

## HOME MONTHLY: FEBRUARY 2004

### Cape Cod renovation embraces an island ambiance

by Jane K. Dove

Although a rocky seashore with crashing waves, the cries of circling gulls, and a salty tang to the air are not a part of our local scene, the warm and welcoming shingle-style house built recently in New Canaan by Richard Rosano still manages to capture some of that special Nantucket aura that was his inspiration.

Shingle style homes come in several variations but all have their roots in an architectural rebellion against the fussiness of the embellished Victorian style and were very popular in the Northeast from about 1875 to 1915. Shingle-style homes are known for blending gracefully into the surrounding landscape, be it ocean front or woods, and their monotone wooden siding and unimposing, irregular shapes are classic characteristics of the genre.

The 7,000 square foot home built by Mr. Rosano had its start as a small 1948 expanded Cape Cod on 2.7 attractive acres on Cheese Spring Road. Five years ago, Mr. Rosano, owner of R.R. Builders, LLC of New Canaan, was in the market for a home to expand and liked that area of New Canaan.

"I loved the land the house was on and the quiet atmosphere, on the Wilton side of town," he said. "I also saw the potential of the neighborhood about to unfold, so I decided to invest in the original house. I felt that there were enough structural elements to preserve and decided to go ahead with that approach. I did consider doing a complete 'knockdown' because it would have been much easier, but in the end decided against it."

After purchasing the home, Mr. Rosano and his wife, Sharon, lived in it for four years before undertaking the renovation. "We re-did the bathrooms and just left everything else alone while we researched shingle-style houses," he said. "We spent a lot of time just looking at examples and eventually contracted with an architect, Craig Williams of Norwalk, to develop exactly the concept that we wanted to bring to life."

### Sunny Charm

Mr. Rosano says that one of the elements of shingle-style architecture they found most appealing was the combination of formality and informality. "We wanted to capture that along with that Nantucket 'feel' of sunlight over the ocean streaming through the rooms. To do this, we positioned the house east to west, maximized the size of all of the windows, and added classic 'eyebrow' windows in strategic places."

The completed home is one that meets Mr. Rosano's desire to have a house that combines warmth, charm and livability with a flowing floor plan.

"I also wanted low roof lines when the house is viewed from the outside," he says. "Eight-foot ceilings are standard in most rooms. When seen from the front, the two-story house is not at all imposing. Because of the slope of the property, there is much more visual mass when it is viewed from the rear where you can see the two story family room and kitchen, decks, patio and the full walk-out lower level."

Mr. Rosano and his architect designed the home to combine easy daily living along with plenty of space for formal and informal entertaining.

The floor plan includes a formal living room, dining room, large kitchen adjacent to a family room, five bedrooms, five full and two half baths, a guest suite, an office, parlor, billiard room and playroom on the lower level, three car garage, large laundry room with commercial-sized appliances, screened porch and mahogany deck in the rear of the first floor and a stone patio off the lower level.

The house also contains three fieldstone fireplaces, constructed from stone unearthed during the excavation process.

A unifying element throughout the home is the bright and beautiful light streaming through many large windows. "I wanted a home that was sunny, bright and cheerful," Mr. Rosano says. "We used six over one windows throughout the house along with eyebrow windows in the two-story areas of the house – the entry foyer and the family room. Sets of French doors open out from the rear of the house and there are several large circular windows, all part of classic shingle-style architecture.

Mr. Rosano has also made liberal use of wood elements as another way to add warmth and charm to the dwelling. "There is painted wainscoting in several rooms and natural cherry wainscoting in the office. We used breadboard wainscoting in the kitchen and the billiard room. For the floors we selected five-inch Brazilian cherry wood and for the entry foyer chose red oak set in a herringbone pattern."

The liberal use of wood adds to the home's warm and cheerful ambiance, which is further enhanced by the architect's use of arched doors for some of the main first floor rooms.

### **Special Touches**

The home abounds with special features that Mr. Rosano points to with pride. "The kitchen features granite counter tops, a Wolf double oven and gas five-burner stove, and a second 'prep' sink," he says. "There is a breakfast area, a walk-in pantry, a Subzero refrigerator and a wine cooler with refrigerated drawers. The kitchen also contains a compact information center with a desk."

Moving upstairs, the master bedroom suite contains a large bathroom with marble and granite trim and an oversized changing room and closet with a complete clothing-storage system. Four other bedrooms are airy and spacious and feature the same large windows used throughout the home.

The lower level of the house is a fully finished 1,200 square feet complete with more wainscoting, which makes full use of available natural light to achieve a not-a-basement feel.

### **Exterior Details**

A crushed stone and Belgian block circular driveway with twin fieldstone pillars at both ends provides an attractive entry way. The home's exterior features painted cedar fish-scale shingles with fieldstone trim. A traditional front porch with flagstone floor invites guests. Traditional gables enhance the second story roof line and a seamed copper rear section and two brick chimneys complete the Nantucket feel.

Now that the home is complete, Mr. Rosano says that it has actually surpassed his expectations. "The process went very smoothly and we stayed on budget," he says. "Working with the town departments, including the planning board and the building department also went well. We had a great experience with all of them."

From a professional standpoint, Mr. Rosano views the home as a "career-changing project."

This is the first home that I have ever lived in and renovated," he says. "I enjoyed the experience because I was there every step of the way. I am happy to be able to tell you that it took only 10 months to complete the structure and another two months for outside landscaping. I would like to do more projects like this one in the future, focusing on special types of architecture and design elements that are out of the ordinary and create a finished product that is truly special."

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