors, and high ceilings) to the original home. At the same time, the first floor was renovated to include an updated kitchen with new appliances, granite countertops, cabinets, and slate flooring.

The ground floor consists of an L-shaped, open floorplan, which facilitates entertaining while cooking, a plus given that the couple likes to have people in as much as they like to go out. They have annual Memorial Day, Fourth of July, and "Friendsgiving" parties, which include

themed games and a photo booth, as well as food and drink. The second floor has three bedrooms, one of which serves as a shared office, as well as a full bath.

What makes the house unique is how much Margaret and Joe have made it their own, reflecting their fun, upbeat vibe. They've filled the space with art and clever purchases from local shops, their travels, and online retailers like Joss and Main and Wayfair. The look might be described as "industrial coastal"—beach-y decor combined with contemporary furnishings in a way that feels fresh and hip. Ocean-inspired details include a ship's wheel and a large metal compass as wall art, a folk-art style wooden whale sign, lamps with seahorse bases, and throw pillows in colorful fabrics featuring fish, starfish, coral, and lobsters. Small touches include an anchor doorstop, decorative coral and shells, lobster coat hooks, and starfish towel holders. (Maine venues for purchases include Local Color in Kennebunkport, the Shop Next Door in Camden, Portland Architectural Salvage, and Scarborough's House of Lights.)

Iron and wood—used on the bar cart, entertainment center, and coffee table—account for the industrial feel, as does a custom-made dining room chandelier with mason jars and pendants from Lamp Goods in Winterport. A Joss and Main upholstered headboard and bench for the owners' bedroom, a custom sectional from Hub Furniture, and a farmhouse dining table from Wayfair are a few of the more luxurious pieces.

Given that Margaret and Joe collaborate on their website, work in the same home office, and attend social events together, one might imagine they each have a handful of solitary pursuits, but their other great love is fitness, and they work out together five or six days a week. They are enthusiastic about the personal trainers they have found at Shift on Preble Street, as well as the classes at Jibe Cycling Studio, where Margaret now teaches, and Portland Power Yoga. On days they aren't at a session or class, they like to run. A favorite route takes them from South Portland into the Old Port to the Eastern Promenade, and then, quite happily, home again. ★