

New England Home

CELEBRATING FINE DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURE

JULY/AUGUST 2008

**FRESH AND EASY
RELAXED SUMMER ELEGANCE
AMID WOODS, WIND AND WATER**

**PLUS A HISTORIC GARDEN
LIVES ON IN BAR HARBOR**

SEASIDE RENDEZVOUS

Childhood summers on the Maine coast are recaptured in a family's vacation home, right down to the swimming hole the homeowner remembers from her youth.

REPRINTED FROM THE JULY/AUGUST 2008 ISSUE OF
NEW ENGLAND HOME

Seaside Rendezvous

Childhood summers on the Maine coast are recaptured in a family's vacation home, right down to the swimming hole the homeowner remembers from her youth.

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THE OUTCROPPINGS AROUND THE SWIMMING POOL APPEAR TO HAVE SPRUNG FROM DEEP WITHIN THE GROUND, AND ARE ORIENTED SOUTHWEST AND NORTHEAST TO MIMIC THE NATURAL ROCK FORMATIONS ALONG THE MAINE COAST.



DEPENDING ON YOUR POINT OF VIEW, THE HOUSE MIGHT BE INSPIRED BY EDWIN LUTYENS OR JOHN CALVIN STEVENS. FACING PAGE TOP: GREENE AND GREENE'S INFLUENCE IS UNMISTAKABLE IN THE MASSIVE PORCH RAFTERS. FACING PAGE BOTTOM: A SMALL SCREENED PORCH OVERLOOKING PENOBSCOT BAY IS THE FAMILY'S FAVORITE INFORMAL DINING ROOM.



Children who experience

the time of wonder that is summer on the coast of Maine are fortunate indeed. For Gail Catharine Leavitt, childhood summers Down East informed her adult ideas of beauty, of family gatherings and of summer houses. When it came time for her and her husband to build a family vacation house of their own, there was never any question: it would be in Maine.

Even for the splendid Pine Tree State, the Penobscot Bay site they chose and the way they built their house on it are special. From a two-lane road, an unassuming driveway meanders through native growth, leaving the house unrevealed until the very end. Its 8,000-plus-square-foot mass is broken into picturesque sections, producing tantalizing glimpses of a jerkinhead roof, red cedar-clad walls, diamond-paned leaded-glass windows and massive stone chimneys. A charming twig gate leads into an enclosed garden, while a porte cochere connects the house and the garage. The picturesque stone pavement in this arched space leads to a breathtaking view.

The landscape falls away to the ocean below, pausing on terraces, lawns, patios, meadows, stone walls, meandering stairs and a swimming pool whose azure waters appear to flow from below a great granite escarpment. "We tried to re-create the homeowner's favorite childhood swimming hole," says landscape architect George Workman. "She told us about it, and we went to look at the rock formations. Then we tried to bring those elements to the pool."

His comments betray the fact that, as long-established as the house, hillside and dramatic pool terrace may appear, all were created on a rather soggy slope a mere three years ago. "I had a wonderful team," says



THE WAINSCOTED DINING ROOM SEEMS TO FLOAT BEFORE ITS VIEW OF BAY, ISLANDS AND SKY. ITS CENTRAL LOCATION IN THE HOME MAKES IT AN IDEAL PLACE FOR ENTERTAINING.





A NINETEENTH-CENTURY PORTRAIT GAZES DOWN FROM A FIREPLACE BREAST THAT'S THE VERY ESSENCE OF MAINE. FACING PAGE TOP: QUARTERSAWN OAK, MORRIS-INSPIRED WALLPAPER AND WROUGHT IRON MAKE AN ARTS AND CRAFTS KITCHEN. FACING PAGE BOTTOM: THE STRAPPED STAIRCASE WAINSCOTING AND REEDED NEWEL POSTS ARE AS AT HOME IN COASTAL MAINE AS IN ONE OF GREENE AND GREENE'S "ULTIMATE BUNGALOWS."

Leavitt, referring to Workman of Landworks Design of Newcastle, Maine; architect Richard Bernhard of Bernhard & Priestley Architects of Rockport, Maine; contractor Taylor Martens of Northport, Maine, and a number of subcontractors. "Everyone took such pride in their work; the craftsmanship in this house is just gorgeous."

Bernhard looks at the rambling house with satisfaction, happy to name its stylistic influences. "The massing pays homage to the iconic Maine Shingle Style as expressed by John Calvin Stevens, the shed dormer roofs over the windows are a little English Arts and Crafts à la Edwin Lutyens, and the entries and the interior wainscoting are in the manner of Greene and Greene. The overall style owes a lot to what developed over time. We pride ourselves on the fact that we don't have a signature architectural style," he says.

For Bernhard, this was an opportunity to incorporate favorite historical elements into a new house and to express his clients' design preferences as well as some of his own. "Wherever we go," he says, referring to his firm's projects, "we always design ceilings higher than eight feet, no matter how humble the house. In these Maine cottages, we like radiators instead of radiant heat in the floors. Here, everything we like was what the clients wanted."

Managing the lot, however, was a major challenge. The large and now magnificently landscaped slope was not always so beautiful. Workman describes it as "either a sloping swamp or a wet meadow."

He solved the water problems with a vast underground drainage system that feeds into catch basins and, eventually, a natural stream at the foot of the hill. "Our client said that she wanted to be able to walk down to the water's edge in her bare feet, and we made that a reality," Workman says. "There was a tremendous amount of work done before the house was ever started, and a lot of it you'll never see."

Once the drainage work was finished, Martens built the garage, complete with an





upper-floor apartment. The family took up residence there while the rest of the house was under construction.

Near the flower garden inside the twig fence, a stone and timber porch guards the massive, paneled front door. The door leads into the stair hall, then directly into a dining room that seems to float before the view of bay, islands and sky. “When guests come in and see the set table, with lit candles and the view beyond, they feel, ‘I’m in for a treat!’” Leavitt says. “The twig chandelier over the dining table sets the tone.”

Although Bernhard initially wasn’t so sure about the dining room’s location, he now agrees that it makes a compelling statement here, at the center of the house. A side door leads into a cook’s kitchen, in direct line with the dining and living rooms, where a massive stone fireplace warms a conversation grouping of traditional furniture. The decor—a combination of well-designed, timelessly traditional pieces, a rustic Maine sensibility and well-chosen antiques full of personality—is Leavitt’s work, here and throughout the house. “Interior design is something I think I do well, so I use interior designers for specialized and specific things. In this house, Margo Moore of Camden, Maine, worked with me on some of the fabrics.

“My style was influenced by the Arts and Crafts movement and by William Morris papers,” she continues. “Those were rooted in medievalism, so I used a lot of Gothic elements.”

The master bedroom is located at the far end of the first floor, beyond the living room. Here, warm woodwork and traditional floral fabrics accompany another great field-stone fireplace. Upstairs, suites of rooms provide great comfort for visiting friends and family. The cozily proportioned rooms belie the house’s size and age.

“I love old houses,” Leavitt says. “When I stay in a modern hotel, I never feel comfortable.” **NEH**

NOTE For more about *New England Home*, visit www.nehomemag.com.



THE MASTER BEDROOM SITS AT ONE END OF THE GROUND FLOOR, CONVENIENT YET HIDDEN IN ITS PRIVATE SUITE. FACING PAGE TOP: THE HOMEOWNER, AT EASE BY THE POOL. FACING PAGE BOTTOM: IN THE MASTER BATH, AN UMBRELLA MAKES A WHIMSICAL SHADE FOR THE HAND-HAMMERED COPPER TUB.

