

INSIDE *Out*

by Rachel Walman
photography by Dan Cutrona



A3 Architects and York Construction joined forces with the homeowners of a special Dennis property to create a synthesis of past and present—the flow of traditional and modern Cape Cod emanates throughout this new construction.

Returning to a memory is not always easy. In the case of homeowners Joel and Ann, coming back to Joel's parents home in Dennis—a place he remembers fondly, full of happy childhood days spent among nature and his mother's watercolor paintings—it was a meaningful choice to make when deciding what to do with the property. "It was always 'my parents' house.'" Joel explains. "And my kids grew up visiting their grandparents here, so I felt a great connection to the property. It was rundown when my parents bought it—and it was our cute, quirky house—but it did sort of run the course of its life. We decided to give the next generation had the legacy of this place."

Alison Alessi, Co-Principal of A3 Architects out of Dennis, met the homeowners in 2018, with York Construction of Sandwich signing on in the fall of 2019. "It's on this charming little historic street," Alessi says. "We wanted to keep the spirit of the house that had been there. In the initial design concepts and schemes, we stayed very true to what was built—we wanted to keep the memory of this little cottage."

Joel himself is an architect, and was able to work together with Alessi to devise the various special touches that should inhabit the home. "We were on the same page from the beginning," Alessi emphasizes. As the rebuilding of his childhood home was undoubtedly a passion project of Joel's, he jumped right in, taking on a few design responsibilities himself. "We wanted to be involved in the details, whether it was the selection of the doorknobs, or taking the lead with a cabinet designer; we worked with Mid-Cape Home Centers, who did a great job."



In keeping with the layout of the old home, a barn section would be incorporated alongside the cottage. "We knew we would have a connector piece—that one story piece in between the two sections—and planned for the cottage section of the home to be more quiet and private," Alessi illustrates. "We always imagined that the barn would be the main living space. In that space are the kitchen, dining and living rooms, then there's stairs up to the loft on the second floor. I wanted to incorporate these soaring, dramatic ceilings—I love having a mix of spaces where there are these open, vaulted views, but also places where it feels cozy and small again."

Both Joel and Ann also knew that they wanted to incorporate their more modern design sensibilities with and old-world sense that many classic Cape cottages still carry. A3 and York were able to add little particulars here and there that reflect a 21st century style, but with quirks that you may only find in an longstanding, unique property. "In the connector hall, there's a skylight cutting in from above," Alessi describes. "This entry area is the only place in the house that has white shiplap siding, and the only place that has the cedar wood ceiling and dark tile floor. We imagined for these materials to bleed from inside to out—the white shiplap walls and cedar ceiling, the same tile material going

down the hall and bleeding out. It was very much meant to be an extension of the screen porch in the back."

Matt York, Owner and Builder of York Construction, agrees. "The cedar ceilings are something that is typically done on an exterior porch, and the clients wanted to kind of bring that feeling inside," he continues. "It's the contrast between going into that intimate space; something about the cedar ceilings brings the space down in the dark floors—and then you walk into the expansive great room."

Ensuring that the new home felt connected to its landscape was a must for Joel and Ann. In a bold and ingenious design move, A3 and York were able to combine the couple's adoration for modern aesthetics and the outdoors by stationing large window panes that envelop one corner of the



rear section of the home. In this way, the two styles are truly brought together: a classical presentation on the street-facing side, with a hidden contemporary expression. "Working on this historic street, we loved mixing with a really modern intervention," Alessi explains.

"We wanted to have oversized windows, and ended up with this iteration where we have large windows framing views out to the backyard."

"The homeowners had this in mind from the start," York adds. "From when we were picking

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windows, profiles of windows, through when we were selecting our interior finish moldings and trims. The interesting thing about a modern aesthetic when it comes to carpentry is that it looks minimal, but there's an enormous amount of precision that's needed to make the carpentry look good, since the lines are so simple and clean."

All in all, the finished result is a sight to see—from both inside the home and outside, when the warm light spills onto the lawn at dusk. "The way it sits on the land, the way those big windows in the living room tie you to the outside, the way the breezeway brings the outside in—it all expands the house," Joel muses. "To sit on the sofa and look out those big windows, you see the sky, you see the birds, and it's just really amazing. I hadn't realized how tremendous it would be to have that connection right in the house—during summer, winter, all seasons."

Although the home allows for clear, immersive living from the point of view of the backyard, the front remains a time-honored, simple presentation. "It's a house right on the street, but the backside is so private," says Joel. "It's great to have that, and also be a five-minute walk from the center of Dennis Village."

It was seemingly a perfect project for Alessi, whose designs seem to blend and weave old and new Cape Cod. "I always love the challenge of keeping the scale and character of these little historic neighborhoods, but making them of the 2020's—how do we balance both? It's lovely to be given the opportunity to do that. We're allowed to have fun in the back and make the interiors more playful."

McDonnell Mechanical

Viola



Not only does this new property reflect the homeowners' desire to feel connected to the land it was built upon, but it was also built to be as energy efficient as possible. "One aspect that was important to Joel and Ann was the different mechanicals that went into the house," York explains. "They picked packages that were going to aid in making sure that the energy consumption was not wasted. Suitably, A3 tends to design projects in a way that gears a home towards being eco-friendly."

"We wanted a house that didn't use fossil fuels," explains Joel. "I had explored using a heat pump system in our house in Lincoln. In a way, we wanted to respect the old home's connection to the land. My wife and I are both involved in the sustainable planning—Ann

worked for an environmental nonprofit for 25 years. It was crucial to find a way to build a house like you should be building in the 21st century."

And on the inside of the home? Joel and Ann made a point to conserve a few of the very pieces that Joel's parents had all those years ago. "We've integrated some of the look and feel of the old house," he says. "My mother was a painter, with a studio in what is now the barn living area. In a way, the two-story loft has some features from what her studio was—a big skylight and open space. We've tried to respect both the history of this property and my family, as well as our own personal interests with modern architectural design."

In a way, the completed project is really a story of two homes,



two-fold in the way tales and fables add up and flow over time. "It's an odd thing to come back to a place that you grew up at," Joel reflects. "I think we've respected its history, but also transformed it into something that that is

uniquely ours. And I think we did that very successfully. There is this sense that it's a place where people go and stay long term. We've sort of uncovered that." 🏡

Rachel Walman is the assistant editor for Cape Cod Life Publications.

