

# Details, Details



Careful attention to the fine points turns a waterfront home from simple to simply stunning.

TEXT BY ERIN MARVIN • PHOTOGRAPHY BY LAURA MOSS • ARCHITECTURE: MCKEE PATTERSON, AUSTIN PATTERSON DISSTON ARCHITECTS • INTERIOR DESIGN: NANCÉ J. VIGNEAU, VIGNEAU & ASSOCIATES INTERIORS • PRODUCED BY STACY KUNSTEL



The large dining table, which offers plenty of seating for family and friends, came with the owners from their previous house. *Facing page:* Round and oval ornamental windows add interest to the house's front facade.





Interior designer Nancé Vigneau styled the intimate living room with a monochromatic beige-and-tan color scheme. *Facing page top:* The paneled wall underneath the staircase landing encloses a small powder room. *Facing page bottom:* Some of the bookcases architect McKee Patterson designed wear a cover of ornamental wire.





From a distance, it's a simple stone and shingle house with a bevy of large, unadorned windows and an ample porch overlooking Noroton Harbor. Though it has an expansive green lawn, the house itself seems content nestled back within the protecting shadows of wizened trees.

The finer points begin to reveal themselves on closer inspection: round and oval ornamental windows beautify the home's front facade. Along the edge of the property, a low-set stone wall is occasionally interrupted by a series of small wrought-iron gates. A breezeway that connects the garage to the main house offers both shelter from inclement weather and privacy from those arriving by car, who are not yet privy to views of the splendid stone terrace or adjacent blue pool that shimmers in the backyard sunlight.

Step inside, and the careful attention to detail changes this house from simple to something special. The design of the staircase newel post is fashioned after the binnacle of a sailboat, in homage to the harbor outside. Hidden behind a curved paneled wall underneath the landing is a small powder room complete with a hammered brass sink. (This same brass is echoed in the inserts in a pair of cherry tables in the living room and lamps in the master bedroom.)

Looking through an interior window, the twin star light fixtures above the dining table are seen repeated as smaller versions in the family room. Coffered ceilings in the living room boast a delicate roping detail, another nod to being on the water.

"The idea was to make the house feel generous but not overly grand," says architect McKee Patterson, a principal at the Southport-based firm Austin Patterson Disston.

When the clients approached Patterson with the commission for a new house, their requests were relatively straightforward: a fairly classical aesthetic, a large porch overlooking the water and a big family room. A formal dining room would be perfect for entertaining guests, but it shouldn't be *too* formal—they wanted the house to feel relaxed, not stuffy.

The property itself forms a large L, and while that might normally present a siting challenge, it was actually the perfect shape to fit both the main house and the out-buildings—a detached garage, guest house and cabana—

"They wanted it to feel fairly timeless, so once it weathered in it wouldn't feel like it had landed from the moon."









The back porch sprawls across the living room, family room and kitchen with their spectacular views of the harbor beyond (*facing page bottom*). Second-floor dormers give the master suite and guestroom similar vistas. *Facing page top*: The terrace, with its large barbecue area, outdoor dining space and stone fireplace, connects the main house and cabana.



that the clients also wanted. "We worked on keeping the major trees and shoehorned the house in," says Patterson. "They wanted it to feel fairly timeless, so once it weathered in it wouldn't feel like it had landed from the moon."

One last request came from the husband who, much to his wife's chagrin, wanted a built-in bar in the family room. "It presented a design challenge," says Patterson. "I've never had to put a full-on bar in the middle of a room."

The wife was insistent that the bar not dominate the room. Though Patterson did recess it in an alcove, somewhat in shadow, the end result—a beautiful cherry-wood bar with working taps, seating for friends and glass-enclosed shelves—is just as much of a conversation starter as any of his carefully designed bookcases, benches, mantels and other interior architectural elements found throughout the house.

Patterson also designed the white wood cabinetry for the kitchen. This room feels slightly more rustic than the rest of the house, with its walls of colored clay plaster and tongue-and-groove planks and a natural rough-sawn oak timbered ceiling. The kitchen sink sits in a bay window with a water view; the backsplash and counters are a warm gray and creamy white grigio stone. An island and a bar area allow both plenty of prep space and room to pull up a stool and chat with the cook. "If they have friends coming over they want people to feel like they can hang out in the kitchen and be a part of it," explains Patterson.

Patterson took care of the hardscaping as well, creating an outdoor terrace complete with an extensive barbecue area for the husband that boasts a smoker, gas grill and wood-burning barbecue grill. The large stone fireplace, perfect for keeping the outdoor space warm on chilly







The master bedroom boasts a variety of soft colors and sumptuous textures, from the tufted blue-velvet headboard to the quilted cream bedding and luxurious faux-fur throw. *Facing page top:* The bowed ceiling and beaded paneling of the cabana's bedroom was inspired by boat interiors. *Facing page bottom:* The tub in the master bathroom offers harbor views.





A rough-sawn oak timbered ceiling lends the kitchen and adjacent sitting area a rustic look. Vigneau mixed styles, using an antique trunk as a coffee table and contemporary chrome-and-leather stools. To the right of the kitchen a small office sits behind paned-glass walls.





nights, pulls double duty in the cabana building that it backs up to. The owners enjoy dining outdoors, and there's plenty of seating for family and friends at both outside tables and in a screened-in eating porch adjacent to the barbeque area.

When the time came to look for interior paint colors and furnishings, Patterson suggested the owners meet with Westport-based interior designer Nancé Vigneau, with whom he's collaborated in the past. "Mac is great with the details," says Vigneau. "He's my favorite architect to work with."

Because the house is on the water, the clients wanted a sea-inspired palette of aqua, sea glass green and sand, which Vigneau incorporated into the paint colors, fabrics and furnishings. Paintings throughout the house, chosen by the owners, are all serene beach and water scenes that echo these same hues. "It's very beautiful but very subtle," says Vigneau. "It doesn't scream at you."

As a young couple, the homeowners had no need of stiff formal rooms, preferring that the interiors reflect their casual lifestyle. To help accomplish that, Vigneau mixed styles, incorporating items that fit the wife's preferred aesthetic of contemporary/transitional design with the husband's penchant for the traditional. Fabrics—even chenille, mohair and velvet—were chosen for comfort rather than luxury. New furniture mingles with pieces the clients already owned, and the wife was very involved in choosing many of the accessories. "I want the home to be a reflection of them, not me," says Vigneau.

Again, close attention to detail keeps this casual house from being commonplace. Interior walls are paneled and inset with a delicate grasscloth in one room, and painted a faux strié in another. Custom Elizabeth Eakins rugs line quarter-sawn white oak floors throughout the house. In the family room, a welcoming sofa, along with two big, comfy chairs and a matching child-sized version for the owners' young daughter, gather around a large stone fireplace like old friends. No heavy draperies block the view from any room; rather, window treatments are kept simple, from wooden matchstick blinds to light-as-air sheers that waft in the breeze. "They wanted a casual house that's filled with light," says Vigneau. "And it is."

If, as the saying goes, God is in the details, this couple has built themselves a little piece of heaven. •

**Resources** For more information about this home, see page 127.

