

New England HOME

Celebrating Fine Design, Architecture, and Building

Sweet Summer
Timeless Style, Easy Living



"This house doesn't have a back," says architect Paul MacNeely. This "front" faces the pool and the main house. Stone from the excavated hillside covers the foundation and extends into a graceful radial wall toward the main house. Landscape architect Doug Jones cleared brush and understory to reveal a commanding dawn redwood that shades the side of the guesthouse.

Head for the Hill

Text by
JORGE S. ARANGO

Photography by
GREG PREMURU

A guesthouse on the ocean becomes an exercise in easy living...and of restoring the native topography.



ABOVE: The pool-facing facade's generous overhang offers protection from the hot sun. **RIGHT:** Ample fenestration on the ocean-facing side affords breathtaking marine vistas and glimpses of the beach. **FACING PAGE:** A balcony off the living room cantilevers over the rock ledge facing the ocean.



Building a home, especially near floodplains or protected wetlands (during a pandemic, no less), can feel like a Sisyphean task. But for the design team who erected this 1,800-square-foot guesthouse on the North Shore of Massachusetts, it was literally an uphill climb.

The owners purchased a parcel adjacent to their main house, says designer Jim Gauthier, “for their grown children to use as their families grew. Everything had to be family friendly and withstand wear and tear.” The lot’s tiny existing house came down, and architect Paul MacNeely was hired to design a new one.

“The site was so powerful that the architecture for us became very simple,” MacNeely explains. “It would be a New England cottage, but how we think about it today, and it would become a kind of staircase that led from the main house to the beach.” Translation? New England-style cedar shakes and vertical cedar siding but with clean modern lines and



ABOVE: The living room opens to the veranda and view. A door to a bedroom is hidden between shelving recessed into the reclaimed barnwood paneling. **RIGHT:** The interior dining area features a built-in banquette and custom chairs around a BoConcept table, all underneath a modern Ochre chandelier. **FACING PAGE:** A groovy retro-looking fireplace creates cozy warmth in colder months. Next to it is a built-in blackened-steel wood storage unit.



more glass to ease the transition from the traditional main house to the organic coastline.

Because the lot sat on a granite ledge almost level with the main house, the new cottage was notched into the rock to prevent it from obscuring ocean views. This required blasting to excavate granite, exposing the beautifully dramatic geology of the ledge and, also, creating a recess in it for a firepit patio further down the slope. From there, landscape architect Doug Jones designed steps to convey people to a lawn, then a meadow, and, eventually, the beach.

Builder Kevin Cradock estimated he'd remove 100 cubic yards of granite. "It turned into 650 cubic yards to get the house situated properly," he recalls. "We took some of that material to cover the foundation," making the cottage





“Our work is fun; we don’t take ourselves too seriously. And the clients are well-traveled, so they appreciate the mix of elements.”

—Interior designer Jim Gauthier

LEFT: A white lacquer kitchen made by About Face Cabinetry & Refacing with a Radianz quartz slab on the island “just disappears,” says designer Jim Gauthier. It also highlights the richly textured reclaimed barnwood paneling. **BELOW:** A powder room off the kitchen boasts a custom vanity, continuing the barnwood theme, while the honeycomb pattern on the Osborne & Little wallpaper gives a potentially grandmotherly floral a contemporary twist.



appear as if it grew directly from the ledge. Jones used more stone to build a radial wall that flows from that foundation, bordering the edge of the ledge and partially encircling the firepit patio below.

To accommodate the steps to the lawn, Jones cleared the hillside of invasive species and non-native plants that hid not only the ledge but also the

base and trunk of a majestic dawn redwood. This elegant tree became the focal point of the descent on this side of the house (a driveway on the other side also accesses the beach).

The overgrowth was replaced with new plantings of switchgrass, winterberry, holly, shadblow, bayberry, and other native specimens. The base of the hill was a floodplain, he adds, “So

we planted native coastal varieties that could receive brackish stormwater.” Back up the hill, stone paths and a new pool and pool house connect the main and guest houses.

Gauthier, who also designed the interior of the main house, says, “We wanted a simple, contemporary interior with cool shapes, color, and interesting textures that would be a contrast to



ABOVE: In the bedroom, a custom oversized fuzzy chair that Gauthier says “feels like a teddy bear” is a perfect perch to take in the views. The ottoman is from Artefact Home|Garden in Belmont, Massachusetts. **FACING PAGE:** A family room just inside the downstairs entry from the beach juxtaposes a blue wing chair from Lekker Home and an African wall hanging from Artefact Home|Garden’s Boston location.

the more traditional main house. Our work is fun; we don’t take ourselves too seriously. And the clients are well-traveled, so they appreciate the mix of elements.”

To these ends, Gauthier explains, “We used reclaimed barnboard on walls as a reminder of an old sea shanty,” but mixed it with concrete-tile floors, a sleek white-lacquer kitchen, a Moroccan carpet, and a retro-looking fireplace in the living room. Pops of greens and blues in mix-and-match patterns add levity on sofa pillows, an ottoman, a striped chair, and on what Gauthier calls a pixilated “nana-ish” wallpaper in the powder room. Indoor-outdoor fabrics abound.

“The irony,” says the designer, “is that they’re thinking this might actually become their retirement home, and they’d give the kids the main house because they love the ease and charm of the cottage.”

EDITOR’S NOTE: For details, see Resources.

ARCHITECTURE: Paul MacNeely, Tim Stewart, Eck MacNeely Architects

INTERIOR DESIGN: Jim Gauthier, Susan Stacy, Gauthier-Stacy

BUILDER: Kevin Cradock, Nathan McBride, Kevin Cradock Builders

LANDSCAPE DESIGN: Doug Jones, Chris Shirazi, LeBlanc Jones Landscape Architects





A brise soleil breaks up sunlight over a seating area with ikat cushions in the wife's favorite color combination: orange and green. Custom Quality Pools built the pool, which replaced a smaller one. The pool house is also new. This space helped unite the two properties and operates as a transition from the main house to the guesthouse.