

Below Deck

By Allyson Plessner

Photography by Dan Cutrona

Washashore Home Interior Design and Polhemus Savery DaSilva Architects Builders highlight the original nautical charm of a home well-suited to its new owners.

Visitors from around the world flock to Cape Cod for its rich history and spectacular beaches. The unique blend of nautical lore and breathtaking views makes it the ultimate place to escape the monotony of everyday life, and there are few places that capture the whimsy of that combination—memories to be made indelible, coupled with views of seaside splendor—better than Chatham’s Lighthouse Beach.

Overlooking the vast, seemingly unending, waters of the Atlantic, Lighthouse Beach is a true embodiment of the commanding coastal character of Cape Cod. Of course, the Chatham Lighthouse (for which the beach is so appropriately named) completes the picture of a quintessential Cape Cod beach. And, in true Cape Cod fashion, the beach itself is not without its own maritime tales. On the night of February 18, 1952, the SS Pendleton was split in two by a nor’easter—the kind of storm so many Cape locals know well—trapping over 30 crew members amongst the wreckage and 60-foot seas. Luckily, a daring, yet successful, rescue mission was undertaken by the Chatham Coast Guard, in what has become known as “the Mount Everest of Rescues.” If that story sounds familiar, it’s because it was the inspiration for the book, and film of the same title, *The Finest Hours*. And perhaps, it also became part of the motivation for a nearby home with the enviable distinction of an unobstructed view overlooking Lighthouse Beach. At least, the lower level, renovated to evoke a ship, might make one think so.





“This was a home that we originally worked on about 20 years ago,” explains John DaSilva, design principal for Polhemus Savery DaSilva Architects Builders (PSD), a firm whose craftsmanship has contributed to beautiful homes across the region that capture the true natural spirit of New England. As both architects and builders, PSD was well-positioned to handle the original renovation of the home which is part of Chatham’s Old Village Historic District. “It’s really an iconic house in Chatham,” explains DaSilva about the history of the property. In fact, the initial renovation uncovered graffiti under the finished walls (which would have then been made from open studs and wood rather than plaster and sheet rock) which spoke to the home’s days as a local ice cream shop. Working with such a historic home meant an extensive renovation for the PSD team, who worked to lift the home

and essentially remove and rebuild the second floor. “It was important to us and the homeowners to put everything back together in the same form that it had been originally,” notes DaSilva, explaining that other than a small addition at one end of the house, the footprint of the original space remains the same.



“With that first renovation, there were so many fanciful details that made the project interesting for us,” says DaSilva, pointing out that a lower level was made to look like the interior hull of a ship; and a second-floor bunk room, featuring built-in bunks and an overhead balcony evocative of the bow of a ship, was created. “The carpentry

that originally created that lower level is really not unlike what you would see when building a real boat,” adds DaSilva. The bunk room also features mahogany flooring done with black caulk so as to emulate a ship’s deck.

“The original owners had three young boys, so the idea was to create a really playful, whimsical space for them to create memories,” says DaSilva. The owner even hired a muralist to paint scenes on the walls behind the portholes in the lower level so it feels like you’re looking out to a faraway island or a lagoon of mermaids. “The second time around, we were grateful to work with the new homeowners, and that they respected the architecture that we did with the original renovation. So many of those fanciful details remain, but we also got to help these new owners make the space their own. Not only was it fun the first time around, it was fun the second time too,”



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laughs DaSilva. “For us, the most important thing was to represent the client in this space, and that meant being good listeners.” DaSilva goes on to explain that while the second project wasn’t nearly as extensive as the first renovation, the new homeowners had their own functional needs—such as a true laundry room rather than the existing small laundry closet. Large, custom built-in cabinetry to function as a mudroom by the entryway, as well as aesthetic desires when it came to tiles, finishes, and fixtures rounded out the personalized list of deliverables.

Those interior design elements are where Peyton Lambton and Sarah Waldo of Washashore Home applied their creative expertise. The duo is passionate about reinvigorating historic mementos—from serendipitous yard sale finds to archetypal architecture—and use those elements to bring rustic coastal flare to a home. Since the Cape is in no short supply of history, and this home is no exception, their skill at combining elements of old and new helped the Washashore team really understand this project, and the need to marry the powerful individuality of the original home, with the needs and personalities of the new homeowners.

“Sarah and I came on to this project to assist in the selection of tile, vanities, lighting, mirrors, and wallpaper for the bathroom, as well as helping to redesign the living areas and bedrooms with the right furniture and accessories,” explains Lambton. “The clients plan to use this property as a summer house, so our goal was to make it comfortable and inviting so that the family could arrive and immediately relax.”

“The stunning architectural and millwork details provided a very traditional New England base which made it easy to incorporate classic Cape Cod pieces,” adds Waldo, noting that the family had a strong desire to bring a true Cape Cod feel to the home. Nautical textiles,



such as the window treatments in the bunk room depicting colorful sailboats, and energetic preppy color tones pull together the feeling of a coastal getaway, all while playing off the original seafaring vibe of the home. “We pulled inspiration from the ocean, sand, and hydrangeas just outside the door,” continues Waldo, noting some of the Cape’s most remarkable natural accents.

Working with a home which possesses such a strong personality, as well as a detailed history of its own, not to mention the neighborhood in which it stands, may have presented a challenge for many, but the PSD and Washashore teams were eager to pay homage to the home’s character while making some much-needed updates. “The new homeowners were hoping for a fresh take on the traditional, which allowed us the opportunity to layer in fun prints, textures, and colors,” says Lambton. “We worked with a lot of specific pieces of furniture as well as architectural details that



were held over from the previous owner and brought them back to life with a fun, fresh perspective.”

“This project allowed us the opportunity to combine old and new. Bringing new life into a family’s home and heirlooms to create a completely fresh space that feels unique to them is where we love to be creative,” adds Waldo. “We always enjoy the opportunity to work along with a design/build team because it makes a project come together in a seamless way. PSD goes above and beyond with details that enhance a project, and we loved collaborating with them.”

The PSD team agrees that getting the chance to return to a project that they put so much passion into 20 years earlier, and turn it into a space fit for a new family with their own love for the Cape, was a special experience. Updates to the primary and guest bathrooms as well as new finishes in the kitchen allow the often-used spaces to sparkle and shine like new; other updates such as the aforementioned built-in near the entry, provide space for kicking off sandy shoes and hanging coats, and add elements of modern functionality. The brick fireplace, originally built by PSD 20 years earlier, which received an update with new paneling and molding, offers a beautiful focal point for the living room. The drama of that space is only heightened by the ceiling, stepped up in the center. In

this room, it’s easy to see the ideas of two homeowners intermingling to form one cohesive design—not unlike the ways in which the history and seaside beauty mix beyond the windows of this home, drawing so many to the splendid shores of Lighthouse Beach.

“I think our favorite aspect of the finished project was how the bathrooms came together,” says

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Lambton, noting the playful hydrangea wallpaper in the guest bath and the zigzagging tiles in the master shower done in charming tones of light blue, sand and pearlescent white. “The tile combinations and whimsical wallpapers create a beautiful, modern Cape Cod look. These weren’t even part of the original scope of the project, but we felt they really enhanced the full design of the house.”

For DaSilva, his favorite part of the home is, of course, below deck. “We work with a nautical theme in a lot

of our other projects, but usually not this extensively,” he explains about the boat room downstairs. “At one point a realtor said to me that finished lower levels don’t always add a lot of value to a home—that’s not the case here.”

“The basement was definitely a stand out area that we were really excited to have some fun with. We designed this as an entertaining space where the family would play games and relax with a below deck vibe,” add Lambton and Waldo.

“The site is very tight; it’s a real village location,” says DaSilva about the property. “But there’s still room for a small yard area overlooking the ocean.” That view can also be enjoyed from the upstairs balcony, built into the roof of the porch below. When it comes to creating sought after Cape memories, this home certainly is not lacking in vantage points.

“We love to create projects that are playful and fanciful—true getaways,” says DaSilva. “With

second homes, there’s this sense of longing when you’re not there; you love the place, but it’s not where your daily life is. It’s very important for us to create those memorable images for people, and this house does that quite extensively. We want to focus on things like relaxation and creating memories, hopefully for generations.”

Allyson Plessner is a contributing writer for Cape Cod Life Publications.

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