

Maine Homes

by *Down East*

YOUR LIFE LIVED WELL SUMMER 2021

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MAINE-MADE
LIGHTING**

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IN WATERVILLE?**

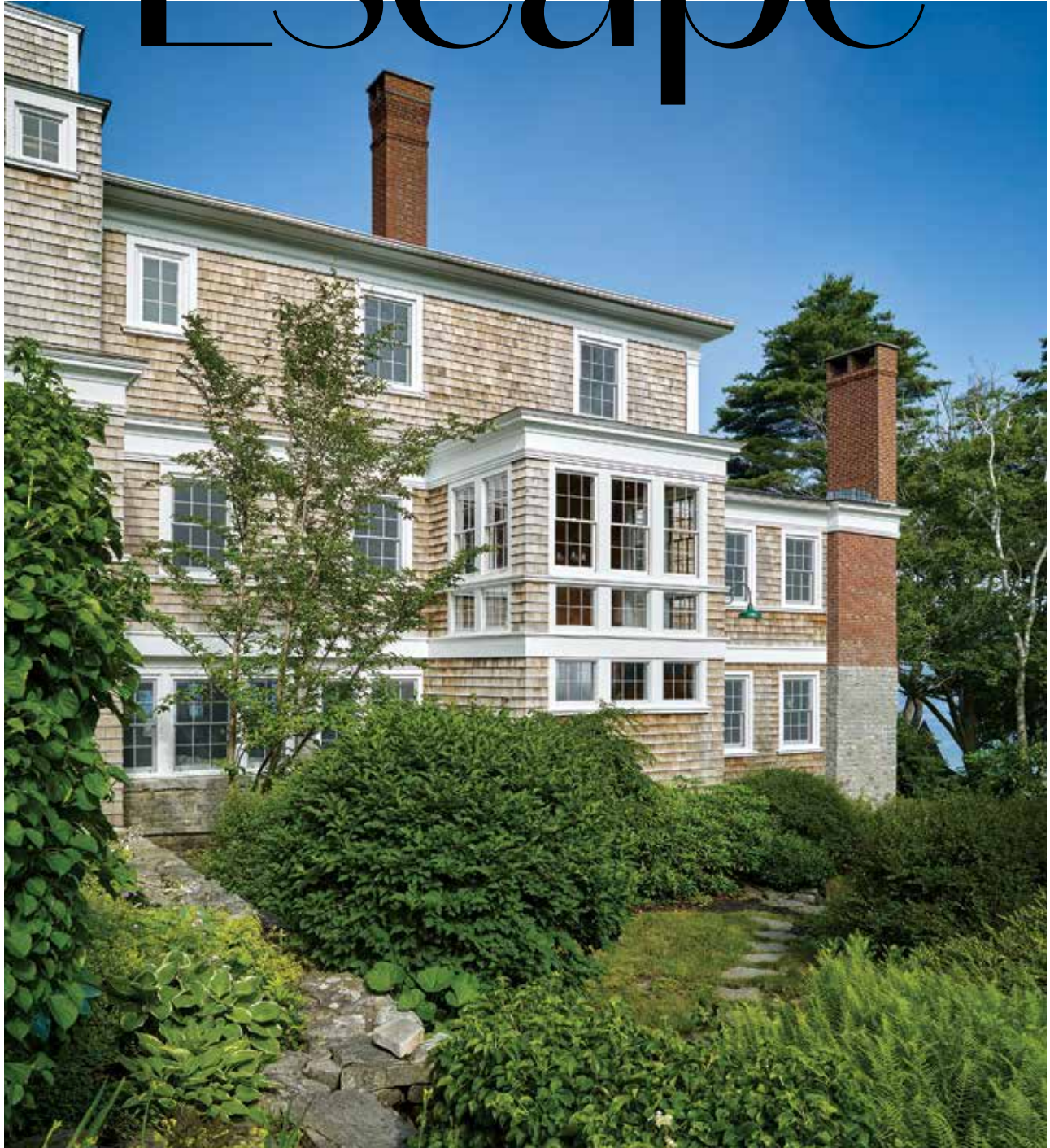
**SHELF HELP:
HOW TO PULL
OFF A CHIC
NAUTICAL LOOK**

PLUS
**INSPIRING
BACKYARD
RETREATS**

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ISLAND Escape



On Falmouth's Clapboard Island, an eccentric real estate magnate's 1898 estate is ready for the next century.

TEXT BY **SARAH STEBBINS** PHOTOGRAPHS BY **DARREN SETLOW**



FROM TOP The ground-floor kitchen is equipped with a dumbwaiter and staircases that once allowed servants to access the first-floor dining room and their third-floor sleeping quarters without crossing paths with the homeowners. Kolterman furnished it with new Douglas fir flooring, slate countertops, paint, and appliances. Kolterman (rear, right) explores the grounds with his brothers and nephews.

Each summer beginning in 1899, Philadelphia real estate developer Samuel Houston, his wife, Charlotte, their children, servants, and even the family cows traveled by train and boat to a spot that easily accommodated the whole kit and caboodle: a private 40-acre island a mile off the coast of Falmouth Foreside. The prior summer, the story goes, 100 men erected the Houstons' 9,000-square-foot, Colonial Revival-esque dwelling on Clapboard Island in 100 days with supplies dragged across the frozen bay by horses and oxen over the winter. With its 13-bedroom home, six beaches, yachts, clay tennis court, extensive perennial and vegetable gardens, and fields for grazing cows (brought "so that the children's digestion would not be upset by unfamiliar milk," David R. Contosta wrote in his 1988 biography, *A Philadelphia Family*), Clapboard offered five-star comfort and, according to Houston, healing. "Several different summers convalescents have been on the island, and have made most remarkable progress," he claimed in a 1920 letter to an associate of President Woodrow Wilson, who had suffered a debilitating stroke. Houston hoped Wilson would rent Clapboard for \$2,500 for the summer, though, he conceded, "I do not suppose the question of cost in any way enters into your calculation."

Centuries earlier, Native Americans were drawn to Clapboard, as evidenced by the mounds of discarded clam and mussel shells on the eastern shore. In the 1800s, farmers brought their sheep to graze without fear of predators or need of fencing; eventually, a farm was established with a simple gabled home that still stands. And in the early 1980s, an elementary-school-aged Neal Kolterman gazed up at the Clapboard compound the Houstons created from the Widgeon he was sailing and thought, "I wonder what that's like?" In college, Kolterman, who grew up in Falmouth, and his friends would anchor their boats off the island to swim and drink beers and he'd again wonder about the place. Then, in 2018, after a 22-acre parcel with the main home and farmhouse on it languished on the market, he and his family decided to refurbish it as a gathering spot for their extended clan and a rental property.

Since Casco Bay no longer freezes, Kolterman needed a crew that was comfortable timing the hauling of supplies with the tides. The team at Portland's Knickerbocker Group, led by construction manager Tom Burrill and interior designer Angela Ballard, "was not intimidated," says Burrill, who had worked on three previous island projects with boat-only access. The group set about replacing the estate's damaged decks and porches, removing and cataloging more than 200 original windows for restoration by



New and antique light fixtures (powered by the island's 70-kilowatt solar array) crown the dining room, which showcases exposed knob-and-tube wiring. A commissioned painting of Clapboard Island by Waterville's Matthew Russ — acquired through Erica Gammon of Contemporary Art Maine — hangs above an antique sideboard.

TIP

IN A SEASONAL HOME, OPT FOR ALL-WEATHER RUGS AND UPHOLSTERY, WHICH CLEAN EASILY AND RESIST FADING AND MILDEW.



Winslow's Jacobs Glass, and hand-scrubbing thousands of shingles. Inside, they reconstructed the floor in the kitchen — built atop ledge and arranged, *Downton Abbey* style, beneath the first-floor dining room — and upgraded the home's nine baths.

To brighten the pine-paneled interior, Ballard had trim, beams, wainscoting, and the kitchen cabinetry painted in Benjamin Moore's Snow White and matched light-colored modern pieces with the home's existing furnishings. In the dining room, for example, a pair of armchairs in a blue-and-white geometric print set off an antique inlaid mahogany table and chairs with reupholstered ivory seats. Overhead, clear-glass globe pendants supplement the Houstons' ornate chandelier in brass and alabaster. "The idea was to maintain what was there and work in color and pattern minimally so as not to overtake the original pieces," Ballard says.

One collection no longer in the home is the Dresden china that might have once filled the dining room's massive built-in. According to author Contosta, Houston, who had been enamored of German culture, renounced it at the onset of World War I. So much so, that he had the china loaded into a boat and tossed overboard. But visitors can glimpse a hint of the old fondness, and Houston's love of family gatherings on Clapboard, in the German phrase embossed on ceramic tiles on the sunroom fireplace. Translation: "Where your sweetheart lies, there's also your heart." □





THIS PAGE, FROM TOP

This west-facing porch received new ipe decking and all-weather-wicker furnishings; at left is a German-style garden house installed by the estate's original owner, Samuel Houston. The home's stone foundation backdrops open shelving in the kitchen, which sports its original slate sink and butcher-block island top. **OPPOSITE, FROM TOP** A sunny-yellow chair — left exactly where the renovators found it — and an engraved coastal chart from Westbrook's Benoit's Design Co. punctuate a cozy kitchen seating area. This serene second-floor bedroom is one of 13 in the estate.

