

featured projects



A Beach House for the Generations

A cramped Eastham Cape gets a shingle-style makeover, but stays casual enough for sand on the floors

Text and Professional Photography: Roe A. Osborn | Design: Peter McDonald Architect

Construction: Cape Associates, Inc. | Interior Design: Kira Vath

In 1988 Tom and Susan bought a Cape-style beach house in their favorite Eastham neighborhood. The house served the needs of their family for fifteen years, but as the family grew with spouses and grandkids, the little Cape started to feel a bit cramped. So the couple asked Eastham architect Peter McDonald to help them expand the sunroom to add some much needed space.

Before McDonald finished those plans, Tom and Susan asked him about converting the garage into living space. But with grandkids arriving faster than CAD mouse clicks, Tom and Susan soon went back and asked McDonald about raising the first-floor ceilings. He responded: "Sure, but we'll need to redesign the house from the ground up."

Same footprint, but more house

McDonald's plan extended the first floor over the original garage and breezeway areas to create two large bedroom suites, one on each floor. Two other bedrooms above the main house replaced the original second floor bedrooms, but McDonald added large dormers and higher ceilings to make them feel much roomier than before.

McDonald kept the original footprint intact except for bumping the kitchen wall out. This strategy let them tear down the house, but keep the original first floor deck. The new layout roughly follows the original, with the kitchen and dining room on one side of the main volume, and the living room on the other. As before, the chimney and stairs divide the two sides. In the public spaces on the first floor, interior partitions were eliminated to open the rooms into one another, instead using built-up ceiling beams to delineate the spaces without using walls.

The main stairway location remained behind the chimney. But the higher ceilings meant that the stairs had to run longer. To make them fit, the stairs descend to a raised landing, turn 90° and then step down into the dining area. The original staircase was closed in, but McDonald removed the partitions on both sides, further increasing the open feel.

A private wing



Tom and Susan wanted private space in the new house, and the rooms in the former garage area provided that space. McDonald started with a master suite on the first floor, and a music loft above. But when the couple saw the view from the second-floor, that space became the master suite.

A separate staircase accesses the area, but to give those stairs enough room, McDonald designed an intimate sitting-room landing that cantilevers over the outdoor shower below. Initially the master suite was to be completely separate from the other bedrooms. But, McDonald connected both ends of the house with a corridor that can be closed off for privacy.

A bright kitchen with sandy granite

The new kitchen is light, open and designed to be a family gathering space. Moving the entire outside wall out 8 ft. creates a light well that makes the kitchen a bright and

vibrant place to work and entertain. The half dozen windows also let folks in the kitchen keep tabs on grandkid activity on the back deck and in the backyard.

For countertop material Tom and Susan chose granite that they say looks like wet sand after a wave washes over it, the perfect choice for a beach house. A long, wide slab creates a massive island that serves as an informal dining spot for the kids, but still has plenty of room for food preparation. This beachy granite extends to the perimeter counters of the kitchen as well.

A mail order porch

Early in the design process, Tom came across an L.L. Bean catalog, whose cover showed a Maine cottage with an inviting porch. "I tore that cover off right away and showed it to Peter," said Tom.

The front porch is the most dynamic element of the renovation. A semi-circular section with a conical roof starts at one end, and returns back to the enlarged sun room. The porch then continues across the front of the house, wrapping around the other side. "The porch is designed primarily for the grandkids," said Susan, "It makes a great outdoor play area!"



Visually, the front porch unifies the volumes of the house, tying together the main house, the breezeway and the former garage space. Above the main entry, the eaves curve gently in an eyebrow arch that breaks up the long porch roof. While the porch ties the parts of the house together, McDonald added a trio of dormers above to enhance the shingle-style look of the house. The dormers create a visual rhythm that helps to mask the increased scale of the renovated house.

In the back of the house, the new sunroom is heated and insulated for year-round enjoyment. A screened-in porch tucks into the corner of the bumped out kitchen. The porch connects two decks that Tom and Susan included for moms to sunbathe while their kids are napping inside. They also passively cool the indoors. The porch roofs shade windows and doors from the hot summer sun, and natural convection currents draw in cool breezes through the screened windows and doors.

Pro-active building crew

Both owner and architect had nothing but the highest praise for the Cape Associates building crew. "Most top-notch crews do a fine job of executing what you draw," mused McDonald, "But these guys would call with suggestions and ideas that enhanced the design."

After McDonald had drawn the arch over the entry and its reverse on the second floor balcony, the crew decided to continue the theme by installing end caps with small arches on the end of each roof ridge. In another instance McDonald introduced interior glazing between the living room and sunroom to let in natural light. He wanted to use a window that had come from his dad's barn, but it was in rough shape. The crew completely rebuilt and reglazed the window so that it looks brand new. "The entire crew was totally focused on this project. That let them think creatively and pro-actively about what went into the house," said Tom. Keeping it beachy

Throughout the design process Tom and Susan kept asking one question: Is it beachy enough? They wanted everything about the new house to be open, and as easy going and casual as the little Cape that had stood here before.

The couple had the new place wired for cable, but for as long as they had owned the property, Tom and Susan never had a television in the house. "There is so much to enjoy on the Cape, a TV just isn't needed," Susan said with a grin. In keeping with that tradition, their kids now insist that the new house will not have a television. And with all the places in the house to enjoy, that TV shouldn't be missed.

Project Overview

- Remove dated, cramped portions of the house
- Raise overall height of house, creating higher ceilings on first floor
- Bump out a rear wall to allow for a larger, brighter kitchen
- Create a secluded wing with a master suite