

# From the Ground up





# When you outgrow your dream home, how do you dream even bigger? With the right team.

By Hannah Kunze

Photography by Taylor Allegrini

Before he lived in Old Mill Point, a bucolic neighborhood in West Harwich, a young man would jog through the neighborhood on hot summer days and admire the Cape-style houses lining the road, trying to imagine his young family in each. He dreamed of the day he might call one of these tranquil homes his own.

After years of waiting for the right property, this man and his wife found their perfect match in a home cradled between a meandering river and the glittering sea. Summers spent at Mill Point were perfect, but the family continued to grow. With each passing year, the old house felt smaller and smaller.

“The ceilings were low, and the rooms were chopped up,” the homeowner says as he recalls the original home that allowed them to make Mill Point an important part of his family’s life. “We loved the look from outside but increasingly it was less and less livable.” After six years of cramped quarters, the

couple decided they would keep their dream home in this special location, and rebuild it, starting from the ground up.

“We knew we wanted a lot of indoor/outdoor space and to keep the inside open because we host a lot of guests throughout the summer,” he states. “We wanted a long-term home that we could grow into—a house our kids could bring their families to as they grow.”

Patrick Ahearn Architect was brought on to design the new home. It was important that the new structure provide more space, yet maintain coherence with the other neighborhood homes. “Mill Point Village is a 40-acre parcel with an eclectic collection of Cape Cod vernacular architecture,” explains Ahearn’s managing principal Michael Tartamella. “We needed to create something that looks like it could have always been there.”

Traditionally, a Cape-style home is 1.5 stories and often appears to have expanded over time. Adhering to these restrictions while adding space was a challenge. “We took our cues from the mass and scale of the old house,” says Tartamella. “Adjusting the roof lines created a scale appropriate for the neighborhood but



allowed us to add four bedrooms upstairs. From the outside, it still reads like a Cape-style home.”

Each side of the building was carefully designed to have an asymmetrical appearance, furthering the narrative of a home that expanded naturally over time. The different style dormers and the gables of the front roofline reference the original home’s structure, making the contemporary home feel traditional. The fenestration along the rear of the home disrupts a long, linear exterior. On the second floor, a balcony overlooking the river fades into the facade due to a red cedar railing and balusters that seamlessly connect it to the roofline. “These changing planes create a push and pull that breaks the scale down to a more human, relatable experience,” Tartamella explains.

The house is a seasonal home that was designed to have seamless transitions between indoor and outdoor living spaces. This is particularly evident in the backyard, which was designed for entertaining. A cabana containing a bar area with a full-sized refrigerator and bath extends the living space beyond the walls of the main house. Nestled between the screen porch and the cabana, the pool area is an outdoor room of its own. A sliding barn door on the back of the garage allows the family to entertain even on rainy or scorchingly hot days. Simply sliding the door open instantly connects the pool area with a cool, dry indoor space. On particularly dreary days, the indoor entertainment spaces provide no shortage of fun. In the basement, a turf-lined room contains



a golf simulator where players can engage in digital golf tournaments using real clubs and a screen. “There’s a full bar in the basement where you can watch people play golf while you eat and drink,” says Rob McPhee, president of McPhee Associates, who built the home. “It’s great for entertaining. The old house didn’t have this kind of basement opportunity.”

For McPhee, however, nowhere quite beats the charm of the screen porch. A conduit between the indoors and the home’s natural setting, the porch provides additional living space that can be enjoyed year-round. “We installed custom paneled screens with glass inserts that go in for the winter so the family can extend their season,” explains McPhee. “In the spring when pollen is flying, the glass keeps the porch clean. Then, during the summer, they have screens to capture a cool breeze.” A wood-burning fireplace provides warmth during chilly months. McPhee sums up the charm of the room perfectly: “It’s really nice to sit out there overlooking the pool—the glass and the custom-made skylight make it very bright. On days with bad weather, you can still enjoy being outside.”

The porch also features a coffered ceiling of wooden beadboard. Striking woodwork is a theme throughout the house. The homeowner describes it as a “defining piece” of her home. “It took a long time to get the



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woodwork right,” she remembers. “It has added so much dimension and value to the house. We were impressed with Ahearn’s plans for the woodwork and McPhee’s craftsmanship.” The ceiling and crown molding in the kitchen, the wall paneling in the foyer, and the shiplap walls in the bathrooms provide added texture and character to these spaces.

The woodwork also plays an important second role in conveying the tone of a space—its level of formality, intimacy, or romance. “The paneling in the front entry, the brick on the mudroom floor, the beadboard on the porch ceiling—these all start to tie into the emotion we’re trying to convey in those spaces without overtly saying it,” explains Colby Mauke, project manager at Patrick Ahearn Architect.

The millwork and trim are monochromatic to provide clarity and continuity throughout the house. “There’s a dialogue going on between rooms,” says Tartamella. “It’s important for a continuation of narrative that things remain fairly neutral.”

Roberta Sobran, owner of Delicious Designs Home and the interior designer for this project, agrees. “The first floor is one big beautiful open space—I wanted it to flow together,” she explains. “It felt nice to have a neutral white palette. Spaces are delineated with lighting and textured surfaces instead of color.” The rectangular dining table, for example, forms a soft separation between the kitchen and living room. To keep the space open and inviting, the sofa faces the kitchen and is flanked by two swivel chairs

that facilitate conversation between rooms.

Throughout the home, a classically coastal blue and white palette adds pops of color to the neutral base. A sapphire enameled La Cornue range is the centerpiece around which the kitchen was designed. Accented by brass hardware and framed by a white quartz backsplash, the range was the first item the homeowner selected for her new home.

The house has many bathrooms, all master classes in color and



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texture. “Bathrooms are not spaces where you spend a lot of time, so I like to make them a little bit of a surprise,” Sobran explains. “We used different materials and tiles in each one to make every room unique.” In the primary bathroom, an artwork by Wendy Callahan is a burst of cerulean blue in an otherwise calm and neutral space. Navy shiplap walls and a leather mirror create a chic, masculine ambiance in the bar bathroom. Recycled Moroccan glass in various shades of blue transforms the cabana floor into a box of shining sapphires.

While every room has its own outstanding qualities, unique and exceptional lighting (both natural and incandescent) is a feature that runs through the entire house. On the lower level,

light streams through a boxed-out bay window, while four Nantucket-style dormers over the front entry brighten the rooms upstairs. Areas that lack natural light were remedied by Roberta’s expert eye. “Lighting is what makes a home shine—it’s like jewelry to a home,” she says. “In this house, even in the mudroom, there’s jewelry everywhere.”

In the sitting room, the furniture has been thoughtfully arranged to foster conversation. Four cream-colored chairs encircle a central table. The woven neutrals, found in the window treatments hanging over the bay window, as well as in the floor coverings, share the same rough texture as a windswept beach, a nod to the landscape peeking through trees outside. But it’s the two vintage flags

on each side of the window that turn heads. Both are several hundred years old and pay homage to the family’s unique chapter when circumstances made them Americans residing in England during the period this new home ultimately came to fruition.

Separated by thousands of miles and COVID-19 travel restrictions throughout the construction process, both the family and the design and build teams relied heavily on communication and teamwork. “We always got excited about ‘Friday Pictures,’” the homeowner remembers fondly with a smile, referencing an established tradition wherein the construction team would send weekly photo updates. “Our team was so communicative. There’s not a thing I would change about our home.”

“It took a lot of collaboration,” says McPhee, “but it was a rewarding project. The architecture is timeless, and I hope it provides inspiration to others.”

Tartamella agrees, “We created a home that looks like it was always there, but lives the way we live today. We accomplished all the goals we set out to achieve.”

*Hannah Kunze is a freelance writer for Cape Cod Life Publications.*

