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# Maine Home

## +DESIGN

July 2011

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**Summer**

On the **Beach**  
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“Philosophically,” says the homeowner, “our move to Maine was about being able to give our children an upbringing that connects them to something bigger than themselves.” On this land, the family enjoys raising chickens, composting, and eating what they grow in their gardens together.

# Farmhouse Allure

For a family returning from abroad, a historic farmhouse gets a breath of new life and becomes home

Old farmhouses tend to seduce wide-eyed house hunters of the romantic sort, lusting for generous amounts of land, antique architecture, country living, and a touch of history. But it takes a particularly dedicated homeowner to live in one, not to mention restore one. The owners of such homes become stewards of history, while any restoration requires a careful balancing of modern needs with architectural tradition. The homeowners of this South Berwick farmhouse are precisely that kind of homeowner.

Their house—one of South's Berwick's oldest—was named Hill Garrison after John Hill and was built in 1698, in the days when the center of South Berwick was located near the Old Mill, the largest lumber mill in New England at the time. Back then, every town had a house designated as the garrison, and this was South Berwick's.

The house's present-day story began about ten years ago, far from Maine, with a couple of expatriates living in Hong Kong. The couple had just started a family when they grew nostalgic for their home country. "We didn't own a home anywhere at the time," says the wife, "and we decided it would be a good time to purchase a 'bolt hole' back in the United States." But where? The only place the couple could agree on was Maine. The wife had spent childhood summers in Cape Neddick, and she brought her husband to Maine when they began dating. He fell in love almost instantly. "When we first thought about a Maine house, we had notions of a beautiful house on the sea," she says. "However, we really wanted land for a garden and, after years of living in densely populated cities, privacy and space were paramount."

Because of the house's proximity to the road, angling the addition helped improve privacy and views of the pond. Part of the original barn is across the driveway from the house and functions as a garage. "The addition needed to be close to the garage because it was detached," explains builder Robert Reed of Robert Reed Associates.





“One of my favorite pieces,” says the homeowner, “is our dining room table, which is square and made of old floorboards where names have been carved out. We bought the table when we lived in Asia, and the wood is teak from Indonesia. At that time, we lived in a tiny house and the table took up most of our downstairs space. We used to joke that it was the table that ate the living room. Over the years, we have picnicked on top of it and underneath it. When we lived in London, it was just too big so we took it apart and hid it up against the wall where we hung all our coats. We knew one day we would have the right place for it because we loved it. In this house, it looks like the table was built for the dining room.” The dining room chairs belonged to the wife’s grandparents.

“I believe her exact words were, ‘You can smell the Thanksgiving turkey the minute you walk in the door.’”



The new kitchen (below) is reminiscent of an English country kitchen, with hanging lights the homeowners bought in the United Kingdom and a butcher's table from France. "My husband is an amazing cook," says the wife, "and one year when we lived in London, I gave him the butcher's table. It has a wonderfully worn dent from decades of butchering with a heavy cleaver. When people walk into the house, they often can't resist running their hands over it." The homeowners chose French blue for the cabinetry—the color of the kitchen in the 1960s, when it was part of the home's boxcar extension. All the wood floors in the addition are random-width heart pine supplied by Carlisle Wide Plank Floors.

They also wanted a home with historic significance. "While pregnant with our first child," recalls the wife, "I read the biography of John Adams, who traveled southern Maine as a young lawyer. His wife, Abigail, was someone I completely identified with. She was a wife raising children while her husband traveled frequently. They lived in a modest, classic New England farmhouse, which is exactly what we wanted."

The year was 2000, and the couple was still living in Hong Kong, so their first encounter with the historic house occurred online. They called the one person they knew who lived year-round in Maine and asked her to take a look. "I believe her exact words were, 'You can smell the Thanksgiving turkey the minute you walk in the door,'" recalls one homeowner. Based on this vivid description and their friend's recommendation, they bought the house, sight unseen.

Like many farmhouses of the era, it was an amalgamation of the original house and structural add-ons built by previous homeowners over several decades. The kitchen was a typical boxcar extension attached to the older four-on-four main house. In addition to the kitchen, the boxcar extension included the laundry, downstairs bath, and master suite upstairs. The addition had been used as a milking

shed for dairy cows back in the 1800s. "We learned from one set of previous owners that, when they bought it in the early 1960s, the extension had a two-hole outhouse and the kitchen still had a dirt floor. Those owners put in a kitchen, which they built themselves, along with heating, laundry, and an upstairs shower." The current homeowners loved the kitchen's well-worn blue vintage cabinets from the 1960s. "As our vacation house, it was easy to enjoy the old architectural details such as the 14-inch-wide floorboards in the dining room, but once we decided to live in Maine full-time, we had to make some big changes."

The couple began looking to hire someone who could act as an architect and contractor in one. "I only wanted one point of contact, and I really wanted to like that person, because the work was going to take a year, and I would only be able to be on-site for about one week in total of that time," says the wife. After seeing a house in Cape Neddick designed and built by Robert Reed of Robert Reed Associates of York Harbor, the couple was sold. "I really liked that Bob answered his own phone, and he was not daunted in the least by the fact that we would be doing much of our communicating over the phone and via email."

Reed led the charge to preserve the integrity of the original four-on-four structure while adding some modern-day conveniences—





— — — — — This South Berwick farmhouse (above) is one of the oldest homes in town. From the outside it looks like two houses have been joined together with a connecting hallway, but on the inside, there is a seamless transition between new and old, thanks to builder Robert Reed. “People often think the new side was always part of the old house, and we simply did a nice renovation,” says the homeowner. “They don’t realize everything east of the center stairs is brand new.”

Reed designed a master bedroom suite on the second floor overlooking the pond—a private space, but still just a short walk to the children’s bedrooms. The master bath (below, right) features a painted tub that the wife calls “magic.”

In summer, the wraparound porch (below, left) provides much-needed shade for the kitchen extension.





Much of the bedroom furniture, including the Asian-looking dresser with the marble top and tall mirror, came with the house. “It looks like it could be from Thailand, but actually it’s Victorian,” says one homeowner. Natural light was a concern for the homeowners. “After living in a townhouse in England where you only get natural light from the front and back of the house, it was important to have light from at least three sides in every room.”



which, for this family, meant a large country kitchen and dining area designed to be the home’s focal point, a place where they could have family dinners or entertain, where they would begin and end their days. It needed to have a fireplace, views of the pond beyond, and access to a porch. Reed convinced the homeowners to tear down, rather than try to adapt, the existing boxcar kitchen. His solution was a connector from the four-on-four structure to a new two-story, double-gabled, kitchen-and-master-bedroom wing. The main challenge was marrying the new addition to the 300-year-old existing house. “The addition could not be an exact duplicate. It needed to have its own character and, at the same time, complement the main house,” explains Reed. “It needed to seamlessly connect to it without overpowering it.”

The new connection also had to house many of the utility functions for the home. That included a new set of stairs, a powder room, a kitchen pantry, and—on the second floor—a laundry area. The new stairway not only improved circulation from the first to second floor, but it replaced the old back stairs and became the family’s primary means of ascent and descent. The hallways on the first and second floors, which connect the new addition to the existing house, also take advantage of natural light with large windows that brighten the transition between the old and new.

Reed designed a second-floor master bedroom suite overlooking the pond—a private space for the couple, but one that is still just a short walk to the children’s bedrooms. The family also wanted a larger bathroom for the children and a guest bedroom in the main

house with its own bath. “Bob split the only upstairs bathroom in the old part of the house and created an en-suite bathroom for the guest room that still gives our three children a big bathroom of their own with two sinks, a bathtub, and a separate shower,” says one homeowner.

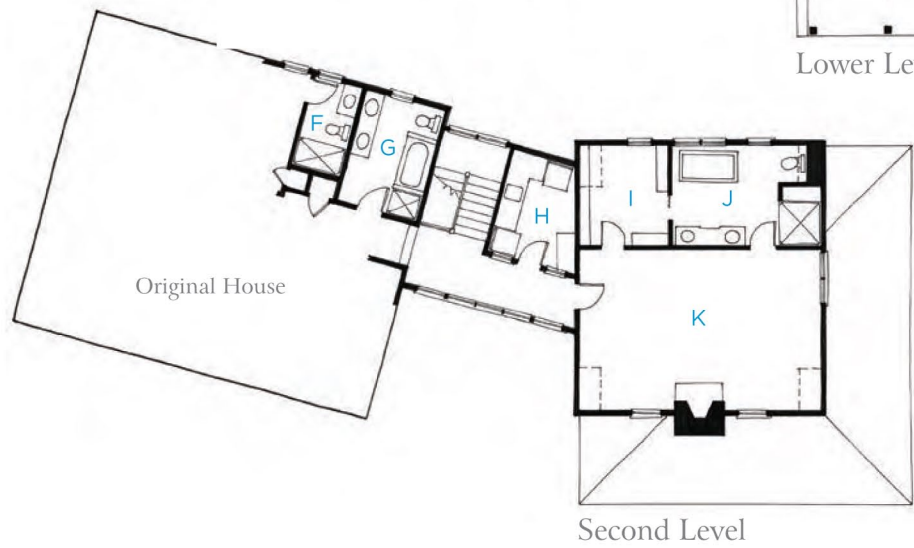
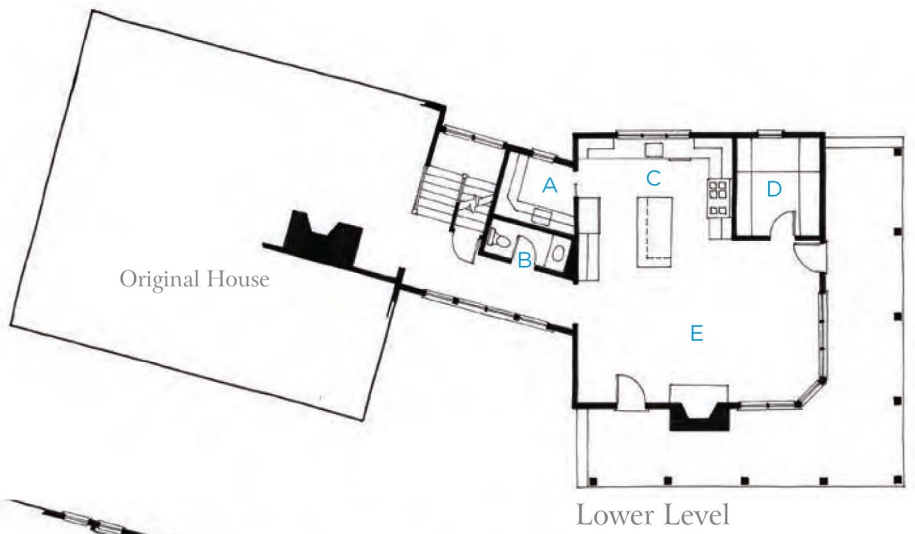
As for the complexities of working with clients who lived on the other side of the globe, Reed got into a routine fairly quickly. Every Friday morning, he would send them updated photos of the house. “We worked out a timeline so I knew exactly when the deadlines were for decisions that needed to be made,” says the wife. “It really helped me prioritize so that I wasn’t picking out bathroom tile when I needed to be focusing on where the lights and outlets should go.”

The most important thing to Reed was having the owners feel at home the minute they walked through the door for the first time. “A transition like this is never easy,” he says, “especially for children. This was the best gift we could give them.”

As for the children, moving to Maine has been filled with new adventures like raising chickens, composting, and eating what they grow in their gardens. “Philosophically,” says the wife, “our move to Maine was about being able to give our children an upbringing that connects them to something bigger than themselves. The ideal home for this vision included part preservation, part restoration, and part new build.”

The ideal home was this farmhouse—a place filled with history, the stories of generations of families past. And now this family, their story.

- A Pantry
- B Powder Room
- C Kitchen
- D Boot Room
- E Great Room
- F Guest Bath
- G Family Bath
- H Laundry Room
- I Closet
- J Master Bath
- K Master Bedroom





BRIGHT IDEAS



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Old farmhouses are often the sum total of inherited family pieces and furniture purchased, restored, donated, and found along the way. This house is no different (opposite). "Nothing really matches," says one homeowner. "We mix woods, colors, patterns, and furniture styles. Somehow the mismatched interior works with the character of the house and makes the house even more interesting."

The homeowners had a pool put in by Aqua Paradise Pools the year before the house renovation. The lounge chairs are from West Elm.