




JEWEL BOX *by the Sea*

On Nantucket Island, the character and craftsmanship of a brand-new home beautifully belie its age



In careful concert with local historic organizations and respecting the village of Madaket's history at the angular intersection of English and Native American settlement lands, the home's exterior employs all-natural materials: white cedar shingles and trim. (Only the door is painted.)

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Photographs by Tria Giovan*



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When architect Steve Ekman began drawing out the plans for his clients' summer home on the island of Nantucket, he kept one idea top of mind: "We never intended this house to be large," says Ekman, principal of Ekman Design Studio in Colorado. "We wanted the materials to be so special, the artistry of every detail to be so rich, that it would long be thought of as a jewel box by the sea."

Ekman and interior designer Ramey Caulkins, principal of Griffin Design Source, had previously collaborated on two other homes for this client, grasping their style and enduring affinity for Nantucket, where they'd spent every summer for 25 years. Ekman and Caulkins drew their primary inspiration from the 1930s fishing cottage that originally occupied the Madaket property. The cottage, with its Japanese red pine interior, was cozier and more rustic than cool, built with materials that had stood the tests of both time and the elements.

From that original cottage's warm interiors, the team fashioned a new, more spacious house that reflects that same aesthetic while embracing even more of the site's sweeping views. Ekman designed the new structure as two "cottages" connected by a glass breezeway that doubles as the entryway. The original cottage houses the public spaces—great room, dining, powder room, pantries, and mud-room; the new cottage holds the bedroom suites and an office. The main ingredients of the home's structure—tongue-and-groove pine ceilings and walls, fumed-oak floors, wide shiplap, and local stones—unite the two spaces.

"There was a weight to the materials we used in the house that demanded a different kind of interior design," says Caulkins. "I knew I couldn't come in there with wisps of crisp linen and white-slipcovered sofas when the ceilings were crafted out of old sinkers that had been aging for years under a lake in Louisiana. It would feel incongruous. Nothing could look like it was dropped in after the house was done. Instead, I had to bring in elements that would feel at home alongside these rich materials, and I needed to develop a color palette that balanced everything, too."

She employed plenty of unlacquered brass—from the custom hood in the kitchen to the plumbing hardware throughout the house—for its promise of a quick patina. Caulkins also chose a palette of deep, sea blues, which she employed in everything from the upholstery to the kitchen cabinetry, to balance the weight of the tongue-and-groove pine ceilings. And she delivered a more storied look throughout the home by hunting for found objects up and down the East Coast, securing one-of-a-kind objects like two original ship portholes in the kitchen doors and vintage nautical light fixtures.

“Even when a house is new, or perhaps especially if it’s new, I like to bring in as many found objects as I can,” says Caulkins. “That’s what makes a house truly unique, when you source things that can’t be easily duplicated somewhere else. Absolutely everything in this house has a story to tell. It isn’t the great big new mansion on the bluff. It’s the one that looks like it belongs. And inside, it tells such a beautiful story. And that was the goal from the very beginning.”



A historic entryway

“The original fishing cottage had a painted compass design on its floor,” says Ekman, who loved the detail so much he repurposed the floor as a wall in the basement recreation room and then enlisted the help of artist and woodworker John Yarema to honor that historical detail in the home’s entryway. Yarema composed the floor’s intricate compass rose using 11 species of wood, as well as wrought iron and mother-of-pearl. “It’s like nothing I’ve seen in my life,” says Caulkins. “It elevated the level of craftsmanship in the whole house.” The fireplace is composed of local stones, and the nautical paintings are from Nantucket galleries. Caulkins transformed antique hand-hooked chair seats into pillows for reproduction wicker chairs with fabric by Peter Dunham.

Space for gathering

In the great room, the view is the conversation piece. “We didn’t want to obstruct from the incredible view with any drapes or window coverings,” says Caulkins. “But we needed to work in a lot of furniture, because this is the home of a large family who loves to entertain.” She relied on pieces that can be easily rearranged to handle groups, and then wove in plenty of texture and pattern in shades of blue. Ekman designed the ceiling to replicate the interior of a whaling dory. The wood, milled from pine resurrected from

decades on the floor of Lake Pontchartrain in Louisiana, delivered the same warmth as the Japanese red pine in the original cottage.

Caulkins designed the banquette—which is the only dining area in the house—to seat up to 12 people. The light above it was custom made by Paul Marra from string colors Caulkins selected to match the stripes on the chairs. “It needed to be a light fixture that didn’t block the view toward the water but still offered some level of artistry,” she says.





Blues and brass

Caulkins added dimension to the kitchen by using a darker navy paint color alongside a slightly lighter blue, and then let brass take center stage: an unlacquered brass hood designed by Ekman, flanked by a pair of antique portholes carefully placed in doors on either side of the workspace. The fireclay backsplash—with monochromatic grout—is composed of 2- by 8-inch glazed thin brick tiles. The vintage, reeded-glass pendants were found objects that Caulkins purchased on a drive from Maine to Nantucket. The

wooden barstools, upholstered in fabric by Katie Leede, mimic the warmth of the ceilings and brass accents. Builder Jamie Feeley (of Cottage + Castle, Inc.) loved the unlacquered brass hardware in the house so much that he couldn't bear to put in a stainless steel sink. So he gave the homeowners the brass sink (inset) as a housewarming gift. "That's how much the people on this project believed in the artistry of it," says Caulkins. "And he was right—the sink *makes* the kitchen."



Guest appearances

For the guest room (above), Caulkins used wide-board shiplap that is butt-jointed, so the paint seeps in at different levels. "It gives the appearance that the walls are very old," she says. Playing off the room's ample natural light, Caulkins paired yellow as an accent color in the bed skirt trim, drapes, and benches, with a custom sage green headboard and dry-brushed Ballard bedside tables. The antique light fixture is from Maine.

In the guest bath (left), the homeowners preferred a curbless shower so the floor would be on one plane. The beadboard-patterned painted wall is seamless, too: "The material looks like it's continuous, but we had the Corian cut in a beadboard pattern for the shower wall, and you can't even tell where the transition is from wood to Corian." The fixtures are all unlacquered brass. "They deliver the most beautiful, timeless look, and quickly patina, especially on the East Coast," she says.



A well-feathered nest

Caulkins wanted a quiet luxury in the primary bedroom (opposite), so she upholstered the walls in a soft gray-blue fabric by Calvin Fabrics. "It's not a grand room, but the double-height ceilings make it feel that way," she says. "Upholstering the walls really anchored the space and made it feel balanced." Sticking to the ethereal palette of soft blues and grays, she layered in woven shades and custom drapes in a Peter Fasano fabric to further soften the diminutive space. "I love to mix and layer patterns when they all stay within a simple palette," says Caulkins, who designed a custom bench for the foot of the bed and upholstered it in a fun pattern by Penny Morrison. Brass strappings on the timber trussing draw the eye to the ceiling: Ekman's architectural tribute to dories from Nantucket's whaling history. A Paul Ferrante light fixture in custom colors delivers subtle drama overhead and echoes the soft blues elsewhere in the room.



Bathing beauty

In the primary bath (above and left), Caulkins designed the scalloped tile pattern and meticulously carried it around the side wall that separates the shower from the tub, as well as behind the Belle Epoque sink. The designer paid careful attention to lighting, too. "One signature thing I love to do in bathrooms is mount sconces on a larger mirror over the sink," says Caulkins. "It's a clean look and allows you to use a larger mirror than you could if you were mounting the lights on either side." She also found an unlacquered brass ship light to hang above the bathtub.



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“THIS HOUSE WAS A LABOR OF LOVE OF CRAFT AND ARTISANSHIP”

—STEVE EKMAN



Cozy hideaways

Clockwise from top, left: The staircase in the entry showcases the natural woods that are used throughout the home. Tongue-and-groove pine forms the stairs and ceilings; the floor is fumed oak.

For the clients' daughter's bedroom, Caulkins chose a rattan headboard that didn't obstruct the light. The window shades match the color of the walls and ceiling (Alaskan Husky by Benjamin Moore).

Caulkins transformed a landing on the second floor to a sitting area that easily transitions to sleeping quarters. “We designed

built-in beds to resemble those on a boat, so the edges are rounded, and it's all tucked into a window with the most amazing views and natural light,” she says. The tongue-and-groove walls and ceiling are painted Super White by Benjamin Moore, a crisp backdrop for the blue-and-red palette.

A beadboard-clad nook adjacent to the bedroom is just large enough to hold a full-size bed. “It really is like a cozy cocoon,” says Caulkins, who placed a Nathan Coe photograph of a Nantucket landscape inside the dreamy space.



Inside out

Caulkins wanted the back deck, which enjoys views to Smith's Point, to be the place her clients began and ended each day. A fireplace makes that possible, delivering warmth on cool Nantucket evenings. “The family loves Nantucket and have come here for years. They arrive on

Memorial Day weekend and stay through Labor Day, so this truly is their home away from home.” The shingled exterior is traditional to island architecture, but the design team fought hard to win the dark bronze-brown window trim, which feels more earthy and authentic to the home's interiors.