

FROM ACROSS THE marsh, the house appears to float above the landscape. The living room has glazing to its full 15-foot height. The railless deck steps down so it does not to interfere with the view from within. Deep overhangs shade a small deck (FACING PAGE) outside the master bedroom and the wife's office.



lasting legacy

A NEW HOUSE PAYS HOMAGE TO CAPE COD'S MODERNIST HERITAGE

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riven by a shared love for the exquisite light, miles of unspoiled beaches, and winding roads through scrubby woodlands filled with pines that make Outer Cape Cod a place like no other, architect Mark Hammer, landscape architect Keith LeBlanc, and their clients created a place that, in the words of one local historical commission member, “was worthy of its location.”

“This house is the result of a lot of people caring deeply,” says one of the owners, a married couple, both historians with careers in academia, who for 20 years enjoyed Cape summers in a house they owned in Wellfleet, Massachusetts. When it came time to plan a new house, one to which they would eventually retire, they had requirements that their house could not meet, namely an ocean view and one-level living.

Remarkably, says the wife, they found “this incredible piece of property” in 2012 on their first day of real estate hunting. Set on a wooded knoll overlooking a pond on one side and the Pamet River on the other, the site in Truro, Massachusetts, had views across a salt marsh to the beach and ocean beyond. Located within “the park,” as the locals call the Cape Cod National Seashore, the lot included a house, but “there were so many things wrong with it,” says Hammer, “that it made no sense to try and fix it.” Though building is no longer allowed in the park, structures can be replaced. “If there hadn’t been an existing house, we wouldn’t have been able to build,” says Hammer. It took six months to get the required per-

DURING CONSTRUCTION, COLLECTING midcentury pieces to furnish the house became a happy pastime for the wife. For the great room, she purchased the Hans Wegner sofa and the Saarinen swivel chairs from Machine Age in South Boston and the Finn Juhl teak dining table and Erik Buck teak dining chairs online from Look Modern in Portland, Oregon.





A BLUESTONE WALKWAY edged with Hakone grass and purple geranium 'Rozanne' leads to the covered entryway (LEFT). Horizontal siding (ABOVE) wraps the street side of the house, emphasizing the low-slung design and affording privacy. The screen porch (RIGHT) connects the master bedroom with the living room and has a 180-degree view of pond, beach, and river. The Richard Schultz table and chairs are by Knoll.

mits, which involved approvals from the National Park Service and the town Planning Board and Historic and Conservation commissions before the old house could come down and construction on the new house could begin.

The owners and their team also have a shared appreciation for the legacy of midcentury houses on the Outer Cape, which has one of the most significant concentrations of Modern residential design in the country. After World War II, traditional industries such as farming and boat building were on the decline and large, inexpensive tracts of land became available. Emigré architects who favored the International Style and the Bauhaus School of design discovered the Cape's charms. They bought land on bluffs and around kettle ponds and built summer houses using simple forms, flat roofs, deep overhangs, and large expanses of glass.

With that tradition in mind, "it seemed appropriate to build a midcentury-style house" says the wife, and in Hammer, and in his associate, Don DiRocco, she and her husband found kindred architectural spirits. "The idea of Modern design, informed by midcentury fundamentals, really makes sense for how you live on the

Cape," says Hammer, whose firm, Hammer Architects, has offices in Truro and Cambridge, Massachusetts. There is, he muses, a simplicity and connection with nature that defines a Cape Cod summer.

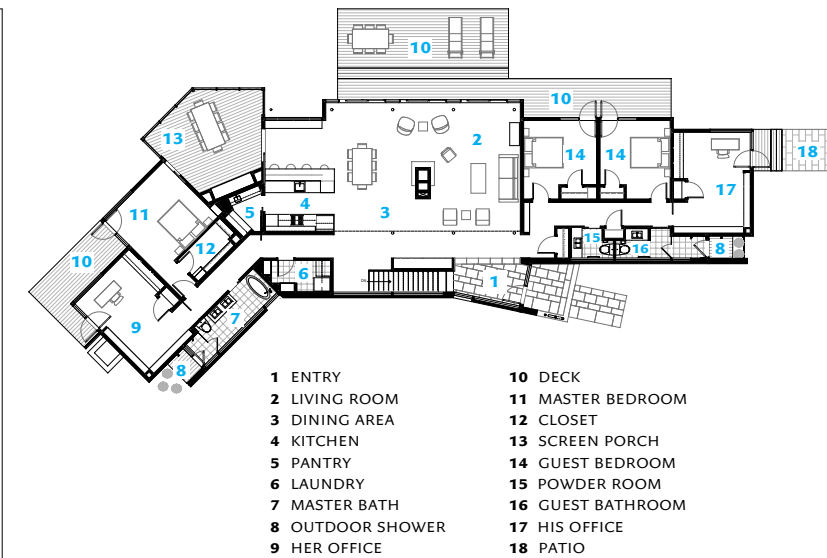
The owners' program for a low-slung house that would sit lightly on the landscape and connect them with their natural surroundings was tailor-made for a Modern blueprint. Siting the house was done with painstaking care. "There are so many views," says Hammer, "not just the ocean but the pond and the woods and the river, and we wanted to take advantage of them all."

To that end, LeBlanc was brought into the planning early. His firm, Keith LeBlanc Landscape Architecture is in Boston, but he has a vacation house in Truro as well, and, says Hammer, "he has the same feel for the Cape as we do."

Instead of stretching the house out in a straight line across the top of the knoll, Hammer rotated the wing containing the master bedroom and wife's office 45 degrees in plan to provide better views of the Pamet. A screen porch that pulls out from the building occupies the intersection of the two geometries, providing a 180-degree vista. In a collaborative "Eureka!"

DESIGN DECISION *Going Native*

Creating a landscape to complement both the architecture and the setting was a welcome opportunity for Keith LeBlanc of Keith LeBlanc Landscape Architecture of Boston. In front of the house, the design is defined but not formal. Wooden decking turns to bluestone as it approaches the house, and purple geranium 'Rozanne' and Hakone grass provide interest at the entry door. Elsewhere, he replaced native plantings disturbed during construction. "They may be native," he says, "but that doesn't mean they don't need care. And the larger the plant, the more care it takes to get established." Among his favorite native plants are winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*), a deciduous shrub with small leaves and showy red berries in fall; sweet fern (*Comptonia peregrina*), a shrub that spreads underground roots for complete coverage; oakleaf hydrangea (*Hydrangea quercifolia*), a deciduous shrub with large oak-shaped leaves and a showy white flower; sweetbay magnolia (*Magnolia virginiana*), a beautifully formed deciduous tree with small, fragrant white blooms in June; and American witch hazel (*Hamamelis virginiana*), a small tree for the understory with large, flat leaves and persistent fall foliage color.



BUILDER Homes by Sisson





IN THE MASTER bath, the indoor shower leads to an outdoor shower (LEFT TOP), an arrangement that at first was met with skepticism by the homeowners. “Now we think it’s brilliant,” says the wife. At the other end of the room (LEFT BOTTOM), a soaking tub is bathed in sunlight from a floor-to-ceiling window. Custom mahogany cabinets define the kitchen (FACING PAGE), which has enough room behind the peninsula for two or three cooks to work comfortably. The door to the right hides a pantry with a second sink and lots more storage. The Bertioia Stools are by Knoll.

moment, owners, architects, and landscape architect made what they all agree was a pivotal decision to move the entire footprint 6 feet to ensure maximum views. “That gave the porch a better relationship with the trees and better views to the left and right,” says LeBlanc. It also improved the vantage from the kitchen.

There are plenty of low-tech hallmarks of the midcentury prototype in the house design, but Hammer and DiRocco embraced modern engineering. “The challenge,” says Hammer, “was how to achieve the lightness of the classic Modernist house with today’s building codes.”

A successful example is the great room, where the angled ceiling rises to a height of 15 feet. Exposed steel columns, finished with an acid wash for a refined but rustic look, connect with hidden steel beams to form a structural cage. The ocean-facing wall is glazed top to bottom with a row of operable clerestory windows above the sliding glass doors. The ceiling is made of laminated structural wood decking that holds ample insulation above it and gives the space a visual warmth.

The custom center fireplace, assembled from modified prefab fireplace components, is a masterly combination of aesthetics, technology, and materials.

“We considered having the great room completely open,” says Hammer, “but adding the fireplace gives a sense of intimacy.”

It separates the living and dining areas and also creates a third zone for reading, which the homeowners, when they took up occupancy last June, furnished with two Saarinen swivel chairs that can turn to face the glass doors or the fireplace. “As the end of daylight pinkens the sky over the ocean,” says the husband, “they are always turned to the view.” 🏡

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