

ARCHITECT PATRICK AHEARN BREATHES LIFE INTO THE HISTORIC MYLES STANDISH HOTEL

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# Shaping the Steps of Standish

Architect Patrick Ahearn reinterprets the historic Myles Standish Hotel into a stunning home on Duxbury Bay.

By Susan Dewey  
Photos by Taylor Ahearn

When Patrick Ahearn, FAIA, a highly regarded East Coast architect known for historically informed, yet innovative designs over a near 50-year career, received a call from a Duxbury couple about taking on the repurposing of the town's famous Myles Standish Hotel, he was understandably intrigued.

The hotel (1871-1946) was once a sprawling seaside oasis atop the bluffs on Duxbury Bay, where the rich and famous gathered for carefree holidays away from New England's congested cities; a stately hotel gracing a glorious coastal location with deep historic American roots. Built on land that was deeded

in 1627 to Myles Standish, the famed Mayflower passenger who was engaged by the Plymouth Colony as a military advisor, the hotel was also known for a healthful spring that bubbled across the property since Standish's era. Guests at the hotel believed the elixir was a restorative beverage. In fact, the hotel's owners once had a thriving bottling business.

Since its glory days as a destination reminiscent of the grande dame hotels in nearby Newport, the Myles Standish fell on hard times during the early years of the 20th century. The original hotel, a rambling railroad-style structure with long expanses of windows and front and back porches, was hit by a devastating fire in 1908 that destroyed several outbuildings on the property, eventually necessitating complete division into two separate wings.

A world war and the advent of the automobile for weekend and summer holidays in the 1920s, combined with managerial challenges, rang the death knell for the Myles Standish Hotel.

For decades the once lauded landmark slumbered, a decaying eyesore in an upscale neighborhood filled with some of Duxbury's acclaimed residences.

Eventually, a couple living next door to the abandoned hotel—now a single structure—began to imagine restoring the hotel into their own coastal retreat, envisioning a classically elegant reconstruction honoring the hotel's legacy.

Aware of Patrick Ahearn's sterling reputation for combining a unique awareness of history with superb, top-notch design and construction consultation, the couple asked Ahearn in 2016 to take on the restoration of the Myles Standish.

Ahearn, whose long list of accomplishments spanning residential and commercial projects throughout New England includes the restoration of Manchester, Vermont's historic Equinox Hotel, welcomed the considerable challenges of reshaping a 150-year-old, yet still venerable building into a beacon of classic American design that could fit the needs of a modern couple and their visiting family and friends.





Following his first book, *Timeless*, currently in its seventh printing, in which Ahearn introduces his process and the depth of his experience over the last 50 years, the latest book is titled *History Reinterpreted: The Myles Standish Hotel*, and is a stunning 82-page monograph by Ahearn melding an engaging mix of historic, black-and-white photographs of the hotel with fascinating step-by-step construction photos. Ahearn's marvelous new book contains hand-drawn sketches, contemporary photography depicting the remarkable restoration, and insightful commentary throughout.

"Whether actually historic or historically inspired, my residences balance preservation with modern innovation and are carefully designed to improve the lives of those who experience them, whether as homeowners, visitors, or mere passerby," says Ahearn, noting that this is his second book.

Ahearn says that it was a special pleasure to work in Duxbury. "Architecturally, Duxbury is notable for its textbook examples of well-kept early houses, which survive to this day," Ahearn says, describing the town as having "streets that put forth a living primer on classic vernacular."

The architect stresses that the hotel's historic structural and decorative elements were honored



as much as possible during the project's two-year span. "In a sense, the Myles Standish would be the preservation of an idea, not necessarily a structure," says Ahearn. "We wanted to communicate the history that had happened on site more than we wanted to preserve the exact half-hotel that remained on the property. The renovation would require operating with care, proceeding with a sensitive eye toward original architectural elements, the spirit and scale of which I intended to keep in the transformation."

Such sensitive attention to detail—a hallmark of Ahearn's work—can be seen in the choices of historically accurate coach lighting brightening doorways on spacious porches which showcase both the water and street-side views of the house, the home's classic white clapboard siding and Essex green shutters, the choice of New England construction materials such as bluestone and fieldstone for outdoor kitchen, patio and pool areas, and cedar shingles chosen for the home's exterior throughout.

From his very first visit with the clients, Ahearn strove to meet the needs of a multi-generational family, including accommodating plans for the homeowners to age in place, as well as providing the comforts and technological needs of 21st century living. "Space for entertaining was important and a substantial program for outdoor living was a





definitive ask,” says Ahearn. “They requested a dedicated office space for the husband and an additional office area for the wife, plus a fitness center of some sort on-property. Most important, the homeowners wanted to capitalize on long views of Duxbury Bay from main living areas and bedrooms, especially the primary bedroom suite.”

Ahearn began his drawings—he still uses pen and ink to render his plans, but his staff also provides computer generated schematics if the client wishes—on the street side of the home, making the most of a handsome stonewall already in place and centering on a stunning natural element already in the very forefront of the hotel, a massive, rare tree known as a *Castor aralia* (*Kalopanax septemlobus*).

The architect notes that one of the unusual tree’s best assets is a cascade of white flowers in late summer, explaining that the species is regarded by the Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University as “one of the best ornamental trees for the New England region. The existence of this tree on site was about as rare as the structure we were working on itself,” says Ahearn. “While others may have considered removing it based on its placement, we took every possible step to protect the tree during construction and to incorporate it as an anchoring element of the home’s new arrival sequence.”

A processional pea stone driveway bordered with cobblestones was designed to sweep toward the home, encircling the tree and branching to the left to encompass a new, vertically aligned carriage house, which would also become an indoor/outdoor recreational area perfect for visiting family and friends. “The bayside augmentation of the carriage house would function as a pool cabana, housing a shaded and cooled sitting room along with a lavatory. In addition, by considering a second floor within the carriage house, the clients could achieve a surprising and bright home fitness center,” Ahearn says.

Both the front and back sides of the home honor the Myles Standish legacy with the addition of long, yet distinctive porches providing both a dignified entrance area on the street side, and on the bayside an expansive three-season porch for outdoor living and entertaining. “There is significant hardscape with space for outdoor cooking, dining, conversation, and poolside relaxation. To fully respect zoning laws, all elements were kept out of the 200-foot buffer from the shoreline and a significant rear lawn was maintained,” Ahearn stresses.



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To eliminate a “rabbit warren” of bedrooms in the existing hotel structure, Ahearn designed a strategic “center spine” to run from the front entrance of the house out through the dining area and onto the water-side porch, creating an open airy space that instantly gives breathtaking views of the bay beyond. All along the back of the house, living spaces, including a first-floor bedroom suite, overlook the water, which is dramatized with walls of windows and French doors. On the second floor, the main emphasis is on providing family members and visitors with ensuite bedrooms. Many have water views and two feature balconies. A third floor features attractive office space for the homeowners.



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Approved plans in hand, construction on the new Myles Standish began. Ahearn and the construction professionals at Colclough Construction, Ahearn’s partners in numerous projects over the last decade and a half, determined that the existing foundation of the house was insufficient to support the proposed renovations. “While rich with character, the old foundation would be insufficient to support the proposed additions, and a modern concrete foundation was specified,” says Ahearn. “In order to pour it, however, the house needed to be methodically lifted and moved aside, then returned to the new foundation. In the case of the Myles Standish, the steel would support 75 tons of weight.”

The lifting of the house was just the first of many challenges restoring and safeguarding a fragile structure. Walls that were bowing out over time required the lifting of the entire roof by three inches in order to straighten out and replumb all interior walls. Two large chimneys were taken down brick by brick and rebuilt by hand. Ahearn refers to the superb workmanship and dedication of the project’s construction crew with gratitude. “Skilled laborers and craftsmen all lent their time and proficiency to the home. Master carpenters, cabinetmakers, tilers, landscapers, and so many more—all played a part in creating this historically inspired composition. Thanks to their dedication the home feels authentic inside and out.”

On every page in this beautifully produced book, the vision and skills of Ahearn, his firm, and his dedicated team glimmer. The new Myles Standish is a showcase with its carefully orchestrated excellence

of design and construction, offering a fitting historic connection with the home’s picturesque seaside surroundings, and establishing an inspirational portrait of the property’s grand legacy as a place of camaraderie, relaxation, and comfort. Visit [patrickahearn.com](http://patrickahearn.com) for a visual treat and to purchase his current book, *History Reinterpreted: The Myles Standish Hotel*. 🏠

*Centerville’s Susan Dewey is a freelance writer and former editor at Cape Cod Life Publications. She is also a direct descendant of Myles Standish and hopes one day to visit the stomping grounds of her 10-greats grandfather, who was reportedly quite a character.*



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