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The two-mile scythe of Ogunquit Beach is uncrowded and unsullied by the taint of suntan oil. Sweaters and windbreakers are now the order of the day, and beachcombers in bare feet or boots stroll the splendid expanse to the accompaniment of thundering breakers from dawn to sundown and beyond. Even the joggers seem to lope instead of run.

And, on a late fall evening, if you are really lucky, the wind will drop and a fog will steal in, filling the air with microscopic droplets of sound-muffling moisture and sealing you in a dome of delicious romantic solitude.

At a moment like that it is possible to believe you are the only person left in all of Ogunquit.

Why would you go there at any other time? □

Serendipity House

The couple who just remodeled this stately home overlooking Linekin Bay wound up living here more by chance than by design. By Bruce Snider.

SITTING on this back porch in the sunny late morning, looking out through high, twisting oak limbs to the blue water of Linekin Bay far below, one has to believe this is someone's retirement dream come true. And, true enough, the owners are a retired couple. But their Maine idyll was born not of pining to live "the way life should be," but rather out of plain necessity. Back in the 1980s, says the wife, "We were living out of the country, and we needed a place in the states. We needed a house. We needed a place to put our stuff."

A tip from her sister, who lives on nearby Spruce Point, led them to this waterfront Federal Revival house, which they bought to use simply as a summer retreat and stateside base. After relocating from abroad to Connecticut, they kept their Linekin Bay house as a summer place, and when retirement rolled around, they didn't dream about Maine, they just filled out the change-of-address form. But if the sequence of events seems more pragmatic than romantic, the results tell an entirely different story.

The owners' love affair with their Maine home started with the site itself. Four wooded acres at the edge of a bluff that falls steeply to the shore, the land had languished for decades under the hands-off care of the original owner. The stately oaks that rise from the waterfront embankment were choked with undergrowth. "You couldn't even see the

water," says the husband. "You had to use a lot of imagination." Avid and accomplished gardeners, the owners had that in abundance. With judicious clearing, they created breathing room around the oaks and opened water views that strike a comfortable balance between exposure and enclosure. Viewed from the water, the house itself is still lost in the treetops.

Getting to that view also took some doing. "There was no access to the water," the husband recalls. Worse — almost inconceivable to a boater-kayaker-fisherman — "there was no dock." Probing gingerly to detect underlying granite ledge, the owners plotted a footpath that snakes gracefully downslope to the shore. To make the path even more natural to the site, they laid it with quarried stone that matches the colors of the site's native bedrock. "From the water you can't tell there's a walkway. It looks like ledge," according to the owner. Some discreet scraping exposed ledge outcrops around which the couple laid out the profuse perennial gardens that are their summer hobby.

FOCUSING first on the grounds is the natural approach for gardeners, but it also gave the couple time the get to know the house before undertaking a remodel. "We wanted to live in the house for a while to see what we needed," the husband says.

Built in 1947, the original house was solid, comfortable, and not at all bad to



look at. But its formal layout only partly addressed the extraordinary site. The kitchen, for one thing, was tucked in a corner of the house facing away from the shore. A first-floor master bedroom suite added by the original owner in her later years also needed some refinement. But the current owners' primary wants concerned the house's communal spaces. There was no informal dining area with a view. The deck was just a deck, rather than an outdoor room.



Gathering spaces were lacking in general; circulation didn't circulate.

With their diagnosis complete, the owners referred the case to a specialist, Belfast architect Dominic Mercadante, whose design of a Rockport home they had admired in *Architectural Digest*. They had interviewed architects up and down the coast of Maine and from as far away as New Hampshire, but Mercadante struck them as offering the right combination of creativity, common

sense, and easy communication. Mercadante immediately grasped the building's deficiencies, but perhaps more importantly, he recognized its strengths. While it lacked the historical cachet of the original Federal Style houses that grace the Maine coast, he says, "you had this actually very well-proportioned Federal Revival volume." Rather than contemplate changing the basic character of the house, Mercadante explains, he "started playing with it, thinking, 'What

Only because they needed a stateside house in a hurry, and a sister nearby tipped them off to this place, did the owners snap it up back in the 1980s. After serving as a summer retreat for years, it became a natural place to settle when the couple retired, though the 1947 house needed some serious updating.

if it were an 1810 original and someone did a more Victorian addition?" The resulting work plays deftly on that theme, preserving the spaces and character of the



driveway-view kitchen with a mahogany-paneled office more suited to that private location. It was a neat transplant, accomplished without moving any walls, windows, or doors. Removing a redundant back stairway freed up space for utility and laundry closets on the first floor and an enlarged bedroom on the second. The old first-floor master bedroom addition required a bit more intervention. Here Mercadante neatly transformed some underutilized space into twin walk-in closets and a second master bathroom.

Where the architect pulled out all the stops, though, is in the new kitchen and covered porch, which manage to do justice to both the inward-looking formality of the original house and the spectacular environment outside. "They wanted the kitchen to be big enough to have the whole family milling about while the owner's cooking, and still work," says Mercadante, and now that the job is finished he knows why. "Every time I've been to visit them they have had other people staying there."

Filling a crook in the existing floor plan, the kitchen now reaches out toward the view, culminating in a half-octagonal water with its own turret roof, where informal meals come with a lighthouse-keeper's perspective on the bay. The covered porch stretches along the rear of the house, offering a generous sheltered outdoor living space. A five-foot extension of the existing dining room eases circulation between the kitchen, dining room, and porch, allowing friction-free party traffic. At a housewarming celebration, Mercadante says, "I got to see the house with 100 people milling about in there, and the flow really worked."

Just as he choreographed circulation through the house, the architect wove the owners' eclectic visual style into a coherent and appealing stage set. The wife's former career as an antique dealer shows in the ornate architectural brackets under the kitchen wall cabinets and island counter, panes of leaded glass that bridge the narrow spaces between porch columns, and the antique marble mantel that serves as a backsplash in the butler's pantry. The kitchen is marked by bold gestures: a jumbo checkerboard pattern painted on the yellow pine floor, a *trompe l'oeil* bookcase that camouflages a back doorway to the master bedroom, a tiled kitchen backsplash dotted with relief sculptures of gargoyles and lions' heads. But Mercadante balances these with a quieter palette of materials for cabinets and counters. Base



The original kitchen was small and tucked in a corner of the house facing away from the water, so relocating and expanding it became a priority. In addition to providing a spectacular ocean view, the new kitchen boasts top-of-the-line appliances, a work island crafted from tiger maple and granite, and a "hidden" door disguised with a *trompe l'oeil* bookcase (opposite).

original house, adding new spaces to accommodate the owners' style of living, stretching the historical references, but in a way that feels completely natural.

MERCADANTE exercised a particularly light touch with the original main house. Here the major surgery involved replacing the



and wall cabinets are a traditional raised-panel design in painted wood; the island is a slab of granite, so subtly grained it looks almost like slate, resting on a base built of tiger maple. Also used at kitchen and pantry counters, the beautifully figured wood gives these kitchen appointments the look of fine furniture.

The hands that crafted this cabinetry belong to Knickerbocker Woodworking, the millwork subsidiary of Boothbay Homebuilders, whose selection as general contractor seems to have been the easiest decision of the entire project. Not only did the owners' local friends recommend Boothbay's owner, Steve Malcolm, as the best man for this grade of work, local trade contractors seconded the motion. "The subs that were doing the work, they wanted to work with Boothbay Homebuilders," says the husband, who has had no cause to regret following that advice. Fittingly for a home so close to salt water, this one is built like a boat.

ON a tour of the house and gardens, the owners cannot conceal their pride in the home they have made. The house sparkles; the gardens are flourishing. Every summer their elderly mothers come for lengthy — though separate — stays. Their grown daughters have both settled nearby; one has taken up quarters in the guest cottage, where she and a business partner have also set up a ceramics studio. With obvious pleasure their mother says, "This is where everybody congregates."

"We didn't know if we'd like Maine," the husband admits. But that pragmatic decision to buy property here proved serendipitous. "I like to get up early in the morning and work three or four hours [in the gardens], then go boating or play golf," he says. While the family generally prefers dinner out on the porch, they sometimes take the powerboat into Boothbay. "It takes twenty minutes by boat. We can have a couple drinks, and dinner, and still be back at 9:00 or 9:30." There is also good fishing right off the dock. Out in his kayak, he reports, he has seen schools of stripers following him like ducklings after their mother. Lately, the beautiful setting has inspired him to take up watercolor painting. Alongside the house there is a spot with a view that might make a nice place for a small studio.

And all this because the family needed "a place to put our stuff." Sometimes, it seems, one can have a dream come true without ever having had the dream. □





Even in the waning days of autumn, the new covered porch draws the homeowners and their guests outside. While the couple landed on the coast of Maine as much by accident as by aim, they seem to have adjusted well to seaside living. The husband says he's even been inspired to try his hand at watercolor painting.