

The GUIDE HOME



OPPOSITE, light and design flow through the entryway to the couple's Rockport house. BELOW LEFT, the homeowners, Stephen Florimbi and Sarah Price, on the front step. RIGHT, teakwood makes a durable kitchen counter.



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The Boatbuilder's House

A Maine couple brings their style and sense of craftsmanship to a 19th-century Greek Revival.

BY IAN ALDRICH

For years Stephen Florimbi and his partner, Sarah Price, had a vision of what they wanted in a home: a life tucked away in the woods, isolated, private, off the grid. For Sarah: lavish vegetable gardens. For Stephen, a boatbuilder: a barn for his work. And at the center of the property: a small, energy-producing house of contemporary design, bearing little resemblance to the Capes, Colonials, and Greek Revivals sprinkled around their adopted coastal village of Rockport, Maine, whose ship- and boatbuilding heritage had first lured the pair from New Hampshire in the late 1980s.

The couple bought land in nearby Appleton. Stephen converted a small shed into an even smaller one-room living space. No plumbing, no running water. Around their work schedules—Sarah waited tables, Stephen mixed house construction with boatbuilding—the two mapped out their dream. But just as the couple was set to move forward, a water test revealed high traces of arsenic. Rather than invest in a costly filtration system, Stephen and Sarah set their sights on finding a new place to call home.



THE DETAIL

When it came to the kitchen counters, Stephen Florimbi opted for thin over thick: "I wanted something that had a classic New England look with a slightly modern touch." This boatbuilder found his solution in a material he's more than a little familiar with: copper. He cut out two sheets of the metal (one for either side of the stove), glued each section to a piece of Durock cement board (a special tile backer that can withstand the metal's heat), and laminated them onto matching pieces of medium-density fiberboard. From there, he created a jig to carefully bend the edges of the copper around the backing before screwing the new countertops to the cabinet frames. "It's hygienic and boaty," Stephen says. "And it can handle anything that's hot."



Examples of Stephen's art are found throughout the couple's renovated home.

Their search took them to an 1840 Greek Revival. Located a half mile outside downtown Rockport, it had once been part of an estate belonging to a prominent local shipbuilding family. In recent years, however, the house had been vacant, and what had been described to them as a "fixer-upper" more than lived up to the name.

Drainage and septic problems plagued the place. "You could put your hands on the walls and feel the dampness," Stephen recalls. Windows were blown out, the roof was shot, the old coal-fired heating system was cooked, and on the second floor a thriving Virginia creeper had inched its way inside and taken up residence. And yet...

"It was a real mess, of course," Sarah says. "But it had such nice detail—all these windows—and the way it was laid out gave it this great flow."

It wasn't long before Stephen knew Sarah was hooked: "I remember walking up to the second floor, and Sarah turned around and gave me a big kiss and said, 'I love it!'"

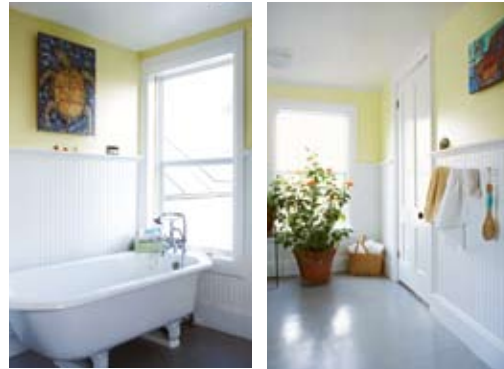
He's recalling this as he sits at the dining room table of the couple's now-

NEWPORT COUNTY CVB

(4.5 X 9.5)



RIGHT, the upstairs master bath is awash in light, thanks to generous windows.



TOP, LEFT AND RIGHT, one restoration project focused on the dining room and kitchen. ABOVE, a basket of abundance from Sarah's nearby garden.

renovated home. A new Douglas fir floor runs underfoot, spilling out into the nearby kitchen. There, amid stainless-steel appliances and the counters and cabinetry that Stephen made, Sarah is putting the finishing touches on a pizza, smothered in fresh vegetables picked from her gardens. The setting, restored and now dry—plaster walls included—is a testament to just how far the couple has come since work began in 2003, when Stephen started hauling a foot-thick layer of mud out of the cellar by wheelbarrow.

It also serves as evidence that the pair hasn't made quite the radical departure from their first vision as it might seem. Their interest in sustainability, which fueled much of their original plans, hasn't waned. It's just taken on a different face. "What we're doing," Stephen emphasizes, "is preserving something that's good and was well made."

In truth, the two see themselves less as owners of the home and more as stewards—ever mindful that the choices they make about how the property is refinished will have an impact on those who succeed them here. It's why decisions such as running under-the-floor radiant tubes (for more even,

COUNTRY CARPENTERS

(6.75 X 9.5)



Cosmo relaxes in a favorite spot in Stephen and Sarah's bedroom.



A reimagined second-floor space let Stephen set up his painting studio close to home.

consistent, and efficient heat) or going with a metal roof (for little-to-no maintenance) weren't made lightly. Not surprisingly, Stephen's boat-building experience factored into the work as well. "In a boat, every space is utilized, aesthetically, functionally—it's all tied together," he explains.

A few choices were direct offshoots of his background. Where windowsills had to be replaced, for example, he sorted through scraps of mahogany, a popular planking material that can withstand the elements, to make a new piece. Gutters are made of fir, another favorite nautical wood. "You just have to treat them once a year with linseed oil," he notes.

Other choices, such as the layout and the look of the home itself, demanded more thought. The biggest change concerned the kitchen, which was moved from one end of the house to the other, giving it a more central location. On the second floor, the couple added more dormers to open up the space, allowing for more natu-

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YANKEE AROUND TOWN

(6.75 X 9.5)



One necessity for Stephen the boatbuilder was adequate barn space for his work.

ral light and making it a prime studio for Stephen, who paints on the side. In the bathroom, the two rebuilt the large window just above the clawfoot tub for a pleasant view of a side meadow.

“What helps a building last isn’t just the materials you use,” Stephen explains. “It’s how comfortable it is and how the spaces relate to one another as you move around the home.”

These days, the couple has settled into the house in such a way that they seem to have lived here for a lot longer than seven years. Sarah has her gardens; Stephen has a new barn where he can build and restore boats. And even though it’s brought them out of the woods, being so close to town, to the harbor, to the community has proven to be a good thing.

“It’s been wonderful to discover how much this house means to people here,” Stephen says. “Especially when we first started work on the house, people stopped in all the time and said, ‘Thank you for restoring it. Thank you for taking care of it.’”

POMPERAUG WOODS

(4.5 X 4.5)

APPLE SEEDS

(4.5 X 4.5)