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A majestic site and a dream design team set the stage for a remarkable new home in Orleans. As the Cape's own Katharine Lee Bates stood atop Colorado's Pike's Peak in 1893, so awestruck by the unbridled natural beauty before her, it was then that the iconic words of what would become "America the Beautiful" began percolating in her mind. The amber waves of grain, the purple mountain majesties—Bates' reverence for nature's wonders is undeniable, and so too are the patriotic musings those wonders inspired throughout her song.

Over 100 years later and 2,000 miles away, it's easy to imagine the kind of feelings Bates experienced when bearing witness to the land and seascape that greet you at one special hillside property in East Orleans.

Surrounded by lush unspoiled woodlands and boasting views of Nauset's outer beach, Pleasant Bay stretching south toward Chatham and the Atlantic beyond, the site is simply enchanting. Enchantment is just what the property's new owner experienced when she first visited these serene grounds.

"That first day I drove out there, it was quiet," she recalls. "You could hear the wind through the cedars, so you heard the breeze, you heard the birds, you saw this beautiful ocean, and I really felt like I was transported back in time, like to the Cape 70 years ago. That's really what sold me on it."



That sense of "old-fashioned Cape Cod" in the natural beauty is what has drawn the owner and her husband, residents of Boston's South End, to Orleans and the Outer Cape for family vacations year after year since their children were preschoolers. Now empty-nester grandparents, the couple wanted to make the Cape a more permanent fixture in their lives—they wanted a place here all their own, a restful retreat from urban life, where their growing family could gather for many more years to come. In April of 2017, they began searching for a house. "It's funny because so many of our friends said it's going to be a year's journey, just start looking now and just keep your eyes open, and don't jump the gun. ... We found this property literally on our second trip to the Cape after we engaged a broker," reveals the owner. "[Our broker] said, 'You've got to come down and see this piece of land. It's just spectacular and unique.' When I drove down and saw it, I called my husband and said, 'We've got to buy it,' and then he came down and agreed. We had been talking about it and talking about it, and we didn't expect to find something so perfect."

The couple could have bought the land as is, with the existing home on site, but they had a second purchasing option: contract with Paul van Steensel of Cape Dreams Building & Design to build a new custom home designed by Bernadette Macleod of Ryder & Wilcox. But the new home's footprint would be limited to a 3,000-square-foot house due to the conservation land surrounding the property. "The neat story is that one of the original founders

of the Orleans Conservation Trust originally owned this property, and he and his wife granted permanent conservation easements on the property, resulting in a relatively narrow building envelope,” the owner explains. That didn’t deter her, though. “I’m a chief sustainability officer for a major company, and I love the fact that the property is so protected,” she says, “and that it could sit comfortably in this beautiful part of the Cape. I love the design of the house—it is a very classic Cape vernacular. So we said yeah, we’ll go for it. That was the start of the journey.”

“To me, the biggest challenge was fitting all of the elements that most people want in a home these days in a smaller space,” says Paul van Steensel. Making the most out of what space they had, then, to comfortably accommodate the homeowners and their visiting family would be a significant theme throughout the two-year project.



Sited atop the hill and wrapping around the front of the property like a one-armed hug, the two-story home is carefully positioned to offer sightlines of the water from practically every room. For the owners, it was important the home feel as open as possible, and that nothing compete with the views. “We wanted to let the property and its proximity to the water speak for itself,” says the project’s interior designer, Ashley Hilferty of Ashley Bradford Interiors. Upon stepping through the deep-red front door, your eyes are immediately met by the view of the water, framed like a painting by a black-framed slider leading out to the deck off the living room. Window frames throughout the home are black, further encouraging your attention on the natural beauty outside. Nonetheless, there is much to admire about the design inside.

Richly grained, 8” hickory flooring spans from the entryway and living room into the open kitchen/dining area. In the kitchen—designed by Dean Sarrasin of Kitchen Port Inc.—an oversized island, complete with a leathered-granite finish, allows for barstool seating. Although the dining area is limited in width, a Dutch-style, 70” walnut

dining table—designed by Hilferty and crafted by Cape Dream’s millwork division, Timmerwerk Custom Cabinetry—fits perfectly and can easily accommodate eight people. Spooling off of the kitchen/dining area, the architectural design of the home forms the crook of the arm in the aforementioned hug. The inner arm finds the mudroom, and running along the outer arm, Macleod has flanked a sprawling three-season porch whose angles allow the panoramic views, through mahogany-clad windows, to provide a treehouse-like sensation, perched above the vibrant conservation woodlands.

At the end of the mudroom, a set of stairs leads to the homeowners’ master suite, located above the two-car garage. “It’s away from the rest of the house to give the homeowners their privacy and a place to escape while kids and grandkids can still be in the main home enjoying each other,” says Hilferty. The landing at the top of the stairs offers the choice to enter the bedroom to the left, or a door to the right leads to the upper level of decking. Inside the master bedroom, a Juliet balcony offers a spot for quiet contemplation overlooking the greenery. Other features that Timmerwerk fashioned include a custom closet niche with built-in, soft-close drawers on either side in the master, as well as a custom bed and headboard with built-in floating nightstands made of butternut in the second-floor guest suite. “Every square inch of available storage that could be built in was done so we could avoid putting in extra dressers,” the owner says.



Understated furnishings, including leather swivel chairs and a concrete oval coffee table in the living room, are chic touches that allow for the simple, open feel the homeowners desired. “A lot of people don’t realize how much of what I call ‘dead space’ there is in a house,” says van Steensel. “When you have a lot of eaves, there’s space behind there but it never gets used.” The limited dimensions of the rooms prompted the builder and his team to maximize that space throughout the home—from built-in drawers, cubbies and closets in the four bedrooms (three, including the master, are en suites) to open shelving flanking the fireplace in the living room. On the second floor, the design team gave the homeowners additional living space

with a centralized open media room, complete with a dry bar as well as access to the upper deck overlooking the water and pool patio below.

When it came down to the details, no matter how small, the owners, with their keen sense of design, overlooked nothing. Having gone through renovation and new construction projects in the past, these homeowners had a firm grasp on exactly what they wanted for their forever home. From the metal roofing and aesthetic exterior brackets, to square-edged moldings instead of crown, to thicker interior doors, everything was customized to their specific preferences. “This was a treat,” van Steensel says of working on the home. “Being able to work with people who are so appreciative of quality, it’s nice to be able to build to that higher standard.”

“Every time we talked to Paul or the subs or Ashley, we made design choices on the fly,” notes the owner—including their decision to cover the majority of the walls in white shiplap. “We made that decision literally in two hours on a Saturday afternoon,” she recalls. “We just walked through every room and decided 100 percent shiplap or not, and then in the rooms where it’s not we picked the accent wall, and in the bathrooms we did the ceiling. Paul actually laughed and said, ‘Are you sure?’ and we said, ‘Yeah! Let’s go for it!’ In certain settings it would seem very gimmicky, but to us it felt very authentic.”



Construction started with an 18-by-36-foot saltwater pool, designed by Viola Associates, and installed where the existing home had been. “We had to excavate and pour the foundation of the pool before we could build the house, because once the house foundation was in, there was no way to get back there,” explains van Steensel. Then came work on the surrounding hardscape. “It was absolutely incredible the amount of stonework we did,” says Al Sorbello of Sorbello Landscaping Inc., who worked in collaboration with Yarmouth landscape architect Phil Cheney and David Lyttle of Ryder & Wilcox on the project. The landscape team designed two concrete-poured retaining walls around the pool, and to beautify these walls, Sorbello selected a veneer of Boston Blend

Ashlar stone. “This was one of those situations where you have an opportunity to make lemonade out of lemons, and even throw some vodka in too,” he says with a laugh. To Sorbello, the two stone-faced retaining walls create “the sensation that you’re swimming on a cliff overlooking the ocean.” For the pool patio, Sorbello chose thermal bluestone paving, and each end of the pool is flanked by sections of lawn and shrubs, creating a cozy, enclosed feel.



In the front, another retaining wall is found along the circular driveway, featuring a charcoal-toned veneer with Belgian block edging. Beyond this wall is a living barrier wall of sorts—layers of trees of varying heights, including 22-foot-tall Radican Cryptomeria, screen against neighboring property and blend in seamlessly with the natural conservation landscape. To achieve the Cape cottage look the homeowners desired, the team incorporated a row of low-growing Hameln grasses along the base of the retaining wall, and hydrangeas and native shrub species tastefully dot the grounds throughout. In the center of the driveway, a River birch tree, a special request

from the owner, is illuminated at night as it casts artistic shadows from its unique peeling bark. “That’s a sentimental favorite for me—it was my mother’s favorite tree,” she says. “Whenever I drive up, it’s so nice because it reminds me of my mother—it just gives me a sense of good karma.”

“All in all, it’s been a successful project,” reflects van Steensel. “The owners have been a pleasure to work with,” he adds. “Oh, they’re a true joy,” enthuses Hilferty. “They really take pride in this property, and they wanted to do the right thing in terms of protecting the land and the water.”

“What I appreciated is how respectful everybody was,” the owner says. Speaking of van Steensel, Hilferty and Sorbello, she adds, “They all love the Cape too, and they want to do right by it, and that came through.”

