

OPEN quarters



The only addition to the footprint of the 1820s Federal house was a screened porch located just off of the kitchen. The house offers garden spaces including this stone terrace accessed through the living room's French doors. OPPOSITE: Mark Hammer Architects added a fireplace, which lends a layer of authenticity to the historical home. Reclaimed flooring was sourced for the first floor.

WITH SENSITIVITY TO SPACE AND STRUCTURE, HAMMER ARCHITECTS REINVENT A HISTORIC HOME IN PROVINCETOWN



After eight years of living in the cramped quarters of an 1820s Federal home in Provincetown, Neal Balkowitsch and his partner, Donald Nelson, decided they needed to upgrade the house to make it more functional. “At first we just wanted to add a master bath and replace some rotting windows, but this quickly ballooned into a whole house renovation,” says Balkowitsch. The old place was small and dark with an unfortunate 1930s addition that had a crumbling foundation. The only way to the master bedroom was via the antique, ultra-steep staircase—and the lone bathroom was on the first floor. “Try climbing those stairs in the middle of the night half asleep,” quips Balkowitsch. Some of the old sashes had been replaced with a large plate glass window in the 1950s, rendering the original historical façade unrecognizable.

The couple drove around the Outer Cape looking at different renovation projects and liked the handiwork of Hammer Architects of Cambridge, Massachusetts. After meeting firm associate Don DiRocco through mutual friends, the couple hired the firm to draw up plans for the renovations of the house.

by nancy berry | photography by dan cutrona



Although not part of the original scope of the renovation process, Neal and Donald chose to give the kitchen a cottage look with simple open shelving, a farmhouse sink, and stainless steel appliances. OPPOSITE: Hammer Architects replaced the original steep staircase with a set that meets today's code standards.

As the clients and architects talked about the project and what needed to be done, it was clear that it would entail more than just adding a bathroom and making cosmetic touches. The team needed to revamp the entire antique structure, which is located in a mews just off Commercial Street. "The house feels very removed from the hustle and bustle of that street, but has several close neighbors to consider. We wanted the renovation to be sensitive to the context and scale of the nearby houses," says architect Mark Hammer, principal of the firm. "The couple definitely wanted more space to live in—the rooms were boxy and small and there were no real outdoor spaces to sit and relax." The couple wanted to open the space, enhance the master bedroom, and add a bath upstairs. They also wanted to enlarge the feeling of the house by inte-

grating the indoor and new outdoor living spaces. "There really was no backyard to speak of," says DiRocco. "Just an old clothes line and oil tank—no one wanted to sit out there. It was completely unused, leftover space. And the renovation turned into a wonderful asset."

Among the most important considerations in the renovations was maintaining the historical character of the original house. "This is a very tight community and we wanted to do the right thing," says Balkowitsch. Instead of adding lots more square footage, Hammer Architects reconfigured the interior space to make it more livable. "We essentially kept the footprint the same and just added a room over the addition," says Hammer. The Provincetown Historical Commission approved the plans on the first submittal.

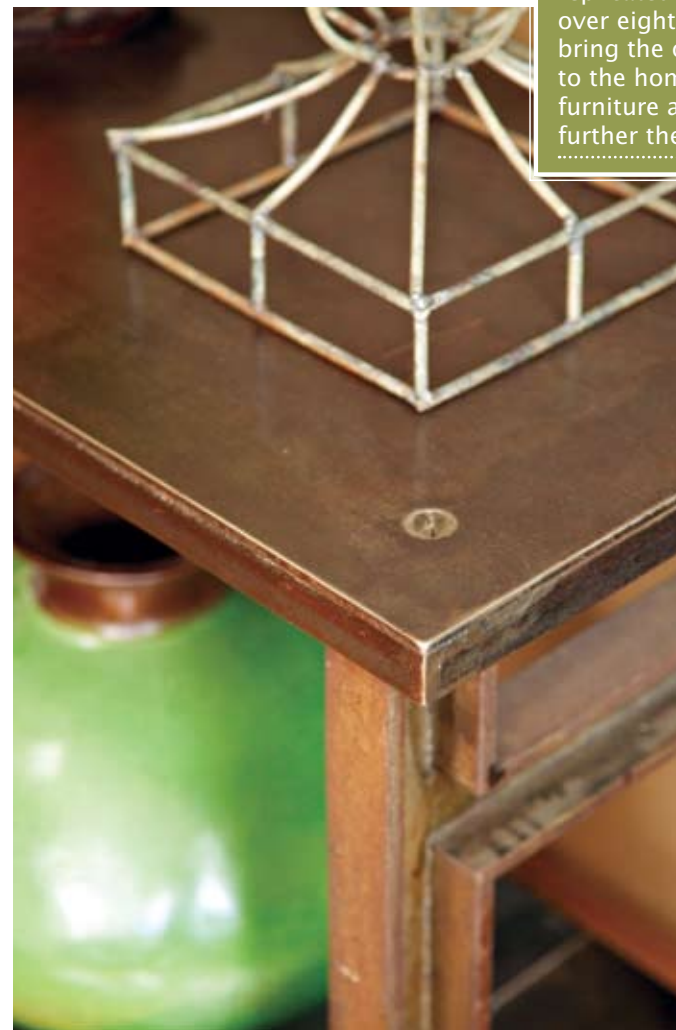


Neal and Donald entertain on the new screened porch during the summer months. Hammer Architects designed built-in cabinetry for the dining room.

The new expansive and flowing floor plan of the house required a complete gut rehab of the house. "We took it down to the studs—but everything happened within the original footprint of the house," says Hammer. The contractors removed walls to open up the living room to the dining area and kitchen, rebuilt the staircase to the second floor, and added a master bath and private deck off the master bedroom. French doors were placed in the living, dining, and master bedrooms to open the house to the newly reclaimed rear yard. A screened porch with a roof deck was also added, and is the only space to go outside the original foundation.




CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: A pergola and awning window add character to the facade; an eclectic mix of furnishing; Hammer replicated the original 12 over eight windows to bring the original look back to the home; distressed furniture and accessories further the cottage appeal.





The new master bath on the second floor offers dual sinks and built-in storage cubbies. OPPOSITE: The master bedroom on the second floor has a bead board ceiling and exposed beams. Door and window trim are kept simple.

Balkowitsch and Nelson love to entertain, and although not part of the original scope of the renovation, the kitchen was completely reconfigured with stainless steel appliances, new cabinetry, and a center island. Previously lacking a well-defined main entrance, the home also received a new kitchen entry, which is reoriented toward a new terrace garden with a pergola and side benches. “The builder Andrew Parkington, owner of Parkington Building and Remodeling, was wonderful to work with—he is really an artist at his craft,” notes Balkowitsch. He had great suggestions on materials to choose and sourced old, reclaimed wide board floors and replicated wall paneling that we couldn’t save during the renovations.”

For cosmetic changes, the team removed the 1950s picture window and replaced it with a series of double-hung windows that match the proportion and size of the original. The exterior also received new clapboard and shingle siding in keeping with the historical application. Door trim was also replicated in the Federal style. “We added a brick chimney to the house at the gable end—this really enhances the look of the exterior,” says DiRocco. “The house was brought to its full potential,” says Balkowitsch. Friends who saw the house before the renovations can’t believe the transformation: They were able to restore the façade to fit into this historic seaside community while reinventing the interior space that would work for the couple today. “We couldn’t be happier with the outcome,” says Balkowitsch. “It really is a new and old house at the same time.” 

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