

BRAND NEW OLD and FAMILIAR

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Kathleen Elridge and her husband, Mark, looked at the beloved cottage, now dilapidated beyond repair, and worried about losing the family traditions and unity if they tore it down. Since Mark's grandfather purchased the waterfront property in 1924, four generations had been celebrating summer here and cherished the spot. But by the start of the new century, the family had expanded beyond the home's capacity to accommodate everyone. The Elridges had even tried to find a second place nearby. When they couldn't, they offered to purchase the old family house from Mark's parents and uncle, knowing they would still be sharing it with them.

Now 10 years after they made the deal, how could a new structure equitably accommodate their two children as well Mark's parents and his sister's family—10 people who all might want to be there at the same time?

Kathleen says she "went over to the town office to ask if they had any ideas who could help and they said, 'Knickerbocker Group.' They are fantastic for people who live away and can't be here to watch." It turned out that Knickerbocker's President and CEO Stephen Malcom lives close by and has kayaked past here a lot, so he knew the property. In 10 minutes they had a vision. We were on."

Prevented by shoreline setback laws from enlarging the original cottage's volume by more than 30%—and most of that would be in height because the original house ceilings were so low—a standing person had no view—Knickerbocker architect Susan Mendelson came up with a two-house solution that gives everyone privacy, space and flexibility. There is a large bunk room for children, a treehouse-like loft bedroom for a couple and two first-floor bedrooms for family members who prefer not to climb stairs. Three and a half bathrooms are available. In winter, when families of varying sizes visit on different schedules, only one house needs to be opened, usually the one on the waterfront footprint of the original building, which has the only kitchen.

Uniting the houses—and the families—is a stone patio that serves half the year as the outdoor living space. "My husband was very adamant that when we are all here, we live outside as much as inside," Kathleen says. "And Knickerbocker worked from that." In addition to bringing in natural light with windows everywhere, Knickerbocker acknowledged Maine tradition by using wood with antique oak floors, fir ceiling and shingling and an architect-designed ship's ladder to the main house loft—another reference to the outside. Malcom suggested "mushroom wood"—funky old slats from mushroom farms that give a rustic patina to the main house ceiling. It makes what's new feel old.

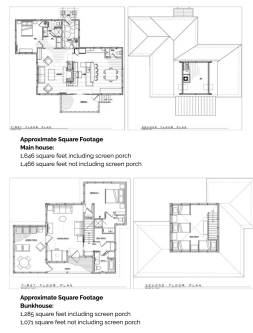
Given all the exposed ledge on the property, Mendelson and Elaine Murdoch, a certified master kitchen and bath designer, brought natural stone inside with stone tiles for a backsplash, slabs between spaces and stone as part of the ship's ladder. Master mason Dan Gier of Pinotons, with a crew of two, sculpted natural Maine granite into a stunning, dry-laid fireplace and outdoor grill, nesting the metal grill into slabs of stone that serve as both counter and table. "A lot of fun work," Gier says. "was finding Oak Hill granite unpollished stones that fit together well. Not just for that fireplace but the wall behind the kitchen sink. It was no matter. And we also had to carve out channels for the wooden shelves."

Those seemingly floating mahogany shelves with tiny integrated LED lighting in the kitchen are one of the ways Murdoch helped the Elridges retain the original cottage's rustic aura, updated with the "edginess" Kathleen wanted. Murdoch had a custom slate bar fabricated, put an antique leaded glass window on the long wall of bunkroom and ran the cable lighting right through the kitchen's wooden ceiling beams. Kathleen also wanted a birch stairway handrail like she'd seen, so project foreman Tim Vigue found a healthy birch tree on a nearby property, which he cut and carefully dried for accommodating the climb to the bunkroom.

Although Mendelson and Murdoch worked mostly on their own, they kept in constant touch with the Elridge family. "We are used to working with clients who are remote," Mendelson says, "so our goal is to keep everyone on the same page all the time. We contact the client whenever there is something on which we know they will want to have input. We never assume anything. Fortunately, technology now makes these collaborations possible."

So do intensive notes, Murdoch adds. "They are very valuable for sharing. We can keep our remote clients from feeling overwhelmed by presenting a few carefully selected choices based on their expressed preferences. In this particular case, Kathleen was fully engaged with us and brought in some wonderful finds herself."

Five years have now passed and, according to Kathleen, "It all works just as planned. Everybody at Knickerbocker deserves so much credit for this wonderful place."



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