



# CAPE COD SALTBOX RENOVATED INTO A TRANQUIL SUMMER OASIS

A simple shingled home on the Outer Cape was renovated and expanded maintaining the integrity of the original house for an end result that's soothing, crisp, and dreamy, just like Cape Cod.

JENNIFER SPERRY | AUGUST 12, 2020

The two-story, shingled saltbox boasted a weathered charm befitting the Outer Cape and a meandering salt marsh alongside. But to gain the modern, light-filled spaces they envisioned, and to best capture those marsh views, its new owners decided on a comprehensive update involving both renovation and expansion.



Lisa Tharp reimagines a Cape house as the perfect vacation space.

Their transformation team included Cape-based architect Peter McDonald and builder Clay Wilkins, of Wilkins Construction, an artisan known for his timeless methods of hand craftsmanship. For the interior, they sought a designer who could honor the home's historic origins while adding a fresh perspective.

A home magazine cover led them to designer Lisa Tharp, principal of Boston-based Lisa Tharp Design, who immediately embraced the project's potential: "They really wanted to honor the saltbox," Tharp recalls. "They could have torn it down and rebuilt, but instead they felt it was important to preserve the structure and sensitively add on. Thankfully," she continues, "Peter is skilled at protecting and promoting beloved local vernacular."



Since the owners live out of state, Tharp communicated with them and McDonald remotely via email and conference calls for months. Amazingly, designer and clients didn't meet in person until the first phase of construction was complete. One addition gained the property a first-floor master suite while a second contributed the new kitchen, dining room, screen porch, mudroom, and laundry space.



The dining table was crafted by Jeff Soderbergh.

Tharp—who enjoys collaborating on big-picture decisions like scale, layout, and flow preconstruction—designed the detailing from “the studs in.” She participated closely in any decisions, big or small, that impacted the interior volumes: “Our work is very holistic. It goes beyond just furnishings; it’s about shaping entire spaces so they feel alive and inviting.”



Taking inspiration from the setting, Tharp riffed on coastal traditions but steered clear of the cliché. “Early on in the project, I shared photography of a classic yacht with my clients: *Bloodhound*, a 12-meter class sailboat built in 1936 and purchased by Queen Elizabeth II in 1962,” says the designer. “Its beautiful white, mahogany, and teak hull and canvas sails became the jumping off point for the materials palette throughout the house.”



The new kitchen, with cabinets handcrafted by Carpenter & MacNeille Woodworking, blends coastal and contemporary in a bright, white-on-white setting. Purposeful details such as map light sconces for task

lighting, shiplap walls, salvaged portholes on the pantry doors, and a teak-and-holly “boat deck” countertop nod to the yacht-inspired aesthetic. Pendant lights by Darryl Carter evoke the lines of a sail while custom leather counter chairs by Richard Wrightman fit right in as statement pieces.

“I love hiding appliances when the kitchen is part of an open plan,” says Tharp, who tucked them all out of view except for the statement black La Cornue range, which, in her eyes, represents the hearth of the room. Contemporary elements—a streamlined vent hood, articulating sink faucet, and a decadently thick, white Neolith island countertop—keep the space feeling clean and cool.



The kitchen is light and airy with a standout range by La Cornue.

A vintage photo of a diver above the La Cornue on the Neolith backsplash is a seemingly small but inspired flourish. “It creates such an unexpected moment and gives the kitchen a bit of soul,” notes the designer.

The theme of spaciousness continues in the dining room, where an overscale Jeffrey Alan Marks pendant light adds texture to the white, vaulted envelope. Artist and furniture maker Jeff Soderbergh crafted the custom dining table’s top from an antique violin maker’s table. Two wing chairs upholstered in sumptuous grey velvet counter its rusticity. In the adjoining screen porch, a pair of wicker daybeds with partnering tea tables encourage gathering, relaxing, and even sleeping on a warm summer night.

Renovating the living room involved negotiating the challenge of low ceilings in the original house. But Tharp turned the restriction into a plus by playing up the coziness factor with a foursome of comfy

slipcovered chairs. The original brick fireplace was reworked into a sleeker focal point, complete with V-groove planking and bluestone surround. A sculptural grasscloth coffee table with brass feet anchors the room.

"I love mixing eras, and the midcentury adjustable lamps flanking the fireplace add light but also verticality," says Tharp, who worked with McDonald on eliminating a wall in favor of the room's bump-out window seat. "It's exactly the width of one twin mattress and the length of two," she describes. "It's a great spot for lounging or can even host overnight guests, and it brings extra light into the formerly small space."



A collage of antique book pages decorates a reading nook.

Demoing the garage made room for a brand-new master suite addition on the home's marshland side. An oversized lantern commissioned by Tharp punctuates the vaulted ceiling, where exposed rafters and wood planking lend new-old character. She designed the canopy bed, built purposefully high to better interact with the marsh experience. The headboard subtly references a dock cleat.

Tharp's out-of-the-box thinking resulted in one of the home's showpiece elements: "Peter [the architect] was totally game for a connected indoor-outdoor shower," she says. Whether the owners choose to shower inside or out, both experiences offer a seamless connection to nature. Wood flooring, made from reclaimed Coney Island boardwalk boards, unites the two spaces.

To her clients' delight, unexpected design surprises pop up everywhere. Soderbergh used the boardwalk boards to craft vanity tops for the master bath, and chicken wire displays from Winston Flowers were morphed into their bases. Vintage canoe chairs double as shelving in the laundry room; a pair of old windows were incorporated into the master bedroom's sliding barn doors; and an old apothecary chest was painted and repurposed as a bureau in the master suite's dressing area.

Treading lightly and giving found objects second life is part of the Lisa Tharp Design philosophy. For the second-floor loft, she lined a daybed nook with a collage of antique book pages. "There are old postcards, excerpts from sailing instruction books, and a pair of antique metal goggles for fun," says the designer, who staple-gunned the chosen items to the wall herself.

Her clients craved a getaway that soothed upon entry—a perfectly tranquil summer escape—and that's exactly what she delivered. The home is now one part old, one part new, but all parts fresh and experiential.