

An upside-down house in Truro offers stunning panoramic views not only of the ocean on each side of the Cape, but also of Pamet Valley below and Provincetown in the distance.

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY BRIAN VANDEN BRINK

House in the Hills



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To have a home positioned to witness both a spectacular sunrise and sunset is extraordinary and rare. Such a privileged view requires a site with height and a narrowness of land. One of the few spots on the Cape that offers such simultaneous east and west views is Truro, the tight swing of land that hugs Wellfleet on the bay side and broadsides the Atlantic on the other.

John DaSilva, principal with Polhemus Savery

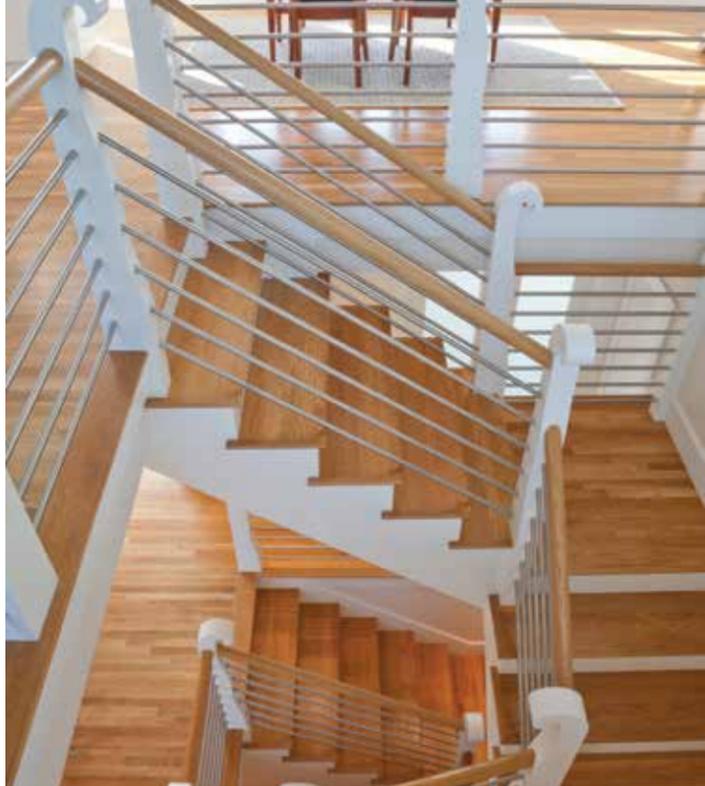
DaSilva, recently had the opportunity to design a home for just such a prime piece of property. His clients had owned the piece of land for some time, but spent their summers in an older house nestled a bit lower on the land next door. When they decided to build on their hill, they wanted something striking. As an architectural historian who admits he has so many piles of books on architectural styles and history at home that he has broken toes running into them, DaSilva was excited by the prospect of working in Truro. It

is here where the modernist aesthetic and the contemporary architecture it inspired first took hold on Cape Cod, a peninsula where traditional forms—Capes, Greek revivals, shingle style—still reign. “It was a pleasure as an architect to work there and tie into that tradition of modernism,” he says.

The first plans he conjured for the site, a contemporary with a jagged roofscape, answered the more radical aesthetic the clients had requested. But when they saw their vision

realized on paper, they thanked DaSilva for designing exactly what they had asked for but decided it was not what they wanted after all. “The next scheme,” says DaSilva, “was perhaps more tame, but still not as identifiable as a traditional Cape house type, though it was not unfamiliar either.” Like many Cape houses, this one is shingled. But rather than white cedar, it is outfitted in Alaskan yellow cedar shingles, which, like their counterparts, weather to a soft silver. Another nod to tradition is the sloping roof, though its pitch is shallower than that of many New England homes.

In looking at the house as it both sits atop and steps down its windy hilltop site, DaSilva points out, “The energy of the house is quite horizontal.” As a contrast to his design, he points to a traditional-style Cape house with white



trim that sits like a top-heavy crown atop its hill in the distance. “Historically, traditional Cape houses were not built on exposed hilltops. They were all about hunkering down and not confronting the landscape.” That tradition shifted in Truro and Wellfleet in the mid-decades of the 20th century when intellectuals from Boston started building minimalist contemporary vacation houses on the hills and ponds of the Outer Cape, a subject on which DaSilva recently wrote for Provincetown Arts, tracing the modernist aesthetic in architecture as it came across the bridge in the 1930s and then gained popularity after the war.

In addition to its horizontal line, another element contributing to this home’s energy is the wave brackets that support the overhang of the broader second floor of this upside-down house. Putting the living areas upstairs and the bedrooms downstairs may be more common on Nantucket, but it made sense in this case for the same reasons it is so frequently used on the island: It gives the spaces used during waking hours—the living room, dining area and kitchen—the greatest access to the panoramic views. Although in this house, the first-level master bedroom, two guest bedrooms, and even the laundry room, offer stunning vistas as well. To add to house envy, the views are not just of the ocean on each side of the Cape, but also of the Pamet Valley below and Provincetown in the distance.

Given that the square footage of the living areas exceeds that of the bedrooms, the upper floor of the home is cantilevered, and the half-dozen wave brackets provide support, while giving a design nod to the steady rollers that break onto Ballston Beach seen in the distance. “The brackets have a nautical feel to them and a vaguely naturalistic feeling. That is intentional,” says DaSilva. “Multiple readings are possible, and that makes it interesting and fun.”

One of the challenges with an upside-down house is making the access to the upper level memorable. DaSilva remarks, “In an upside-down house, the stairs are very important. They connect you back to the ground, and daily use of the house always involves



“In an upside-down house, the stairs are very important,” says John DaSilva, principal with Polhemus Savery DaSilva. “They connect you back to the ground, and daily use of the house always involves the stairs.” As a whimsical detail, the newel posts have a curvaceous swag to them and are topped by a wave element that mimics the wave brackets outside. The long, narrow dining table offers diners a view of Provincetown. The kitchen, designed by Classic Kitchens & Interiors in Hyannis, pays homage to the beauty of beach glass with frosted blue glass subway tile backsplash and granite countertops with flecks of ocean blues.

the stairs.” He adds that not only is a good portion of the budget devoted to the stairs in such a house, but so, too, is the “expressive energy.” In this home, the stairwells are exposed to natural light on three sides. As a whimsical detail, the newel posts have a curvaceous swag to them and are topped by a wave element that mimics the wave brackets outside. “It’s unusual,” DaSilva admits, “but not outrageous. It’s not so over the top that it doesn’t still feel warm and comfortable.”

Given the importance of the natural setting, the interior provides comfortable viewing opportunities. In the living room, the only thing competing with the outside view is a painting by Paul Resika. This vibrant blue, green and turquoise interpretation of the ocean hangs squarely on the natural stone fireplace crafted by Eastham mason Kenneth Higgins. The beaches of the Outer Cape are some of the best places to find driftwood, and to honor that, the living room side tables flanking the sofa have entwined driftwood bases topped with glass.



Though it is less common now to find beach glass than it once was on the Cape, the kitchen, designed by Classic Kitchens & Interiors in Hyannis, pays homage to its beauty with its frosted blue glass subway tile backsplash. The mica black granite countertops flash with flecks of ocean blues, and all is set in relief against the white cabinets whose glass faces multiply the light.

In this open floor plan, the long, narrow dining table is easily accessible to the kitchen and offers diners a view of Provincetown. If the family chooses, they can move the party to the nearby second-level porch, screened in for the summer and sheltered by protective windows in the spring and fall. After-dinner drinks can be taken to the deck outside. The only room without a view on this level is the TV room. If this room of cherry wood built-ins exposed the family and their friends to the same views enjoyed by the rest of the house, even the most compelling documentaries, exciting sports competitions, or suspenseful dramas wouldn’t stand a chance. 🍷