



# ORLEANS WOODLAND





# RETREAT

BY LAURA V. SCHEEL - PHOTOGRAPHY BY PETER LEWITT



# ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN CREATES A RUSTIC FARMHOUSE IN A SERENE SPOT CLOSE TO PLEASANT BAY.

The land purchased for one family's summer getaway has all the makings of Utopia. Views of marshland, not-so-far off vistas of Pleasant Bay, and a private pine and scrub oak setting are the rich rewards. The challenge was to build a comfortable and appealing home that would not only fit within environmental guidelines but also enhance and protect this rare and pristine landscape.

Surrounded by wetlands on all sides, multiple septic requirements, and conservation setbacks dictated how and where a home built on the land could be placed. Despite a large lot, constraints were plentiful to the point that of the entire 4-acre parcel, a mere 10 percent was considered buildable. In addition, the views, abundance of trees, and even the wind direction all had a hand in determining the final plan of the home.

The family approached Architectural Design, Inc., a local architectural firm intimately familiar with the Cape's environmental restrictions and codes, to create their dream getaway. The original intent was clear: not to build yet another massive, beachside trophy home. "The goal was to make the house look as small as possible," says John Ingwersen, one of the architects who worked on the project.









CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Mahogany decks and walkways surround the forest green-trimmed house, and will weather to a tawny brown. Custom-crafted, gently curving red cedar brackets add visual and physical strength to the deep overhangs. The house borrows designs from Adirondack and Maine camps, but keeps some Cape Cod style, including plenty of decks and porches where the family can relax and enjoy the outdoors.







## HOUSE AMONG THE WOODS

The family did not want a home that loomed large in the natural setting but they did want a home that could easily lend itself to large gatherings of family and friends. Calling it a combination of Adirondack meets sophisticated Maine camp, Ingwersen says, “The style and materials of the home make it a real natural for its place in the woods. It really was nice to do something a little different for the area, something a little more unusual.”

Although the house borrows elements from other popular vacation getaways, it isn’t completely out of character for Cape Cod. Through the use of pitched roofs and dormers, the farmhouse offers hints of the Cape’s quintessential style. These numerous roof overhangs and multiple dormers make the L-shaped home appear far more modest in size than its 4,000 square feet of living space, which does not include large expanses of outdoor decking and a porch.

With its natural cedar shingles, wood roof, forest green trim, and heavy eave brackets under the porch roof, the home blends much more into the environment. Copper downspouts and pipes add a mellow, weathered hue to the practicality of their function. Mahogany decking and walkways, lit by embedded low level lighting, wind gently around living spaces. These walkways will age to a tawny brown.

Though the home truly is meant to complement rather than compete with the natural surroundings, by no means is the house lost among the trees. Of particular interest are custom-crafted red cedar brackets, made by Cape Associates, Inc. These pieces, with their curved forms and sturdy appearance, add both scale and strength to the roof overhangs off the living room. The firm also added a stair tower offering a second set of stairs to the home, which lead to the children’s bedroom wing.

## PRIMITIVE LANDSCAPING

The property’s extreme environmental sensitivity offered a unique chance for the homeowners to go above and beyond what was required by town conservation measures. Environmental consultant Seth Wilkinson, of Wilkinson Ecological Design of Orleans, was already on board to guide the family through the extensive conservation process when an unusual opportunity presented itself. Just beyond the driveway lay a tangled morass of overgrown green briar, wild grape vines, and rampant red maple. Closer inspection by Wilkinson’s team revealed thick layers of peat, sodden ground, and the aged remains of cedar trunks: tell-tale signs of what likely was once an Atlantic White Cedar Swamp. Wilkinson and the homeowner’s made the decision to turn back time in a way, by restoring this rare and valuable ecosystem.

“Normally this type of project is done on a community scale,” says Wilkinson, “so it’s very exciting to be working with an individual family to reestablish this wetland.” An ambitious undertaking, the plan involved the careful removal of the invasive jungle of greenery, using highly specialized machinery that wouldn’t compact the delicate soil. Wilkinson’s team dug deep holes for the planting of 185 Atlantic White Cedar trees, which will grow to approximately 8 feet.

“So far (after one year) we’ve seen a great success rate—we’ve only lost a handful of trees. We just need to give the trees the necessary support to thrive, so we’re just along for the ride right now.” An additional planting of native shrubs will act as a buffer zone between the driveway and the cedar swamp restoration. With luck, the surviving one-acre section will provide significant food and habitat for a number of plant and animal species, including the rare Hessel’s Hairstreak butterfly that feeds exclusively on the cedar.

TOP TO BOTTOM: The main floor is an open space that flows from living to dining spaces, right to the screened-in porch. The architects made the most of built-ins to create clean lines and reduce clutter.







## CASUAL INTERIORS

For the interior details, the homeowners had a clear sense of what they wanted. Attention to function and practicality of the interior spaces was a priority “The fact that they knew specifically what they wanted does make the job of accommodating these needs more challenging, but in a way, it also makes things easier for the architect,” says Ingwersen.

The design includes an expansive and open floor plan on the first level, explains Ingwersen, to create a feel of continuous flow from the inside to the outside— and to bring the outdoors in. Thoughtfully placed skylights provide another avenue for welcoming natural light. Mahogany decking encircles a good portion of the home, adding dimension and further encouraging a blending of interior and exterior elements. Inside, a smooth progression of space extends unhindered from the living room, through the dining room and out onto the large screened porch. Architectural Design also incorporated a number of built-ins that would offer desired feel of an uncluttered and inviting open space.

Generous windows and French doors not only allow sunlight to rake through the rooms but also afford views of the surrounding wetlands, cedars, and hints of Pleasant Bay. The stone fireplace also pays homage to this woodland place. Crafted from New England granite fieldstone and grounded with a bluestone hearth, the fireplace is flanked by a pair of French doors so one can gaze at the flames or admire the distant sway of marsh grasses.

Working with interior designer Susan Tuttle and guided by their own personal style, the owners have not created the typical Cape Cod summer home—absent are the swaths of Nantucket blue and white and nautical-themed décor. The warm hues of natural wood found throughout the house are instead highlighted by the bold prints and richly colored upholstery. The interior feel of the home extends more toward sophisticated and artful camp rather than casual beach home.

Although there are nods to the Cape Cod influence sprinkled modestly about. Many of the ceilings are horizontal boards painted white, reminiscent of turn-of-the-century beach cottages in the area. Much of the artwork hanging on the walls consists of original works depicting beach or boating scenes, including a many popular Cape Cod locales. Weathered, painted signs advertise “Fresh Lobster,” or direct viewers “To the Beach.” After all, it’s a quick jaunt to the salty waters of Pleasant Bay and the beaches beyond.



## OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

Enjoying the outdoors is a priority for the family, and the home offers a special “service” room near the back entrance. With extra storage, a sink, refrigerator, counter space, and laundry, it’s the place where the family prepares for beach picnics and other outdoor activities. A hall between the garage and this service area allows for groceries to be easily shuttled from the trunk to the cabinets.

This year marks the family’s first time in their home in the woods. Through thoughtful design, the home balances the need for practical efficiency with a sense of comfort. Tucked snugly within the trees, you can bet that this family is indeed, as one of the hanging painted signs declares, “Happy as Clams” in their summer retreat.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION,  
SEE MARKETPLACE ON PAGE 114.**

*Laura V.Scheel is a Freelance writer From Orleans.*



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: The screened-in porch becomes a semioutdoor living and dining room. The open floor plan carries people through the house, including the living room with the fireplace and the built-in window banquette, all the way to the French doors that lead to the porch. Cape Cod décor isn't overwhelming in this house, which instead makes the most of vibrant colors and vibrant upholstery, as in the girls' bedroom.







## THE ATLANTIC WHITE CEDAR SWAMP

- Atlantic White Cedar (AWC) swamps are found mostly on the Atlantic coastal plain from Maine to Northern Florida; Massachusetts has approximately 7000 acres of freshwater wetlands designated as endangered Atlantic White Cedar Swamps.
- Atlantic White Cedar trees (*Chamaecyparis thyoides*) are actually in the cypress family; they are extremely slow-growing trees but can reach upwards of 80-feet in their lifetime. (The trees planted on the property will only reach 8 feet.)
- Trees thrive in peat-based, nutrient-poor and highly acidic soils with 65-95 percent water saturation. A key requirement for tree reproduction is the random occurrence of wildfires or hurricanes.
- A very dense shrub layer that often includes high-bush blueberry, red maple, and swamp azalea exists at the base of the trees, as well as a variety of ferns and sphagnum moss.
- AWC swamps provide vital wildlife habitat for birds, turtles, deer, rabbits, and the very rare and endangered Hessel's Hairstreak butterfly.
- For over three centuries, Atlantic white cedar was a favorite wood for posts, shingles and lumber, owing to its extreme rot resistance.
- Agricultural, commercial, and residential development are the greatest threats to the survival of AWC swamps.

—Info from *Commonwealth of Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife*

