

# *tidal rhythms* rock 'n' roll

As a 100-year-old structure, this home on Hunting Island is both never-changing—with its long history and pristine natural setting—and as ever-changing as the tides, the play of light and even the brutality of Maine weather constantly impact the main house and new bunkhouse and their surroundings. Owner Kate Horgan and the team at Knickerbocker Group converted this rustic hunting lodge into a liveable space on a rock-strewn acre in the ocean, giving it all the amenities desired for modern-day living, yet preserving the worlds-away character of island life.

A challenging project with unique stories and a smooth finish

interviews *Nancy Gordon*

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Both the living room and dining area look directly out to sea ... The homeowners have experienced the water within six feet of the door.



## Homeowner Kate Horgan talks about Living on and Loving Hunting Island

### What is your favorite story about the house?

The original home on Hunting Island was built as a “get away from your wife and shoot ducks” camp. When the man who built it died, his daughter inherited the island. She never set foot on Hunting. A couple who had seen the island and wanted to buy it contacted the daughter and expressed their interest. She declined but they persevered each year and eventually she agreed to sell to them. They had three boys and spent 40 summers living on Hunting Island. When we bought it from the Brunos, they were in their 80s and it had become difficult to negotiate the boats and docking.

### How did you happen upon this house?

My husband, Bob, and I had just sold a beautiful home that we had built. We were downsizing and I was a bit sad. It was a Sunday and we went for a boat ride. When we went by Hunting Island and I said, “I love that house!” Bob said the Realtor who had sold our other house had told him it was for sale. So we called the Realtor from the boat. He said the key was under the mat and we should let ourselves in. It was incredible. We sat in the living room and it was very quiet and peaceful; quite a spiritual experience. By midnight that night, we had bought Hunting.

### Is this your first time living on an island and boating to and from? Like it?

This is my second island home. Island living requires being organized and planning meals a few days in advance. We always had a lot of kids (we have seven) and friends visiting. I try to keep it simple: lots of grilling, salads and cobblers for dessert. Setting up the house means bringing everything out by boat. All linens, kitchen supplies and dishes have to be brought by boat. The inconvenience is offset by the wonderful experience island living provides.

### What are your favorite quirks about the house/island?

When you are in the living room on Hunting Island, you feel like you are on a boat. At certain times, the tide can come within six feet of the front door. The exterior elements are continuously changing—the tide and the light provide so much beauty.

View from the cottage to the guesthouse.

Bedroom in the guesthouse.

Stairway with the original railing, looking into the living room.

Percy's favorite living room chair.

< Atlas and the baby seal.

### Are the storms on the island scary?

Storms are wonderful, especially when tucked safely upstairs in bed! Storms are the only part of Hunting that my dogs do not like. They are Australian shepherds and get very nervous when it's thundering and lightning out.

### What is your favorite time of day?

My favorite time of day is sunset. We have a spot where we sit to enjoy a cocktail as the day ends. The sunsets are spectacular.

### Tell us about the guesthouse. It's such a wonderful and unique retreat.

The guesthouse is an incredible little nutshell. It was designed by Knickerbocker in accordance with setbacks to fit into a banana-shaped space. On one end is a tool/storage shed and on the other end is a bathroom. In the middle is the bedroom with French doors that open to let the outside in. Our guests feel very special!

### What are your favorite features and/or rooms?

My oldest daughter and I made the driftwood mirror that hangs over the fireplace. We like to gather driftwood to make frames, tables, etc. I love waking up in my second-floor bedroom to the sounds of waves, birds, foghorns and lobstermen pulling traps. The Bruno family owned the house before us and stayed on Hunting for 40 summers. They were the second owners. Mrs. Bruno had a real flair for decorating, which I completely admired. I have tried to honor her style. She was the first woman to live on the island. I am the second. The sense of time seems acute while living there and it is so because of the tides coming and going, the waves coming and going, and the sun and moon coming and going.

I got to the island for the first time one season with my nephew. My friend Philippe was there and we were enjoying a glass of wine. We noticed some splashing out on the rocks and discovered a baby seal. My nephew Atlas lives in New York and this was indeed a treat. We took a lot of amazing pictures of Atlas with the seal until the tide returned the seal to his mother.





Kitchen shelving on casters.

## The Project: In-Depth

### When was the original house built?

**Steve Berger:** Once a hunting retreat with no electricity and only rustic plumbing, Hunting Island was built in the early 20th century. Knickerbocker's work began in 2008, and continued for 18 months, start to finish.

### Water and electric?

**Berger:** Our work included finding a state-of-the-art solution for a septic system as well as bringing water and electricity to the island in submerged lines extended from Southport, more than 600 feet away.

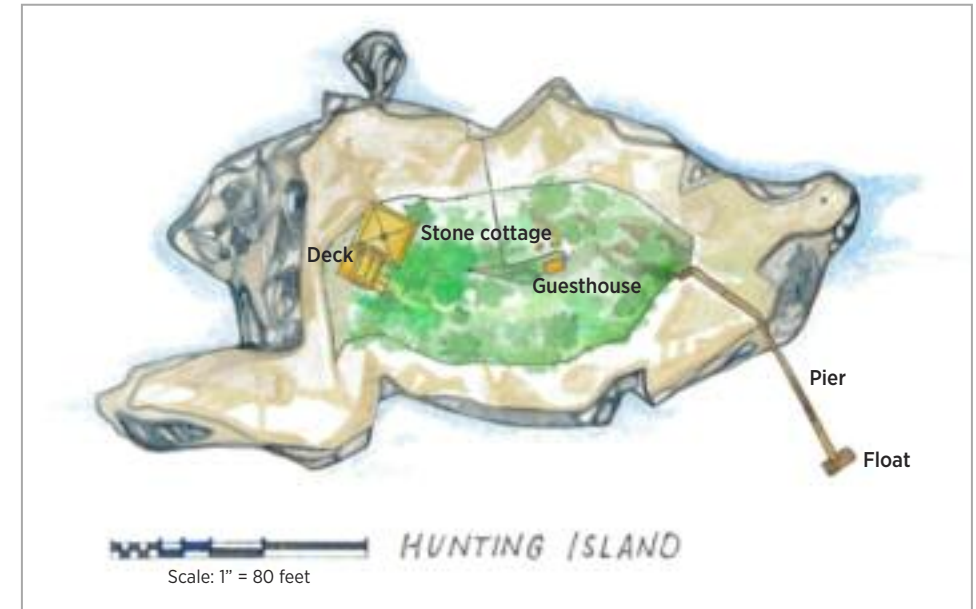
### What were the new homeowners looking to accomplish?

**Rick Nelson:** Most simply, the owners wanted to keep the casual, rustic vibe of the structure while improving its comfort. By adding bathrooms, a proper kitchen, running water, electricity, a small master suite and a guesthouse, this kept the original charm while fulfilling modern needs for living.

### Your first thoughts when you got this project? And what was your greatest joy about this project?

**Nelson:** How in the world are we going to do what they want and still meet the FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) requirements? The whole cottage was in the floodplain and the structure couldn't be raised above the base flood elevation (which FEMA laws require if you improve the structure beyond 50%). The greatest joy was that we found a creative design solution and pulled it off!

We also enjoyed the process of blending new and old and we approached the transition spaces in different ways. For instance, in



Rendering: Emma FitzGerald/Knickerbocker Group

the master bedroom the original stone wall remains exposed on the interior and the new wall adjacent to it is sheathed in cedar planks. Rather than try to blend it, we used the abrupt contrast between the rough multicolor stones and the smooth whitewashed planks to our benefit.

Similarly, on the exterior, the two-story addition is clad in cedar shakes, in stark contrast to the existing two-story stone walls, yet both forms are pulled together by a continuous line of curved rafter tails. We also tore down an old stone addition and re-used the pieces of stone to create the columns that support a portion of the second-floor master suite. So while we chose to push the contrast, we used subtle detailing to draw connections between old and new.

### What was the greatest challenge of modernizing a stone structure?

**Nelson:** Adding electrical service to a stone building was a major challenge because burying wires in the existing stone wasn't possible. Instead, we ran most electrical lines in the few interior walls and then ran exposed conduit to all switches and receptacles.

### Is there any wood framing in this structure?

**Berger:** All first-floor framing is pressure treated and wall finishes are cedar to be flood proof. The roof framing is wood timber with a perimeter steel tension system with a standing-seam metal roof.

### How far did you have to run wire to hook into the main electric pole?

**Berger:** Submerged lines were installed through the harbor, which included more than 600 feet of cable to connect to an existing electric pole in Southport.

### How was everything transported?

**Berger:** We had to be aware of the tides and logistics of getting to and from an island via small landing craft and barges. Once

transported, all materials were then carried from the boat to the building site. Our workers came to and from the island daily by skiff.

### What are the stories behind: bulletproof windows, a triangular guesthouse and kitchen cabinets on casters? Any other interesting/quirky features and stories?

**Nelson:** Because the original building had experienced winter storms that deposited debris in the house (sometimes small boulders), the materials required keeping the ocean at bay. We designed and built ballistic storm panels from mahogany and a near-indestructible plastic composite panel. The kitchen cabinets were built on casters, allowing for them to be moved or raised off the floor should a large storm blow in.

The guesthouse inhabits the only sliver of land on the island where construction was allowed. A detailed survey found only 436 square feet of buildable space on the island, which resulted in the unique "triangular" shape of the guesthouse. We designed the building to accommodate its environment and meld with the land's surroundings.

Again, to meet FEMA requirements, the only way to add to the house was to build up above the floodplain. The master bedroom and bath were put on the second floor, requiring us to build nine-foot-tall stone piers to support the structure.

### Was the problem solving unique to this project?

**Nelson:** Absolutely! Everything was a bit tricky about this project. From the FEMA restrictions, allowable expansion limits in the shoreland zone and the building's original construction method to the site's relative remoteness—each problem needed to be approached with an innovative, thorough eye.

### PROJECT TEAM

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