



# The *Long* View

A modest house on a stunning piece of Rhode Island coastal property  
becomes a quintessential summer getaway for a young family

*Written by* JILL CONNORS • *Photographed by* ERIC ROTH • *Produced by* LYNDA SUTTON

**THE LIVING ROOM** windows optimize the view of Narragansett Bay. Limed-oak floors, wood panels, aqua glass tile by the fireplace, and beige modular sofas all play to the beach-inspired color scheme. At the edge of the property (FACING PAGE) is the spectacular rocky coastline.



**A NEW OPEN staircase with a wood-and-cable banister replaced an enclosed stairway in approximately the same location. In the living room, a fireplace that bisected the room and blocked the view was removed and a sleek hearth took its place. The wood ceiling panel conceals steel support beams.**





***It was an innocent request.*** A couple from the Boston area just wanted to check out the rental house they had reserved for a family vacation on the Rhode Island coast. The location, a spot along the West Passage of Narragansett Bay with a sweeping southward view of Rhode Island Sound and the ocean, certainly was promising. But typical of many 1940s and 1950s houses built in South County, it lacked vision — view-wise and design-wise. They opened the front door expecting to be wowed by ocean vistas, but instead were confronted with a monolith of a fireplace dominating the living room. “The thing must have been 5 by 8 feet of big lumpy stone,” says architect D. Michael Collins. “You actually had to wind your way around the fireplace before you could even see the windows and the water.”

That, and several other drawbacks such as the lack of bedrooms for their growing family, didn’t stop the pair from immediately calling a real estate agent to see if the rental could become a sale and then, after living in the house for a season, renovating it to be their second home. “The view was magnificent,” says the wife, “and the house was sited well, in that you can’t see the houses on either side, so we were really excited about it.” The couple, who have three young children, “invite lots of people down in the summertime,” the wife adds. So instead of merely renovating to make do, she and her husband turned to a team that could transform the modest 1940s house into a summer place worthy of its setting. In addition to Collins, whose firm, D. Michael Collins Architects, has offices in Natick and Cataumet, Massachusetts, they hired Andra Birkerts of Andra Birkerts Interior Design in Wellesley, Massachusetts, and Mark Sevegny Construction Inc. of Exeter, Rhode Island.



**THE HOUSE APPEARS compact and pretty from the street.** The footprint gained a garage, and a center gable was added to the second floor of the house. White cedar shingles finished in a silver-gray bleaching oil will preserve the color of the siding as it weathers in the salt air.



“The absolute first requirement: Get rid of the center fireplace,” says Collins, who appreciated the complexity of the task, given that its mass was supporting the second floor of the house. “That became the driving design element: how to take advantage of the incredible view when you walk in, and how to scale a big open space in the living room so it doesn’t feel so big.” The old chimney came out and two steel beams, each 18 inches wide, were threaded into place along the living room ceiling for structural support. A new fireplace was created along an exterior wall with a minimal stone hearth, and the room’s remaining exterior walls were lined with windows — “all oversize to optimize the view,” says Collins.

The wall of water-facing windows continues to the adjacent kitchen and eating area, creating one continuous multipurpose room with the view as its focal point. A curved deck off the living room adds even more space for enjoying the vista. “We originally had designed a

**A BUMP-OUT** added square footage for the kitchen eating area (ABOVE). The L-shaped island gives its users a view to the water. Counters along the walls are topped with granite, while Silestone is used on the island, which is augmented with raised orange resin counters (FACING PAGE, BOTTOM). A sitting area in the master bedroom (FACING PAGE, TOP) includes a private balcony. Here, as throughout the house, 2-over-2 double-hung windows are in keeping with the original cottage feeling.

simple rectangular deck,” says Collins, “but when the land survey was completed, we realized we had more room than we originally thought, so we made the deck follow the curve of the coastal setback. To the inch.”

In the living room, the main gathering area for family and friends, Birkerts and Collins devised an ingenious camouflage for the steel beams — a sheathing of ribbed oak that establishes a horizontal scheme extending from above the new fireplace, along the ceiling, and terminating in open shelving on the opposite wall. “It became the central theme to the whole room,” says Birkerts, “yet it allows the views to be the most important thing you see.”

The kitchen was extended by a bump-out that accommodates the eating area. The horizontal scheme continues in the cabinetry, built by Kochman Reidt + Haigh Cabinetmakers of Stoughton, Massachusetts, which also did the living room ceiling, mantel, the bookshelves, and the open shelving, accented in vivid colors, in the kitchen.

In the unified space, “There are lots of references to horizon lines and the colors of sand and sea and stone,” says Birkerts, “creating a connection between outside and inside.”

Upstairs, the expanded sleeping quarters took shape as a master suite complete with sitting area, bath, and private deck, as well as a guest room tucked above the kitchen bump-out and a delightfully



#### DESIGN DECISION

### *Lighting by the sea*

Light fixtures chosen by the homeowners, interior designer Andra Birkerts, and Birkerts's senior designer, Courtney Driver, convey a casual by-the-sea attitude perfect for a summer house — but with some unique twists. For example, a custom-made fixture that depicts a few brightly colored fish swimming amid a school of transparent fish (a design inspired by the children's book *Swimmy* by Leo Lionni) hangs above the kitchen table. The master bedroom sitting area has a rattan fixture that resembles a fisherman's trap, while the master bath has a handblown glass dome fixture that looks like something that could have been found in a fish trap. In the bunk room, there are two informal chandeliers made of blue sea glass. Finally, the fixture on the second-floor landing resembles netting sprinkled with crystals. Illuminated by recessed canister lights, the actual light source, in the ceiling, the crystals sparkle like the sea.

THE MASTER BEDROOM ceiling is accented in vivid orange. The master bath (BELOW LEFT) has vanities topped in sea-foam-colored glass and tile backsplashes with the sparkle of mica. The tile pattern in the children's bathroom (BELOW RIGHT) mimics flower petals falling from the sky.

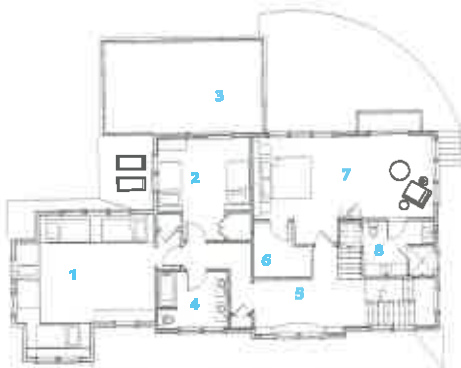




THE BUNK ROOM HAS A turquoise-painted wood floor, blue sea-glass chandeliers, and built-in bunks punctuated with porthole mirrors, rope railings, and ladders with porthole treads.



- FIRST FLOOR**
- 1 GARAGE
  - 2 MUDROOM
  - 3 PANTRY/LAUNDRY
  - 4 DINING/SITTING AREA
  - 5 KITCHEN
  - 6 BATH
  - 7 BEDROOM
  - 8 DECK
  - 9 LIVING ROOM
  - 10 FRONT STAIR
  - 11 FOYER



- SECOND FLOOR**
- 1 BUNK ROOM
  - 2 BEDROOM
  - 3 ROOF DECK
  - 4 BATH
  - 5 HALL
  - 6 MASTER CLOSET
  - 7 MASTER BEDROOM
  - 8 MASTER BATH

BUILDER  
**Mark Sevegny Construction Inc.**

inviting bunk room for the kids. “That room took a while to evolve,” says Birkerts. “The idea was for it not just to be a place for sleeping but also a playroom where they could invite friends and spend time, a place they would long for during the rest of the year.” A porthole window sets a nautical cue in the room, porthole-shaped mirrors reflect the light, and the built-in bunks have whimsical ladders with porthole cutouts forming the rungs. Underfoot, the wood floors are painted a vivid turquoise, a reference to the ocean water.

Throughout the house, limed-oak-floors and elements such as the custom stairway with its contemporary wood-and-steel-cable design establish a light countenance.

Additional space was carved out at the basement level, where builder Mark Sevegny dug down an extra foot to create enough headroom to have usable space, complete with guest room, bath, bar, and a TV room that opens to the backyard. The space is finished with recycled barn boards used for the ceiling beams, bar wainscot, and even the pocket door to the guest bedroom.

With plenty of gathering spaces and a new outlook, the transformed house is just what was intended: a summer place where memories are being made. Says the happy homeowner: “The whole family absolutely loves being there.”

FOR MORE  
 DETAILS,  
 SEE  
 RESOURCES