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FROM KNOCKDOWN
TO KNOCKOUT



A traditional shingle-style beach house sets the standard for style, luxury and hurricane-proof construction.

Story by Meryl Siegman | Photography by Carl Vernlund

A newly married couple, each with a large family and adult children, longed for a house on the water to start their new life together. They found the perfect spot in the Shippan Point neighborhood of Stamford, CT, not far from the Stamford Yacht Club: a third of an acre with a private beach right on Stamford Bay, overlooking the calm water and picture-book sunsets. Then they assembled a dream team, including the area's most sought-after builders, who knew exactly what was needed to make their vision come to life. After a year of construction, a gracious, traditional Shingle-style house rose up in the place of the outdated four-bedroom colonial, built in 1929, that had occupied the lot. The team proved there's nothing better than starting from scratch to create the perfect home.

The owners wanted a space that could accommodate their multigenerational family members for short- and long-term visits, provide multiple areas for par-

ties and large gatherings, and offer an intimate setting for privacy and work, all taking advantage of the gorgeous water views. They envisioned a structure with a modern beach-house feel that respected its historic provenance. The result is a magnificent 4,100-square-foot, four-bedroom, five-bathroom, four-story house constructed from rounded Connecticut fieldstone, double-dipped white wood shingles, an Alaskan yellow cedar wood roof, and bricks from the original structure.

A Winning Team

According to everyone involved, what made the project successful was the collaboration among all the players: architect, builder, interior designer and the owners themselves. According to Peter Sciarretta, CEO of Hemingway Fine Homes, a great home isn't simply about "location, location, location." As he explains, "It's about architectural integrity and the art of fine home building, along with first-rate interior design for the finishing touches." And it helped to have owners who were involved in the process every step of the way.



The custom lantern-shaped chandelier was designed to cover a lot of space but not interfere with the wooden ceiling arches.



Hemingway Fine Homes

Award-winning Hemingway Fine Homes brought the experience of three generations of high-end general contracting to the project. For over 35 years, the firm has designed and built luxury homes in New England and Florida. Founder Sal Sciarretta and Doug Horn, vice president of operations, were on-site from the very first day of construction through to the final punch list to guarantee quality workmanship and complete client satisfaction. “The project was all about the client and collaboration,” says Peter. “The owners were just as involved with the project as the design team and the builder.” Hemingway demonstrated how the art of fine home building is an essential part of creating a dream home.

Robert Cardello Architects

The house was designed by Robert Cardello Architects, which came highly recommended by two members of the owner’s family who had previously worked with the company. Founded in 1999, the firm designs award-winning commercial and residential properties throughout New England and beyond. Known for its timeless design and attention to function and space, the company combines a creative spirit with a client-focused process to design spaces that radiate warmth and intimacy. The main design goal of the project was to maximize the water views from all the public rooms, so the living, dining and family rooms and master suite are all filled with windows and doors. The result is a traditional New England home with gables and a triangular roof,

but the clever use of architectural details—such as a flat entry roof, metal suspension rods and transitional elements including glass and windows—helped create a modern look.

Diana Sawicki Interior Design

Diana Sawicki, owner of Diana Sawicki Interior Design, put the finishing touches on the home with her iconic interior design. The perfect choice for the project, Diana has a portfolio of numerous residential and commercial projects, ranging from New England to Colorado. Her top priority is having a satisfied client. “When construction is involved,” she explains, “I like to be involved from day one. I can help make the builder’s and client’s lives much easier by offering input, such as where the TV or sofa will go.” Diana says she loved working on this project, which she also helped keep on track. “I have the utmost respect for the architects, who went out of their way to fulfill the clients’ wishes,” she notes. “The same is true for Hemingway; Doug was the perfect person for the project. It was great teamwork—everyone was on the same page.”

The Clients

Everyone on the team agrees that the owners were the ideal clients. “They were responsible for creating the dream team to build this home,” says Peter. “They were very generous and fair throughout the entire project.” Rachelle Roll, the project manager at Robert Cardello, adds, “They were the most fun people ever. They both have huge families, and they love to entertain. We designed



Interior designer Diana Sawicki found the perfect wall space for the owners' artwork in a house filled with glass and windows.



The tree branch lamp over the long dining room table adds a touch of whimsy.



doors from the public spaces that lead out to a covered terrace that extends their entertaining space—a truly indoor/outdoor experience and a genuine party house.” Diana appreciates that the owners were “very open-minded, with no preconceived notions.” Most important, the couple was on hand every step of the way to collaborate with the team.

Unique Architectural Features

The house was designed to maximize the view of and access to the water, create places for large gatherings and accommodate lots of overnight guests. It includes some remarkable design features that make the home unique and specific to the desires and needs of the owners. The fireplace in the two-story family room was inspired by the clients’ visit to the Waldorf Astoria in Park City, Utah. The architects figured out the scale of the original, and were able to replicate the random square pattern of the stacked Connecticut fieldstone. They added an oversized granite hearth and mantel to give it an exceptional flare. In the den, they used the same material on both the floor and ceiling, but applied a lime wash to the floor to give it a truly beach-house feel. The room also incorporates facing desks so the owners can work together from home when necessary. The house features a residential elevator that runs from the lower garage level to all floors, including the attic. Another clever detail is the use of fully integrated and concealed shades in the main rooms, allowing the owners to set them to automatically open and close based on the time of day.

The design includes outdoor spaces on every





The custom pendant lantern and recessed cabinet lights set a warm tone in the TV room.



level of the structure. A huge roof deck terrace offers a 360-degree view of the water and the neighborhood. A granite hot tub was installed on the first floor's covered terrace, with views of both the water and a retractable outdoor TV screen, which disappears into a bench seat in the master bedroom above when not in use. The rear terrace on the first floor is half covered and half open, with only a pergola above it, giving the owners the option to let in sunlight as desired. Fully integrated outdoor ceiling speakers bring the entertainment zone from the home's interior to the outdoors. Two cabriolet roof windows in the attic were designed to meet egress requirements. Cleverly designed to look like a normal skylight, they turn into a balcony, allowing attic residents to step outside to take in the view of the harbor on one side and the charming neighborhood on the other. "It's particularly beautiful in the winter," Rachelle explains, "especially when there's a snow cover."

Overcoming Zoning Challenges and Building Requirements

In 2012, Superstorm Sandy wreaked havoc in the area, flooding the basement of the home that previously stood on the property. As a result, FEMA designated the area as a Flood Zone Elevation 13, and the City of Stamford passed an even stricter minimum elevation standard. Knowing that FEMA may tighten its rules further, the architects designed the ground level to be two-and-a-half-feet higher than required so that expensive alterations do not have to be made in the future.

At the same time, the Stamford zoning code limits how tall a house can be. According to Rachelle, "We had to get creative with rooflines and massing so as not to go over municipal height requirements." The technical and design aspects, a big part of the design process, were a huge challenge. "We wanted to



The master bedroom and bathroom offer sweeping views of Stamford Harbor.





Built-in bunk beds were installed in the attic to accommodate multiple overnight guests.



Outdoor spaces offering sunlight, air and views are built into every level of the house.





A clever spin on a distance arrow sign shows all the fun places the owners have visited together.

make the house look grounded, not like it was up on stilts,” she continues. The answer was creating a garage and storage area for recreation and boating supplies on the ground level, with the lifted first floor directly above it.

“Our creative solution was to create a hybrid foundation design system of concrete piers and ‘breakaway’ walls,” says Rachelle. They were clad with stone veneer, creating the seamless look of a traditional Shingle-style house, while making sure the structure was up to code and met all FEMA requirements. “The stone veneer really gives the house character and charm,” she says. “Combined with the white shingles and wood roof, the look is truly timeless.”

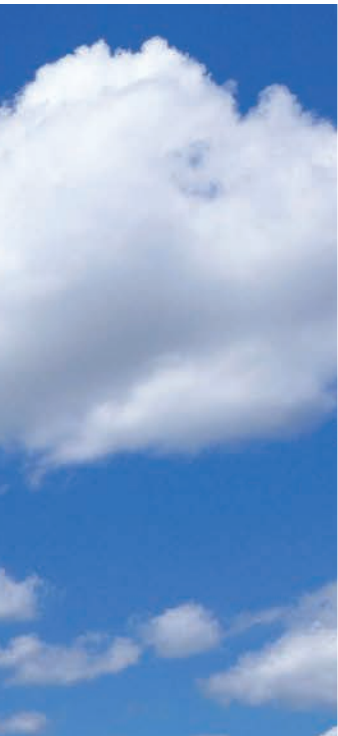
Hemingway Fine Builders also went above and beyond with its ingenious solution to the challenges of building a home in a flood zone. “The soil on the parcel was not solid or suitable for a proper foundation, let alone one meeting FEMA standards,” says Peter. “It takes real experience and know-how to accomplish this.” The team installed suitable soil and structural steel and created breakaway walls, which became the building blocks for the home’s foundation. If there is ever another storm like Sandy, the house will withstand it. Because this was the first home to be built in the neighborhood after the storm struck, it has become the model for future building in the area.

Cool Things About the Interiors

One of the owners had previously lived in a traditional colonial-style home. Interior designer Diana Sawicki helped curate her existing furniture and accessories so they would be compatible with a completely different type of residence: a beach house with an open-space plan. And since the new house has all glass doors and windows, and not a lot of walls, it was a challenge to find the best place to hang artwork and cherished family photographs.

Diana had fun with the light fixtures. She found a Visual Comfort chandelier for the din-





ing room that the clients fell in love with. It is designed with delicate branches graced with leaves and lights, large enough to be suspended over the dining room table which, when extended, can seat as many as 16 people. “I chose it because it is whimsical,” Diana explains. “The clients understood that anything too traditional wouldn’t work, especially in an open-space plan.” The chandelier was hung so it would not block the sweeping views of the harbor:

Diana chose a white chandelier for the living room. “The architect created a beautiful, detailed design with arches, so I wanted something that didn’t interfere,” she explains. She designed a large five-foot-wide pendant lantern that would not detract from the cleanness of the ceiling lines.

Perhaps most striking is the fixture that hangs in the grand three-story entryway. Suspended from the ceiling, it looks like a cascade of bubbles flowing down through all the floors. The chandelier’s illumination source is located on the ceiling plate, its light reflected and diffused by the bubbles. “They are so light and airy—it is perfect for a house on the water,” says Diana. “It looks simply magical.”

Another notable feature of the house is the first-floor powder room. “The client showed me a picture of shower walls that looked like wood,” Diana recalls. She was able to source something similar, and added a floor of mosaic tiles flecked with white marble. “It looks so crisp and simple and beautiful.” The countertop is man-made, so it can withstand the wear and tear of a house full of guests.

Turning Down Offers

“Set against a backdrop of beach and water, this is truly a dream house,” says Peter from Hemingway. “This house is about the architecture, but also about the art of building, using the best materials money can buy.” Even though the home is not on the market, the owners have turned down multiple offers. They plan to live their dream for a very long time.





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To comply with FEMA and local flood regulations, a grotto was designed at ground level for storage, elevating the first floor to above-standard heights.