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# DESIGN

NEW ENGLAND

Classic Kitchens  
& Timeless Baths



# no place like home

**A NATIVE DAUGHTER RETURNS TO CREATE NEW MEMORIES FOR HER FAMILY IN A PLACE SHE LOVES**

*Written by* JOEANN HART  
*Photographed by* ERIC ROTH

**“IT’S ALL ABOUT THE FLOW,”** says the owner of the house on Massachusetts’s North Shore, where she lives at ocean’s edge with her husband, their three young children, and for a few months of the year, her parents. Much of that sensibility stems from the kitchen, whose elliptical shape was derived after Charles Orr, principal with Hutker Architects of Falmouth, Massachusetts, and Thomas McNeill from the firm’s design team, studied the site’s steep, rocky, coastal topography.

“The kitchen was envisioned as a boulder in the tide,” says McNeill. “You don’t show a flat face to the sea, but a rounded one, so the rushing water can go around while the





**AN 18-FOOT CURVED** glass sliding pocket door opens the kitchen to the seaside terrace. In the sweet spot by the sink, the sensation is of being indoors and out at the same time. The elliptical shape of the room is reflected in the recessed ceiling, inlaid floor, and island, and is reminiscent of a boat hull or surfboard.



center holds firm.” The family, too, has held firm. The wife, an executive coach, had grown up in the house that had stood on the property since the 19th century. When her parents began to spend winters in Florida, she and her husband, an asset manager, said yes to the opportunity to buy the place and share it with the snowbirding grandparents during the warmer months. At first, the couple had hoped to remodel the original house, which had suffered a century of random alterations, but one rainy night, as they lay in an upstairs bedroom with rainwater leaking through the roof and filling buckets all around them, they realized they needed to start from scratch. “Life is short,” says the wife.

“We wanted to create the memories now” for their own kids — happy childhood memories, not those of drafty windows and leaky roofs.

They also wanted a fresh look. The husband grew up in a 1760s house in Connecticut, so he, too, had had enough of mossy New England style. Both were ready for a Modernist twist. Under traditional peaked roofs, the central element of the new house is the kitchen, whose cabinets have a white, high-gloss finish that makes them as sleek as an iPod. Mimicking the curve of a sea wall outside, the room is shaped like a pointed ellipse, suggesting the family hobbies of surfing and boating. Contours from the kitchen ripple throughout the house, show-

## dual islands

A space as trafficked and task-oriented as a kitchen poses multiple issues of flow, an elliptical kitchen even more so. Without nooks or corners to designate for specific purposes, Charles Orr

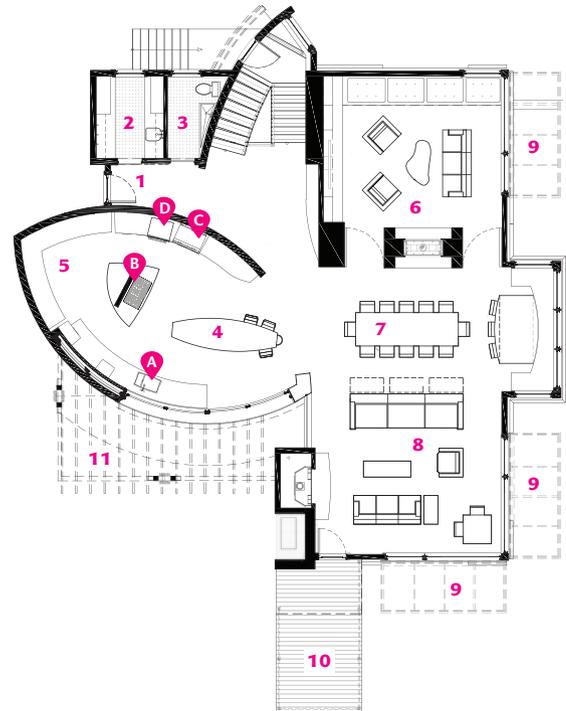


and Thomas McNeill of Hutker Architects found a solution by creating two uniquely shaped islands, placed asymmetrically in the room. The cooktop island, with an Ann Sacks tile backsplash, separates the busy, public part of the kitchen from a quiet area where the children have their own workstation. Here, upper and lower cabinets of red cedar envelop the space with a tight curve of storage, forming a de facto pantry. The surfboard-shaped island is obliquely positioned, as if pointing into an imaginary wind, but the layout serves to tilt the counter space closer to both the [A] sink and [B] cooktop, while pushing the seating area slightly away from the action on the island's other end. This shift also allows for plenty of elbow room in front of the [C] two Miele wall ovens, one conventional and one convection, and the [D] Miele refrigerator/freezer, all handy to the cooktop.

### first floor

- 1 ENTRY
- 2 MUDROOM
- 3 POWDER ROOM
- 4 KITCHEN
- 5 PANTRY
- 6 FAMILY ROOM
- 7 DINING ROOM
- 8 LIVING ROOM
- 9 EXTERIOR OVERHANGS
- 10 DECK
- 11 TERRACE

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**VIEWED FROM THE STREET**, the kitchen's elliptical exterior (ABOVE) steers guests to the main entrance under an arbor on the left, while to the right, the terrace picks up the contours of both the kitchen and an ancient sea wall along the shoreline. On the reverse side of the fin-shaped cooktop island (RIGHT), out of harm's way, the children have their own workstation. This private part of the kitchen is mostly hidden from view and offers ample storage.





ing up not just in walls, but in unexpected details, such as the swerved inlay of the white oak floor that defines the dining area. Yet the nautical touches are subtle. The living room fireplace is framed with sheets of zinc-coated copper, hand-hammered like the hull of a ship. To the right, a fixed-glass panel allows views to where the rounded kitchen seems docked on the terrace.

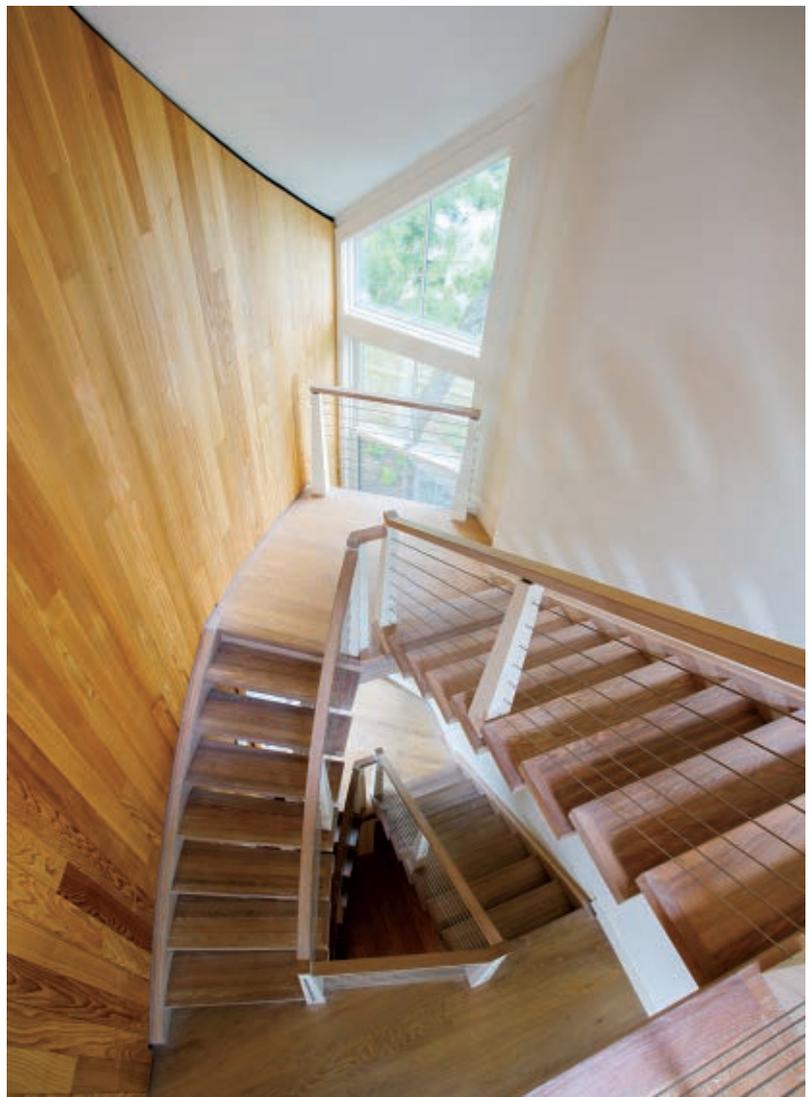
The kitchen's shape is reflected on its ceiling, in its inlaid floor, and on its island, which looks like a Caesarstone surfboard. A second, smaller island/room divider, with a Miele cooktop on one side and a kids' work space on the other, has a fin-like quality that reinforces the surfer theme. Furthermore, the two kitchen islands evoke the very real Ram and Tinkers islands, which lie offshore, a view of them framed by the technical triumph of a curved sliding pocket door, designed by

Hutker and crafted by H. Hirschmann Ltd. of West Rutland, Vermont. The slider allows the space to fully open to the outdoors, where blue-stone blends with the polished concrete that rims the kitchen floor.

Inside, the kitchen flows into the dining area, where an Oly chandelier above the trestle table seems to bubble up from the sea. The fireplace, which is faced with stainless steel, shares its warmth with the family room, which is tucked behind panels of horizontal red cedar that can be left open or closed for privacy. Inside, window treatments are minimal, but exterior wood awnings block the hot summer sun while allowing the low rays of winter to warm the rooms. Two small decks, one off the first-floor living room and one off the second-floor master bedroom, extend like gangplanks over the rocks, a gesture retained from the original house.



**WESTERN RED CEDAR** panels on either side of the dining room fireplace (LEFT) can pivot open to the family room or stay closed for privacy. The table, made from a wood slab the owners selected themselves in the Berkshires, is surrounded by sturdy Philippe Starck Master Chairs. A fixed glass panel in the living room (ABOVE) looks out to the terrace and into the kitchen. The panel also allows a view from the kitchen through the living area to the ocean beyond. A curved red cedar wall (RIGHT) creates a swirling eddy of a stairwell that connects all three floors. The rigging-like stair rails allow for transparency in all directions.





AGAINST THE EVENING sky, the master bedroom, on the right corner of the top floor, resembles the prow of a ship perched above the water. Directly beneath it is the living area. To the left of that is the kitchen, its pointed end facing the street. On the garden level, an in-law apartment opens directly onto a lawn edged with *Rosa rugosa*, a plant that can withstand wind and salt spray.

**BATHROOMS IN THE HOUSE** offer unique flair. A powder room (BELOW) off the entry hall, for example, is on the other side of the stairwell's rounded wall, a feature that the design team chose to emphasize with a custom poured-concrete sink that hugs the contour of the wood paneling. A bright red mirror adds a pop of color and reflects the mica-flecked wallpaper, which is a nod to the stone outcroppings that surround the house. In the master bath (RIGHT, TOP), a window above the sink, where convention would dictate a mirror, offers a view to the sea. The glass-tiled shower has its own window on the world. In the children's bath (RIGHT, BOTTOM), the nautical theme continues as wire stays and chrome clamps hold the vanity mirrors in place. Above them, a glass panel allows light from the adjacent hallway into the windowless space.



In a children's bedroom, windows angle out like a prow. In their bathroom, mirrors float on cable rigging. In the master bath, there is a window where in more conventional houses a mirror would hang above the vessel sink, giving the user a full view of the ocean. Even the shower has a window and a view. The downstairs lavatory, tucked up against the curved wall of the stairwell, has a tapered concrete trough sink and a round mirror that conjures a porthole. The twisting staircase unites the top two floors with the garden-level in-law apartment. "Our goal was to make [the grandparents] part of the household," says Orr, "yet with autonomy." That meant their own kitchen and a private entrance. Keith LeBlanc Landscape Architecture of Boston designed the grounds so that all views from the house are expansive, but the garden plan was careful to leave in place two weathered Japanese black pines, living reminders of the past.

In a neighborhood where 12 families have returned to childhood homes, there is a real sense of continuity. Asked whether it was hard to have the original house torn down, the wife says, "It was very emotional — for about three minutes." Then the excitement of new beginnings swept over her and her family. "We feel we were doing exactly what the property wanted us to do." ▲

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