

Cabin stats

Originally built:
Circa 1908
Remodeled: 2009
Location: Boothbay Harbor, Maine
Square feet: 2,000
Addition: 136 sq. ft.

BIG PAYOFF

FOR A COTTAGE MAKEOVER



Courtesy Mary Barrett

A GEORGIA COUPLE REALIZES THEIR COTTAGE DREAM – IN MAINE

STORY BY DAPHNE HOWLAND
PHOTOS BY DARREN SETLOW

They don't call it "Hotlanta" for nothing. The heat of hustling, bustling Atlanta, Ga., make summers in tranquil coastal Maine an especially welcome relief for Georgians. In July, they trade an average high temp of 89°F plus high humidity for 79°F with low humidity.

But for Mary Barrett and Xavier Duralde, it's also a kind of homecoming. Mary is originally from Ohio, but her family moved a lot during her childhood. And Xavier grew up in Georgia; the couple lives there now and raised their four children there. But they've been spending summers on the Maine coast for years, as Mary did as a child. She grew up visiting Capitol Island in Boothbay Harbor. "It's so different from Georgia," Mary says. "We both love the ocean. In June we'd pile up into the car and the kids and I would spend as much time there as possible, and my husband gets up there when he can."

CENTERPIECE – The need for a new kitchen was a driving reason for the cottage remodel. Prior to a 136-square-foot expansion, the kitchen was small and dark, and a water heater occupied a lot of space.



MAINTAINED – During the remodel, cottage owner Mary Barrett elected to keep the dark woodwork unpainted to maintain the original cottage feel.



BEFORE – These “before” photos show how dramatically the cottage has been transformed. The third and fourth photos (counting down from the top) show the old kitchen.

Mary’s mother and sisters live in Maine now, so looking for a summer home there made perfect sense.

What they found was a quaint 1908 cottage on Juniper Point in Boothbay Harbor, high on a bluff overlooking the water.

A sense of history & community

Boothbay, in Maine’s midcoast area, has been a significant fishing ground since 1666 and remains a working waterfront, dotted with islands and studded with promontories. At many points in the area, you can watch fishermen going out for the day’s catch.

But in the 18th and 19th centuries, the area increasingly also became a gathering place for inland families and those “from away,” who wanted to enjoy a respite on the coast. That tradition remains strong. Juniper Point is one of many “summer colonies” in Maine that began to flourish at the turn of the 20th century. As in many such colonies in the state, there’s still a community house for potlucks, parties and ping-pong, and a spirit of fellowship.

“There are four tennis courts and two public docks, so you don’t have to have your own dock if you have a boat,” Mary says. “The homes are fairly close together, but it’s pretty wooded. So you can be private, but you have a neighborhood.”

Many of these cottages are much alike, as developers (including some in Juniper Point) built a few at once, according to “The Boothbay Region Revisited,” a history of the area put out by the Boothbay Region Historical Society (published by Arcadia Publishing). The cottages were built on land that was unsuitable for year-round homesteads, so they were constructed only for summer stays. Their interiors were usually rustic and unfinished. And that is what Mary and Xavier

found: an aging cottage that had been left largely in its original state by the previous owners, who had used it as a summer place for decades.

Taking stock of the cottage

Before Mary and Xavier bought the cottage, their house inspector determined that the construction was solid. Although the cottage was apparently secure on its 100-year-old brick foundation, they nevertheless decided to shore it up, which, Mary says, was “mostly for our own comfort level.”

The cottage was also dark, and the view that is so compelling from the large windows on the ocean side could not be glimpsed from the entryway because it was blocked by walls and dominated by a double staircase.

Although the cottage feels small, it has five bedrooms, each with its own closet and full bath, a plus for a family with four grown children who may one day be bringing along children of their own.

Mary liked the cottage’s intimate feel. But the kitchen was inadequate. Not just outdated, it was small. She needed more room and modern amenities to prepare the kinds of meals that make spending time with a large family so much fun.

Basic improvements like upgrades to the neglected wiring, foundation and exterior shingles were fairly simple to plan and execute, but how to expand the kitchen was a different story. Zoning restrictions that require preservation of green space and trees limited their options. “But we didn’t want to do a big thing anyway,” Mary says. “We didn’t want to do anything that didn’t fit.”

They turned to Mary’s brother-in-law, Steve Malcom, who owns the Knickerbocker Group, a design-build firm in Boothbay, to help them with this tight puzzle of a project.



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WHAT’S A LOBSTER POUND?

A LOBSTER POUND is a place that sells lobsters and keeps them in pens right there in the ocean or in tanks that run circulating seawater through them. They’re therefore usually very close to/on the ocean and are often lobster wholesalers unless they’re very small operations. Sometimes these places also sell cooked lobster and other foods.

A LOBSTER SHACK is a place that sells food. Menus will vary of course, but they usually feature lobster, lobster rolls, french fries, fried clams, etc. They usually serve everything on paper plates and the tables are picnic tables, often only outside. But some places are more full-on restaurants. Some lobster shacks are also lobster pounds, and the terms are often tossed about interchangeably.

DESIGN & DÉCOR

A STYLE ALL ITS OWN

HOW TO GET THIS LOOK

To capture the bright seaside charm of Juniper Point for the inside of her cottage, Mary Barrett made these decorating choices:

Paint: The exterior of the house is the same lively red as ever, and Mary brought some red into the living area. "I didn't try to be matchy, though, so I use lots of different colors," she says. "Basically, I wanted it to be comfortable and have the cottage kind of feel."

She chose old-fashioned creamy white paint for the bedroom walls upstairs, and painted all the flooring upstairs a gray-green. "Some of the furniture is painted funky colors," she says. "For the bedding and some furniture I picked a turquoise-y green, with some orange here and there for fun."

And in the kitchen, cabinets and open shelves are painted that historical creamy white.

Furniture: To keep the traditional look of their turn-of-the-century house, she chose old furniture that could be painted or left in its distressed state. For bureau drawers, she saved and used crystal knobs from a built-in taken out in the renovation.

Flea market finds: She scoured junk shops and flea markets for droll items like paint-by-numbers-style paintings of the Maine coast, and a needlepoint rendering of a ship. She found wicker hampers and a stack of old suitcases to use as bedside tables. "I just found stuff I liked the look of," Mary says. "I don't have a design background, but I like to look at magazines."

Wood tones: Downstairs, Mary opted to keep the unpainted, darker cottage feel, made more pleasing by the added light allowed in by the new windows. The original walls of the house



STYLE – The lively red exterior color has been brought indoors. The Kohler apron sink, Rohl faucet and Marvin windows all enhance cottage style.

were aged, exposed horizontal wooden panels. For the new kitchen, they installed same-size boarding horizontally, and stained the new wood to match the natural patina of the old.

Re-purposed: A dramatic light shade hangs over the game table in the living room near the fireplace. The shade is a big rattan and metal basket that Mary had wired; she got the idea from a similar, small wicker shade for an upstairs bedroom that she found at a Pottery Barn sale.

A BREAK FROM TRADITION

While Mary Barrett was dedicated to the spirit of this traditional Maine coastal cottage, she didn't love the brick fireplace, preferring the more typical local granite. "That gave us the opportunity to remove the wall between the kitchen and the living room," says Elaine Murdoch, a designer for the Knickerbocker Group, the firm that renovated Barrett's cottage.

While granite is more historically accurate, the large scale of the new fireplace was to be a departure, and its design

took vision. The Knickerbocker Group benefitted from its design-build approach and its close relationship with local craftsmen, says the firm's principal Steve Malcom. The team wanted something special at the home's center, where the stairs, kitchen, dining and living areas converge, he says.

"Looking for a textural change, they came up with the idea of a masonry mass that would wrap the corner and be visible from all the adjoining spaces," Malcom says. "This idea was further conceptualized on-site with the stonemason, who then searched Maine yards for a special piece of stone. The naturally tapering rough granite column was a perfect find, and we worked collaboratively – designers and stonemasons – to combine the kitchen peninsula with the angled living room fireplace to create an integral, organic connection to this cornerstone."

The team added a bit of whimsy, too. In one corner of the stonework, the mason carved a piece in the shape of Maine, another in the shape of Georgia.

DESIGN RESOURCE

Stonemason: Dan Ucci, Ledge Hill Creations, Inc. East Pittston, Maine, (207) 458-1819

STONEMASON – The granite above this new kitchen island is married to the stonework of the living room fireplace. Uniting the two spaces is a tall granite column.





REMADE – The remodel’s biggest change was rebuilding the cottage’s brick fireplace (shown on p. 35) with local granite. Also shown here is a game table where the family builds puzzles and plays cards.

Polishing a gem

It was a mere 8x17-foot bump-out and a bit of creativity that transformed this dated, dark cottage. Elaine Murdoch, a certified kitchen and bath designer at Knickerbocker who worked on the project, likens the work on the cottage to “polishing a gem.”

The kitchen’s needs guided the expansion. It had very little space and a standing water heater took up a lot of it. The bump-out gained 136 square feet, and a window on the eight-foot side provided a new view to the ocean from the kitchen sink. On the longer side, a new bank of windows provided light without sacrificing wall space needed for

cabinets and appliances. The windows were also placed high enough to hide a neighboring house from view, preserving privacy.

“The addition was severely limited by the property lines and the setbacks that we had, so we had to turn to the inside and make that work,” Murdoch says. “It made us make an even better design than if we could have just blown it out big.”

The group moved the entryway and created a high gabled window to accommodate the proximity of the house next door. Originally, the stairway took up a lot of room. It had two entries: three steps up to a landing from one way, three steps up from another.

Full days are celebrated with food, conversation and wine on the porch, overlooking the harbor.



COMFY BUT FUN – Cottage owner Mary Barrett chose an old-fashioned creamy white paint for the horizontal bedroom wall boards to create a comfy feel, but then added brightly colored bedding for fun. And a Maine cottage would not be complete without lighthouses like those in the framed artwork above the bed.



This was a common convention from an era with separate servant entrances, but, in addition to taking up room, it meant that to get from the kitchen to the living area, you had to take three steps up to the landing, then three more down to the living room.

With a bit more room and a clearer path, the entryway now sweeps visually to the other side of the house, allowing light and those dramatic views to the sea.

Fun with friends & family

“What we like to do is get together with family. We’ve had family reunions here, my husband’s family, college friends,” Mary says.

“We don’t own a sailboat, so when guests come we like to take them out in the harbor

IF YOU GO

- Nothing beats the paper-plate-on-a-picnic-table feast you get at a Maine lobster pound in the summertime. Mary, Xavier and their family frequent **Robinson’s Wharf & Tug’s Pub**, a classic seafood restaurant and a Boothbay institution for 40 years. www.robinsons-wharf.com
- Also in the midcoast area, perched on an active fishing wharf in Georgetown, is **Five Islands Lobster Co.** – more of a shack than Robinson’s, but it’s renowned for its fresh condiments and beautiful view. (Notes: It’s open seasonally. You’ll have to bring your own beer.) www.fiveislandslobster.com
- Mary Barrett’s favorite restaurant in town is **Ebb Tide** in Boothbay, a funky cafe diner with rough-hewn furniture that serves up comfort-food specialties like blueberry pancakes and clam chowder. (207) 633-5692
- In the mood to burn some calories before you try the above restaurants? Rent kayaks from **Tidal Transit** for river or sea kayak excursions. www.kayakboothbay.com
- A tour around the island-studded coastal waters on a schooner like the **Eastwind** is a glorious way to see Maine’s forested, rocky coast. www.schoonereastwind.com
- The **Coastal Maine Botanical Gardens** is 250 acres of landscaped gardens, tended trails and wild spaces. It’s open year round. www.maine gardens.org





The porch and the stunning location led to the house's nickname, "Basque in the Sun."

on the Eastwind, which is a schooner that does several harbor tours daily," Mary says. "It's a beautiful way to get out around all the little islands." Sometimes they go for a round of golf at Boothbay Harbor Country Club, which is open to the public in the afternoon. Walks in the Coastal Maine Botanical Gardens and performances at the Opera House are favorite pastimes.

Back at the cottage, full days are celebrated with food, conversation and wine on the porch, overlooking the harbor. It is a spot for

lobster dinners, for card games or for just being there. The porch and the stunning location led to the house's nickname, "Basque in the Sun," which is also a nod to Xavier's Spanish background.

"And when I'm here I just hang out on the porch with a glass of wine. The only thing I did to the porch is paint it," says Mary. ■

Daphne Howland is based in Portland, Maine, where she is usually willing to kayak, but never has to be talked into lobster rolls and beer.

CELEBRATE THE DAY! – Days at the cottage are meant to be enjoyed. Cottage owners Mary and Xavier regularly relax with family and friends on their porch overlooking the harbor.

DESIGN RESOURCE

Knickerbocker Group,
www.knickerbockergroup.com



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