

Bay Dream Believers

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The dream team of architect Peter McDonald and Cape Dreams Building and Design creates a treasure on the beach.

A day at the beach renders countless treasures and recollections worthy of cherishing for a lifetime. For homeowners Rick and Michelle, their days at the beach have become the tide table by which they have measured their family's history for the better part of three decades. After vacationing for years with Michelle's mother in a variety of summer rentals along Eastham's Thumpertown Beach, the couple put down their own roots in the early 90s when they purchased a modest, prefabricated Nickerson Home that had been erected in 1979. The home, perched above Cape Cod Bay, was simply, as Michelle describes it, "A box. With yellow shutters." The two-story structure, while providing adequate accommodations for the family of four, and a long list of visiting friends and family, lacked any sort of architectural character or personality.



Eastham architect Peter McDonald fit the bill when it came to finding someone to create a design that would stop people in their tracks, literally. McDonald and Paul van Steensel, principal of Cape Dreams Building and Design have been undertaking a bit of a "road trip" in this small, coastal community.

The duo has transformed the landscape, arguably for the better, with a slew of projects between Thumpertown and Campground beaches. “Everyone walks along this quiet, sandy road,” Michelle explains, “whether you are on your way to the beach, on your way home from the beach or just out walking your dog. Sometimes it is more people than cars.” It was during one of those walks that Rick and Michelle took notice of a neighbor’s construction project, one that had McDonald and van Steensel’s work fully on display. “The house was coming along nicely, and everyone in the neighborhood was excited,” Michelle remembers. “We talked to the neighbor several times, and he seemed happy with their work. But, when the project was finished he was definitely really happy. That seemed to be a great endorsement.” In the fall of 2018, Rick and Michelle were finally ready to replace the home that they first enjoyed with their pre-school-aged children with a new place to make memories for a new generation that now includes their two granddaughters, Hailey and Bella. McDonald met the couple at the box with yellow shutters and a process of determining what was important to the family began to unfold.



“We knew the deck and the ability to connect to the beach was key,” Michelle states. Keeping the existing layout of “upside down living,” with the majority of the bedrooms on the ground floor and the main living areas on the second floor in order to capitalize on the 180-degree-view, McDonald created a program that would accommodate an open living, dining and kitchen space with a center fireplace, a convenient bar for easy socializing and even a spacious pantry. The home has three large bedrooms, including the master en suite, a guest suite on the lower level and a family bunkroom allowing for four sleeping configurations. A new foundation with nine-foot ceiling height is currently unfinished but anticipates the grown children to determine the best use once the third generation starts to grow, both in age as well as their network of friends.

McDonald did not neglect the family’s request for a deck; in fact he took it very seriously. The lower level has

an expansive decking system that will surely become a private place of retreat as it is accessed from the lower level guest suite as well as the surrounding dune topography. But upstairs is where McDonald really applied his creativity in several ways to maximize the enjoyment of floating above all of Cape Cod Bay. The new dining

area is flanked on the waterside by sliders that access a sundeck, outfitted with comfortable chaise seating. The deck extends across the entire waterside of the home, with additional sliders from the living area that give way to the dining porch. The new home's design incorporates several different rooflines and the treatment of the unique details that benefit the dining porch is one of the most intriguing aspects of the home.



"The clients wanted to take advantage of as much of the view as possible, particularly during the nice weather when they could be outside," McDonald explains. "The previous home took advantage of awnings over the deck to provide shade because every day includes a bullseye sunset on the home. It can be a lot. So, we decided to carry the roofline over the deck on the gabled end. As a result, it defines the dining area nicely and actually frames the view."

The new plan included a detached two-car garage that features a portico at the ground level and a connection between the living room and the master suite on the second level. A modest hallway accesses another deck, just large enough for two Adirondack chairs. Also in the hallway, an oversized custom-built storage bureau, crafted by van Steensel's [Timmerwerk](#) furniture division, provides functional storage as well as aesthetic display opportunities. At the end of the hall, a cozy den with a television opens to the left and a door to the master en suite opens to the right. Like a Goldie Locks discovery, a small Juliet balcony off of the master provides a spot to take in the view that is just right. According to Rick, the details of the expanded master suite are one of the things he is looking forward to as the generations continue to grow. "When the grandkids are grown, and their friends have come up from the beach, and it just gets to be a bit too much, Grandpa will be just on the other side of that door, with enough distance, watching TV in his own private world. The rest of them can have all

their fun!"



Van Steensel's crew often includes interior designer Ashley Hilmerty of [Ashley Bradford Interiors](#), and this stop on his beachfront tour was no different. Hilmerty, who grew up in Eastham, has an easy and approachable style that appeals to many homeowners who want coastal flair with just enough sophistication that it doesn't cramp the casual lifestyle at the heart of their decision to have a Cape house. Her use of fabric, color and accessories keeps things vibrant and carefree, while her years in the business allow her to navigate and recommend the endless choices involved in building a home

The spacious kitchen is centered by a brilliant blue island that grounds the sink so that Rick and Michelle can enjoy the view while cleaning up. "Michelle brought inspiration images to our first meeting," Hilmerty recalls. "She knew she wanted a white kitchen to wrap around a blue island. Together with Dean Sarrasin from [Kitchen Port](#) in Orleans, we found a color that she loved, 'Blue Quartz,' and we even decided to paint the pantry door in the same color." Kitchen Port was also responsible for all four bathrooms, beautifully tiled by Eastham local, Andrew Fettig from [Salt Hay Home Services](#), as well as the beautiful bar in the living room that provides just a bit of sparkle in its ability to keep everyone happy.



Hilferty, Sarrasin, McDonald, and van Steensel, the entire team, all use the same adjectives and emotional charge when talking about this project, but more specifically, the family that their collective efforts benefited. Hilferty, whose demeanor as she interacts with the entire family, seems more like an aunt to Hailey and Bella. "It's not that this project was easy, that's not why I loved it so much," Hilferty explains. "It's that I was designing for a family and it just became very meaningful. Every choice impacted the way they live and enjoy this home together as a family."

Van Steensel echoes the sentiment, "This project was really special because of the people involved. It is the third home on the same road Peter and I have collaborated on, and everything really came together with this one. We were able to deliver the project on time and the owners are so appreciative." Additionally, van Steensel says that the custom pieces (a built-in hutch in the dining area as well as the bureau in the master suite) that his Timmerwerk crew were able to create, based on Hilferty's designs, add to the custom narrative this family achieved with their new home.



Now, weekends are spent with Hailey and Bella tracing the footprints left in the sand by Rick and Michelle's daughters over 25 years ago. Family time on the Cape extends to the next generation as they create new memories in a new home. There is something about this home that has allowed it to quickly take its place in the neighborhood. Maybe because it isn't a box with yellow shutters. Maybe it is the welcoming front porch where Rick likes to enjoy his morning coffee. Maybe it is the unfettered, casual landscape, accomplished by [Sorbello Landscaping](#), that lets people know the home is as connected to the beach as they are. Perhaps it is the perfect shade of aqua Michelle chose for the front door. McDonald's design, with its entrancing lines and gables, might have something to do with it. Van Steensel's uncompromising commitment to quality and craftsmanship certainly plays a part. Whatever it is, a day doesn't go by without several passersby stopping in front of the house. Some just stop to take it in. Some stop and discuss elements of the home amongst themselves. Many stop and, given the chance, engage with the family, often with a compliment of appreciation, while some inquire what that shade is on the door. What better compliment that you have built the right home, than one that stops your neighbors on their way to a day on the beach?