

New England HOME

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That's a Classic

A stone and shingle beauty on the Rhode Island coast speaks to the grandeur of the Gilded Age. TEXT BY LISA H. SPEIDEL

As the old saying goes: when opportunity knocks, answer the door.

And that's exactly what the homeowners did in this case—but in reverse: they saw the door, then seized the opportunity. It was an image of a grand front door in an advertisement (in this magazine, in fact) that led the homeowners to Andrew Reck of Oak Hill Architects.

They had bought a sweeping swath of land on the coast in Rhode Island with plans to create a multi-generational summer home, a place where their grown kids and grandkids could gather.

The location was unique with its 270-degree views, and it was a blank slate (a seaside estate had been torn down in the mid-1900s). "It was a tremendous honor, and it came with a tremendous sense of responsibility," says Reck about the project. "This is a very special piece of property."

In a nod to Rhode Island's roots, Reck designed a house that would "evoke the Gilded Age, but have a quiet grandiosity." He opted for a gambrel-Shingle-style design to both blend with the pastoral surroundings and—thanks to a double-pitch roof that contains the second story in the eaves—decrease the overall massing. To make it feel as if it emerges from the ground, it is built into an existing stone ledge outcropping.



A handsome fieldstone arch leads to the central courtyard, around which the house is organized. "This is one of a series of archways that frame specific views, and define how one moves through the house," says architect Andrew Reck. The facing door opens into the family's mudroom.



TOP TO BOTTOM: The view of the house along the approach; the main rooms are laid out around the outer perimeter to take full advantage of the views, including the master suite on the far left and the guest house, which is connected only by the roof, on the far right. An outdoor fieldstone fireplace is an ideal cool-weather gathering space. The breakfast area off the kitchen has a 180-degree vista thanks to the generous bay window.



The materials, too, conjure classic New England: natural fieldstone, cedar shingles, heavy wooden dentil molding, and granite sills that run the perimeter.

While the house brims with architectural pride of place, the layout was inspired from further afield. “I’ve been drawn to courtyard houses since I studied in Italy and spent time in the Swedish countryside,” says Reck. Here, all of the main living spaces, as well as the overall circulation, are organized around a central courtyard, he explains. Different wings (there are designated areas for the parents as

well as the grown kids and their families), are marked by a series of grand arches. “Through all of the arches you can see out to the water,” the architect points out.

Indeed, there are lots of arches, says Reck, to soften the overall feel of the house. And one of those arches just happens to be a magnificent custom-made mahogany front door with ornate wrought-iron detailing and a pergola-style overhang. A door so striking, in fact, it could appear in a magazine.

EDITOR’S NOTE: For details about this home, see Resources.

ARCHITECTURE:
Andrew Reck, Justin Weil, and Li Yang,
Oak Hill Architects



The statement-making—and welcoming—front entrance has a mahogany arched door with custom brackets and rafters for a trellised look; Reck added wrought-iron detailing to give it an Old World feel. Above, in keeping with the grand Shingle-style architecture, a widow's walk evokes a bygone era.

