

Bliss in Rhode Island

An irresistible location prompted a Connecticut family to remake a tired 1910 estate into their dream summer house

With a 6,000-square-foot, circa-1905 house in disrepair, a rundown tennis court, and an outdated Miami Vice-style swimming pool, the two-acre property in Jamestown, Rhode Island, scared off many buyers. But Keith and Jennifer Driscoll—avid tennis players, ocean lovers, and parents of three children ages 6 to 12—kept their eyes on the stunning views: the Atlantic Ocean to the south, Narragansett Bay to the north. “A lot of people don’t want to take on projects like this, but we saw the possibilities,” says Keith, who bought the house in early 2017 along with his wife and other family members to serve as the Driscoll Family Compound.

The renovated house exhibits classic beach-house style with cedar shingle siding, crisp white exterior trim, and numerous glass doors leading to the pool.



WRITTEN BY JILL CONNORS
PHOTOGRAPHED BY WARREN JAGGER



Interior French doors connect the living room to the dining area and keep sight lines open to the pool and greenery. The living room features original fir floors and beadboard wainscot.

A two-year, strip-to-the-studs renovation ensued with a goal of highlighting the house's architectural style, maximizing the views, and creating spaces to embrace multigenerational family gatherings. "When we bought the house, you couldn't see either body of water from the kitchen, and the entire house needed a better flow," says Keith. Adds Jennifer: "The house just didn't match the grandness of the setting, and we knew we could bring that out. This is the third old house we have renovated, starting with the early-1800s brownstone where we lived in Brooklyn, followed by an 1832 farmhouse in Connecticut, our primary home."

To realize their vision, Keith and Jennifer turned to architect Laurie Keene of DiMauro Architects in Newport, Rhode Island, who had a plan. "For the exterior and overall massing," says Keene, "the key was to bring out horizontal elements to address the towering vertical feeling of the original house," a four-story structure atop a hilly site. The solution included creating four sun decks, expanding the first-floor porch, adding dormers, and extending the roofline. "Inside, we reorganized the interior program to

look at how daylight moves throughout the rooms and to emphasize the views," Keene adds. "We also wanted to bring back architectural details, since a previous renovation had removed all molding."

The exterior also lacked a focal point. "The house really needed a front door at the center of the main facade," says Keene, "so we extended the front porch along the entire east facade and placed the door at the center, leading into an entry area repurposed from part of an old parlor."

The rest of the parlor was converted to an in-law suite. "We wanted a bedroom on the main floor for our parents' generation," says Keith. "This house is all about family gatherings."

ABOVE: The new front entry (left) was given an old-house feel with board-and-batten walls, grass cloth wallcovering, and wood floors. An original hexagonal space, now part of the family room (right), was updated with a beadboard ceiling and enlarged windows.



“This house has the bones of an old house, and we wanted to honor that but also have it feel like you can relax, put your feet up, and walk through the rooms in your bathing suit.”



The Family That Cooks Together...

Key to the renovation was a kitchen and dining area big enough for the extended Driscoll family, which can number 16 people at a time, to cook and eat together, with views of the water. The existing kitchen was an inadequate 17-by-13-foot space with no views of the ocean or bay. By combining that kitchen with the original dining room and extending an existing sunroom, architect Laurie Keene created a 36-by-22-foot dining/kitchen area that boasts captivating views of the water and easy access to the swimming pool and pergola-topped deck areas that run the length of the west facade.

The kitchen itself is centered on a quartz-topped and 12-foot-long island with room for seating and prep work. Cleaning and cooking areas are arrayed in an L shape along two walls, and refrigerator and desk areas line another wall. Simple Shaker-style cabinetry, custom made by Jutras Woodworking, is painted white except on the island base, which is rift and quartersawn white oak applied in a horizontal pattern. “It’s tradition pushed forward,” says Keene, noting not only the horizontal white oak island base but also the floating white oak shelves near the 60-inch-wide gas range.

The dining table is in a sunroom area lined with south-facing glass walls. Around the corner from the main kitchen is a pantry, complete with additional appliances, that can be closed off by oversized sliding barn-style doors. “When we are all together, we always cook in and eat in, and this kitchen is a great gathering place for us,” says homeowner Jennifer Driscoll. “We love the relaxed feeling and charming look of this big house and its subtle elegance.”

To create a large, open-plan kitchen-dining area with panoramic views of the water, the architect worked with builder WKP Construction of Newport and finish carpenters Jutras Woodworking of Greenville, Rhode Island, to extend an existing sunroom and combine the original dining room and small kitchen into one large space perfect for a crowd.

On the second floor, Keene created two master suites—one with ocean views, the second overlooking the bay. Both master suites have their own sun decks, perfect spots for a quiet moment to enjoy the vistas.

Throughout, original fir floors were preserved wherever possible, and heavy cove molding and door and window casings were added to evoke the grandeur of an early-1900s house. Beadboard wainscot and ceilings and board-and-batten walls further enhance the old-house charm, as do interior transom windows and fireplaces with bracketed wood mantels and bluestone surrounds in the living and family rooms.

Interior designer Sara Jordan of Westport, Connecticut, who worked with Keith and Jennifer on their primary house, focused on creating a beachy vacation retreat with respect for the architecture. “This house has

the bones of an old house, and we wanted to honor that but also have it feel like you can relax, put your feet up, and walk through the rooms in your bathing suit,” says Jordan. Touching on a nautical theme, she chose brass light fixtures and rope-wrapped sconces, and, to keep it casual, she used indoor/outdoor fabrics that will stand up to salt and sand on upholstered pieces.

New dormers made it possible to transform the third-floor attic space into a media and bunk room for the youngest generation, who can access a rebuilt south-facing sun deck. On the lower level, a mudroom was fitted with custom cubbies and cabinets to store active-family gear, from tennis rackets to beach towels. The tennis court’s hard surface was replaced with red clay, which is both beautiful and softer, a feature that is “much appreciated as we get older,” says Keith. The gunite swimming pool off the kitchen was resurfaced. Next to it, a sand pit, meant to delight small children, was installed.

“We love to entertain, gather as a family, and invite friends, and this house has all the entertainment aspects you could ever ask for: tennis, sailing, swimming, relaxing on the porch,” says Keith. “During family reunions, when the house is full, it never feels crowded. It has it all.”


OPPOSITE PAGE: The kitchen’s simple Shaker-style cabinetry and original fir floors convey old-house character, while white backsplash tile, commercial style stainless steel range and hood, and floating white-oak shelves add a modern touch.

ABOVE: Designed for family gatherings, the 12-foot-long center island is the heart of the home. The island base features rift and quartersawn white oak applied in a horizontal pattern.

RIGHT: The small original kitchen is now a pantry with supplemental appliances. It can be open to the larger kitchen or closed off with sliding barn-style doors when desired.





OPPOSITE PAGE: The 11-foot-deep front porch features a beadboard ceiling and an ipe deck. THIS PAGE (clockwise from top left): The master bedroom's window features an arched mullion to frame the view. The master bath includes a sleek floating vanity. The mudroom was rebuilt with custom cubbies and a slate-like tile floor.  FOR A LIST OF RESOURCES, SEE PAGE 103

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Photographer Leigh Carlson captured this beautiful sunrise in Stonington, Maine. "Down-to-Earth Down East," page 88.

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