

Maine Home

+ DESIGN

July 2012



Summerscapes

Lushly landscaped along Biddeford Pool, cottage living on Higgins Beach, + stone villa elegance in Southport

Maine Home +DESIGN

75 Market Street

Suite 203

207-772-3373

www.mainehomedesign.com

If you choose to post this article online, please post as is without alterations, and provide a link back to Maine Home+Design. Thank you.



Originally a brown saltbox, the Emmons's summer home now features an open floor plan and multiple windows that look onto Higgins Beach. Interior decorator Marybeth Otterbein of Dwellings was thinking of beach comfort and the homeowners' predilection for blue when she selected items for the home. The throw on the chair is from Brahm's Mount in Hallowell.

COTTAGE CLASSIC

A summer cottage on Higgins Beach is reborn into a contemporary captain's house

by Debra Spark | Photography Trent Bell

There's a nor'easter on the day that I visit Mike and Katie Emmons's home on Higgins Beach. The tide is high, the house built just against the seawall, and when I shiver through the front door, I start. The sea, just on the other side of a large arched window, is so close that I have the sense of waves breaking in the living room. I walk closer, perhaps to assure myself that the unruly waves will stay where they are if I promise to stay where I am. The surfers who usually frequent the beach are gone. A long figure with a dog walks by. Male or female? It is impossible to tell, given the rain gear. The weather may be gloomy, but inside, the home suggests sunny summer pleasures.

"The house was designed with the idea of people running in and out from the beach," says Mike. "As a summer place in which to have great memories." The evidence of this is everywhere. The interior design is light and airy with a sea-glass palette, casual furniture, and wicker chairs and baskets. A large piece of driftwood decorates a windowsill. A spigot behind the kitchen stove is meant for filling lobster pots. A built-in drawer under the staircase is just for beach towels. The stools at the curved kitchen-island bar are positioned so one can swivel to face the water and then swivel back to face the cook.

There are rustic touches here and there. The dining room's custom trestle table is made of antique heart pine. The floors are made of reclaimed barn boards (and feel particularly pleasing to the feet). The fireplace mantel consists of a beam that the builder found washed up on Great Diamond Island.

Upstairs, a surfboard and seagull are painted on a child's bedroom wall. The master bedroom has a built-in, nautical-style bed. The master bathroom's tiles shimmer like the inside of a mussel shell. Outside, there's a sand volleyball court and a shower for rinsing off. And yet, for all its beach friendliness, the house is refined. Aqua sea-glass chandeliers hang over the dining room table and in the main stairwell. The kitchen ceiling is made of Douglas fir. Pendant lights illuminate the Brazilian soapstone of the kitchen island.

The summerhouse is not the couple's first home in Maine. For seven years Mike and Katie lived in Cape Elizabeth. Then in 2002 they decided to relocate to Florida. At the time they'd had enough of Maine winters, though not enough of Maine summers. They kept their Cape Elizabeth home for five more years, then when they were ready to downsize, they bought a brown saltbox on Higgins Beach. The brown saltbox was where they wanted it to be, but it wasn't what they wanted it to be. Indeed, there was nothing about the house that they wanted to keep. A central chimney obstructed the view. The interior was dark, the ceilings so low that Mike could press the palm of his hand against them. Paul Leddy of Leddy Houser Associates in South Portland thought the best thing to do was tear the house down. "It was old, even the walls were old plywood. You don't want to save that," he says. But regulations were such that the house couldn't be torn down. It could be remodeled but not removed. The walls might be taken down and rebuilt, but only one at a time. "So instead of tearing the walls down all at once," Leddy says, "we tore down a sec-



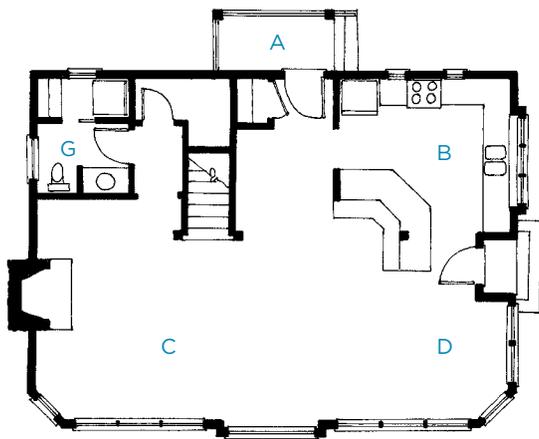


Glass cabinets were installed over windows to let more light into the kitchen. The ceiling is of Douglas fir and the counters, of Ice Flower soapstone. The cabinets are from Glenwood Kitchens USA. They were supplied by Indisco Kitchens and Baths in Scarborough. Note the spigot behind the stove. It is used for filling lobster pots.

“The house was designed with the idea of people running in and out from the beach.”



FIRST FLOOR

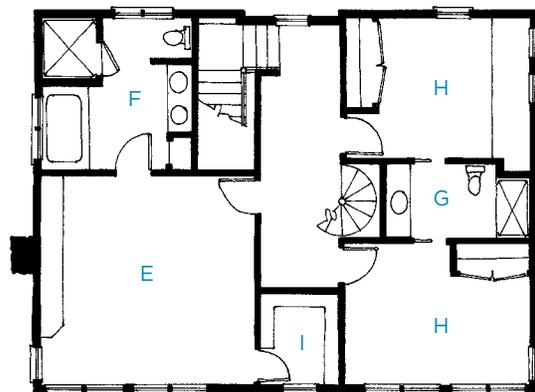


- A Entry Porch
- B Kitchen
- C Great Room
- D Dining Area
- E Master Bedroom
- F Master Bathroom
- G Bathrooms
- H Bedrooms
- I Walk-in Closet

A built-in bed in the master bedroom (above) with a blue duvet from Jonatex.

Marybeth Otterbein, owner of Dwellings in Falmouth, says, "The big inspiration for the interior design was an aqua sea-glass chandelier (opposite). The homeowners came into the store and loved it, and then everything revolved around that." The chandelier is by Arteriors Home.

SECOND FLOOR





tion, rebuilt, and stood it up, and then went to the next wall. This is how we got a nice, new solid structure.”

That nice, new solid structure couldn't extend beyond the existing footprint, so the designers transformed the home's interior with an open floor plan and multiple windows. They wanted to get as much house as they could into the space that they had. They also wanted to handle the exterior as creatively as possible, given that the footprint was basically that of a rectangular box. Architectural designer Walter Wilson of the Design Company in Saco executed the initial plans for the house, and Leddy Houser Associates did the subsequent designing and building.

The ground floor now consists of a single room—a combined kitchen, living room, and dining room—and a half-bath. The original chimney was removed, and a new chimney was built on the street-facing side of the house, the one place where the family might not be so eager for exposure. Windows were added all along the beach-facing side. Paul Leddy says that the central arched window that so impressed me on entry grew out of Mike's desire “to walk in the door and have a ‘Wow!’ factor.” The kitchen wall has a second arched window, and both arched windows have lead-coated copper roofs that form mini-bays that push one foot away from the central box of the house. Typically, wherever you have kitch-





Otterbein outfitted this corner of the living room (opposite) with a star pillow from Chandler 4 Corners and a sofa from BSC (Best Slipcover Company) in fade-resistant, waterproof fabric. The lamp is from Regina-Andrew Design.

A view of the living room (above) showcases the custom stairwell, reclaimed barn-board floors, and a table from Palacek with baskets from Aidan Gray. Windows (including one in the room's angled corner) allow views of the entire beach.

en cabinets or a room corner, there's a wall and thus no chance for a view. To get around this, Leddy Houser angled two of the ground-floor corners to accommodate windows. They also built the kitchen cabinets over windows, so it is now possible to look through the glass fronts of the cabinets and see outdoors. Interior designer Marybeth Otterbein of Dwellings in Falmouth expanded on the beach theme by dressing the cabinets up with bright aqua glassware from Mariposa and white Italian pottery from Vietri.

Although windows open up the view and add elegance to the interior, a box with windows is still a box. There was more yet to do. Two sections of the original straight roofline were dropped, and another section was raised to create a widow's walk. By trading off the permissible roof area in this way, Leddy Houser was able to build a small third-floor room with windows on all sides. The beach-facing side of the room has a sliding glass door that opens onto a cedar deck, which offers 180-degree views of the ocean. Because space was limited, Leddy Houser couldn't install a traditional set of stairs to the new third-floor space, so Unique Spiral Stairs of Albion built a double-helix stairway made of Douglas fir, birch, and reclaimed barn boards. From the beach, the home now looks like a contem-

porary version of a ship captain's house. Gable-end trim, a porthole window, and traditional shingle-style flares add additional interest to the exterior.

If Mike hadn't happened upon a "For Sale" sign while walking on Higgins Beach one day, he probably would have bought a home elsewhere, maybe something bigger. "But I'm glad I didn't," he says. "I like the idea of a small home." The limited footprint doesn't seem to limit the family's entertaining. A typical summer night might find them hosting 20 to 25 people for a lobster dinner. "The house gets plenty of wear and tear," Katie says. "That's the way we like it. We like it busy." Whenever she returns to her home in Florida, Katie says she texts Peter Houser of Leddy Houser Associates at least once a week to say how much she loves her Maine home.

Paul Leddy has known Mike and Katie for over 20 years. He built Mike's first home in Cape Elizabeth, and they have stayed friends ever since. "They are Maine people," he says of the couple. "They just aren't Maine winter people. They wanted a true summer home."

And even on a stormy day, it's clear that is exactly what they got. **MH+D**



Restricted to a tight existing footprint (above), designers and builders complicated the basic box of the house with traditional shingle-style flares, arched bay windows, gable-end trim, a porthole window, and a widow's walk. The landscape design is by New England Landscapes in Scarborough.

BRIGHT IDEAS



- Majority of flooring is of recycled barn boards

For more information, see Resources on page 118.