



ACE OF DIAMONDS

Once a diamond in the rough, this Wellfleet deck house has finally played its hand, and it's a winner

The universe has a funny way of putting us right where we belong. Take Newton residents Chris and Portia, and their four children, for instance... For the last 20 years, summers for the family have belonged to Wellfleet. The beaches, the square dancing on the pier, the bike rides, the delectable oysters and clams—all the backdrop for the indelible memories they've shared. In recent years, Chris and Portia began dreaming: What if we stopped renting and had our own place here? Their older son encouraged that dream to become a reality, emailing them about houses for sale in the area. So the couple decided to reach out to a realtor.

Lo and behold, Chris and Portia were shown a property on Chequessett Neck Road, where they had rented a smaller house just down the street the year before. "At that particular house," Portia says of the rental, "we just had a wonderful, wonderful family vacation." As their realtor

showed them around this larger Chequessett property, Portia says it was immediately apparent this would be "a fixer upper," but that didn't bother them much. "The view of Wellfleet Harbor just captured us."

"The home really found us," says Chris. "As soon as we walked in, we could see ourselves there. It's got these great views, great sightlines—it sits up on a hill and looks over a golf course on one side and the bay on the other side. We fell in love with it, and we fell in love with the mid-century aspect of it."

The property consisted of three buildings, one of which being the main house, a modern deck house, which had been significantly altered over the years. Acton, MA company Deck House originated the deck house style in the 1950s—a semi-modular post and beam, with flooring and roofing consisting of tongue-and-groove decking. In



Sleek yet casual furnishings encourage the laid-back kind of lifestyle the homeowners sought and allow the resplendent outdoor views to take center stage.



The interior of this modern deck house is now a breath of fresh air. What was dark and closed off is now bright and ideal for entertaining.



BY HALEY COTE • PHOTOGRAPHY BY JIM WESTPHALEN

addition to non-traditional flooring and roofing, there are no floor joists to run wires and piping for plumbing, heating and electrical systems. “They’re built differently than most houses,” says Mark Hammer of Hammer Architects. “And they’re somewhat tricky to renovate and expand,” adds Don DiRocco, also a principal of Hammer Architects. “These houses require a great amount of understanding in order to put together, and we’ve had a lot of experience working with that kind of house.”



That’s why Chris and Portia’s realtor recommended Hammer Architects when it came time to renovate. Chris and Portia wanted to maintain the character of the original mid-century modern house style while expanding outdated spaces to accommodate their large family and the many guests they planned to host. “We were able to enlarge the home in a meaningful way by doing a small addition on either end,” Hammer says. Starting with the two-car garage, they removed one of the garage doors and converted the space into a guest suite. Above this guest suite is an expansive deck. “The deck just basically sat on top of the garage, and it was open on all sides. It just felt very exposed,” says DiRocco. Now, the deck is enclosed with railing and feels more defined.



“This house had so much square footage of deck that it was just swimming in it—it was overpowering,” DiRocco says. “There was Trex decking that ran all around the property to form a ramp. So on this side of the house, we reduced the size of the decking and



made it more of a transition space walking from the living room to the outside.” LeBlanc-Jones Landscape Architects worked to connect the decking back down to grade, as well as rehab the landscaping throughout, particularly on the entry side of the main house. “Originally the whole front area was paved. The asphalt went right up to the house,” says DiRocco. “It had a harsh feeling, and there was a really large, ugly retaining wall to the right. LeBlanc-Jones did a lot to minimize the amount of paving and reduce the size of the retaining wall and really soften the landscape.”

Inside the main house, “We basically freshened everything up,” says Hammer. “Everything was dark,” DiRocco explains. “The fireplace was dark, the ceiling was dark, the beams were dark, and even though there was quite a bit of glass in the house, it felt really dark and gloomy.” The fireplace and ceilings were painted white, partition walls behind the chimney were removed to open up the kitchen to the living room, and the exposed beams were stained a natural mahogany hue. Mahogany, in keeping with the detailing of original deck houses, is a theme throughout the interior. New floor-to-ceiling windows, which replaced poorly insulated metal windows, have an interior mahogany finish and a natural aluminum exterior finish. “With all the beautiful new windows, the outside would be the feature,” Portia says, explaining that she and Chris wanted the home to stay true to mid-century modern design in that it be connected to nature. “They were so wise about window placement,” she says of



Hammer Architects. “When people come up the stairs, they are taken by the views—from the golf course to the harbor with the sailboats. It’s just really breathtaking, and they made the most of that.” Complementing those views are the furnishings throughout the interior, completed by Emily Pinney of Pinney Designs. “She really respected that we wanted it to be simple, clean and easy, uncluttered living,” says Portia.

Mahogany continues in the expanded kitchen—formerly a closed-in galley kitchen—with the cabinetry, fabricated by E.W. Tarca Construction. Instead of upper cabinetry here (there is only one upper cabinet, next to the mahogany-faced refrigerator), Hammer Architects designed a wall of windows looking out toward the views of the golf course and landscape beyond, as well as a series of floating shelves. Off of the kitchen is the expanded dining area, which leads out to the deck above the converted garage. Mahogany

detailing is also found in the bathroom vanities and the slatted wall of the staircase leading up to the main level.

The main house originally had a boiler system, and when Ed Tarca and his team at E.W. Tarca Construction came onboard the project, the plan called for a gas burner with baseboard heat—the catch being that Chris and Portia didn’t want the baseboard unit visible. “So I had recommended to go all-electric,” Tarca says. “This is an all-electric home with low-voltage electric radiant heating. Then I suggested, because it’s all-electric, we should look at solar as a means of offsetting the costs of the electric.” On one section of roofing on the west side of the home solar panels were installed. “Since the house is used in the winter, though not extensively, it can stand alone all winter long,” says Hammer. “It takes care of its heating loads and electrical loads quite comfortably.”



Walls of windows in the new kitchen and freestanding screen porch facilitate an intimate connection with the lush landscapes surrounding the property.

Continuing the additions to the home, on the lower entry level, the design team added two bedrooms—a bunk room for Chris and Portia’s two sons and a room for their two daughters. They extended the master suite, creating an addition off of the wall of built-in mahogany bookcases in the living room. Sliding glass doors, with the same interior mahogany finish of the new windows, open into a new outdoor shower off of the master en suite’s dual-headed walk-in shower. The design team also created a bridge walkway off of the master that connects the main house to the two-story guest cottage.

“Before, when we were walking around with Chris, we were like, ‘What’s this doing here?’” DiRocco recalls with a laugh. “There wasn’t any rhyme or reason put into how the outbuildings related to each other and to the main house.” To help achieve a sense of cohesiveness, they changed the roofline and the siding of the building to match the main house. The guest house includes a bedroom and bathroom upstairs, and an open workshop space below,

paneled in birch plywood. “Our kids are really creative—our two boys built us a skiff—so that will be a creative hangout space,” Portia says. “There are just a lot of different things that can go on there. We’re so happy about it.”

Adjacent to the guest house is a small art studio, previously a tool shed, that received a new window, door and slight alteration to its roof to match the other buildings. Opposite the studio is a new freestanding screen porch. “The style of construction there we tailored after the main house, where it has a wood deck exposed ceiling and exposed beams,” notes DiRocco. With its comfy couch swing, picnic bench, and sweeping views of the golf course and rolling hills, it’s an ideal summertime escape for kids, or parents—and such a space was key for Chris and Portia. “It’s a playground,” Portia says of the property, “but with a family of six, that will eventually have spouses and grandchildren, there are all these fun, different nooks and places to be.”

The family simply can’t get enough of their new Wellfleet retreat. “There aren’t enough weekends in the summer,” says Portia. “It seems almost every weekend someone has a pack of kids that come.” From big family reunions, to jumping off the sea wall into the ocean at high tide, to nights in the hot tub gazing at the stars, to even deep-frying their first turkey at Thanksgiving, “It’s been unbelievable for our family as a place to gather,” Portia says.

After purchasing the home, Chris and Portia met with the previous owners—the original owners—for drinks and were gifted three framed photographs: two of the original property, and one a recent aerial. “They were so excited for us and generous. It was really special,” Portia recalls. “They said it was a home of family gatherings, celebrations, lots of parties, and I think we have done them well by that. We just feel so grateful and blessed to be here.”

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