

Bottoms Up

By Liz Arnold

IN WAINSCOTT, A TIMBER-FRAME UPSIDE-DOWN HOUSE KEEPS SCALE AND PROPORTION IN MIND AS IT MAKES WAY FOR OCEAN VIEWS



WIDE-EYED WONDER

WHEN AN INVESTMENT BANKER AND HIS WIFE FIRST VIEWED AN OCEANFRONT PROPERTY IN WAINSCOTT, THEY DIDN'T LET THE SLEEPY OLD BEACH HOUSE, LOW AND TUCKED INTO THE LAND BEHIND A DUNE, OBSTRUCT THEIR VISION FOR A SHINGLE-STYLE VACATION HOME WITH VIEWS OF THE WATER.

In fact, they saw straight over it, literally: Before closing the deal, and along with architects from the South Norwalk–based firm Shope Reno Wharton Associates, the couple, who has two daughters, climbed into a cherry picker and rose 20 feet in the air until they could see past the dune and overgrowth to the water beyond.

"That's how we determined where the second floor would be," says architect Jerry Hupy, the partner in charge. Senior partner Bernard Wharton set the design direction of the timber-frame upside-down-style house, which places all the common areas on the higher floors. "You want to see the water," Hupy continues, "but you don't necessarily want to see the people on the beach—if they're even there."



And so the firm, which has worked with the couple on other residences, began with its third project with the pair, one where living spaces—kitchen, dining room, living room and master bedroom—would comprise the entire second floor. "The biggest thing for them was to have it all wide open, so there are no walls," Hupy says. "You see straight out to the ocean." Decks and porches extending from French doors help take advantage of sweeping southern views; the grown children's bedrooms and a guest suite are all on the ground floor.



WATERFRONT DINING

"I didn't want it to look like an upside-down house," said the husband, who feared disproportion. "I wanted it to look like a regular house." The architects understood his aesthetic preference: The porch on the upper level is the same size as the one below it, and the shingled tiers are purposefully wide and stately to appropriately respond to the grandness of the house. "From a structural standpoint, they don't need to be that big," says Hupy, "but from a visual standpoint, they do. You don't want to have spindly stilts. You have to consider the overall architecture. The house demands this size."



COOK SPACING

Shope Reno Wharton is well known for its open-floor plans and turn-of-the-century Shingle-style architecture. This four-bedroom, 6,000-square-footer is no exception. "It's not the new kid on the block," says Hupy. "You don't look at it and say, 'It's the modern one on the corner.' The way we marry it to the ground makes it look like it's been there a while."

Architectural detailing anchors this new house in an old tradition: Dormers highlight the roof, eyebrows bow out over the windows to protect them, spindles on the staircase are designed with Gustav Stickley in mind, and roof, eyebrows bow out over the windows to protect them, spindles on the staircase are designed with Gustav Stickley in mind, and shingles are used in the Craftsman style. "They're not just functional in protecting the house from the elements," says Hupy, "but you can steam them and use them to follow a curve. Bricks don't allow that; they're not pliable. So there's a lot of movement with exterior shingles."



To make the most of the oceanfront lot, the layout of the house was flipped from its original configuration. In its final arrangement, the master suite, which is on one end of the house, overlooks Georgica Pond, where the residents keep kayaks. "It's all about being close to the water," says the husband.



The interiors are kept simple to allow for an airy feel. The timber frame is white oak; the floors, antique oak. "The great part of the second floor is that the beauty of the wood shows through," says Hupy. "We tend to not take a cherry and stain it to look like something else." The couple, who had worked with interior designer Mica Ertegun of Mac II on other homes, incorporated some antiques and other furnishings they already owned. Landscape design was led by Eric Groft of Oehme, van Sweden & Associates in Washington D.C.



BALANCING ACT

The owners have had houses in the Hamptons for 25 years and are personally fond of Shingle-style architecture—and the results that Shope Reno Wharton delivered here. "A lot of people come to us for Shingle-style houses like the ones they used to vacation in when they were growing up," says Hupy. "Turn-of-the-century Shingle-style architecture is all over the East Coast, from Maine all the way down to Georgia. It's a memory point for people."