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A VIEW TO DWELL ON

BY KEVIN VARRONE

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANNE GUMMERSON

Everyone wants a room with a view, but an entire house with a view is the stuff of which dreams are made. Yet that's exactly what this shingle-style house on Gibson Island provides. Set on the Magothy River with views of the Chesapeake Bay and the causeway connecting the island to the mainland, the house is all vistas. It's also something of an architectural magic trick, an idyllic optical illusion—part cottage, part palace—a dream house in a dream location. But even dream houses have to be dreamt up, drawn up, designed, and built, and the true story of this house is in its details.

The first step in the almost 3-year project was to tear down the 1950s cottage that occupied the site. Although fitting with the traditional architecture of Gibson Island, the house was outdated and ultimately too small for the family's needs. The homeowner enlisted Hammond Wilson Architects to meet a single, daunting architectural challenge: design a house that faces the road squarely while, on the water side, faces east to capture the sunrise over the Chesapeake. No small feat considering the lot made these two things mutually exclusive. In addition, the parcel came with other strings attached, such as a sloping site and a host of zoning restrictions.

Gibson Island is a privately owned community that was founded in the 1920s by yachters and golfers. One of the community's greatest charms is the feeling that it has stepped out of time a bit. The majority of the island's five square miles is wildlife preserve, forestry, and bird sanctuary, and residents are intent on maintaining the integrity of the land, so they exercise strict zoning controls over





Comfortable upholstered seating and a bold, uplifting blue and yellow color scheme define the main living area. An adjacent casual, enclosed porch capitalizes on the view.

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development. This conscientious stewardship of the land meant that Robert Hammond and Chris Frank, the architects on the project, faced a daunting challenge. The homeowner wanted a large house for his family, and he wanted it to blend seamlessly into a tightly knit community primarily consisting of seasonal cottages. And, naturally, he wanted the house to capitalize on the location's greatest asset, the water views. "Getting all the components in, given the zoning restrictions, was a difficult challenge," Hammond says. "We were trying to make a house that would fit in with the neighborhood and still fulfill all of the client's desires."

Fitting into the neighborhood meant obeying the various laws governing waterfront construction. For example, the home couldn't be within 1,000 feet of the bay, and impervious areas (house, garage, walks, etc.) could occupy only 15% of the total lot. Given the need for a five-bedroom, five-bath home with a three-car garage, the architects had their work cut out for





ABOVE: A rounded game room doubles as a breakfast nook. Simple furnishings and curtains allow the views to dominate the room, while an intricate ceiling design and unique chandelier provide surprising accents.

RIGHT: A combination of old-fashioned style and modern industrial technology, the kitchen juxtaposes muted color tones and bolder accents brought in with seating and accessories.

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them. Rather than trying to overcome the restrictions the lot posed, the team worked within them. They devised an L-shaped plan that maximized exposure to the water and increased the living space without overwhelming the site. They also took advantage of the slope of the lot, so that from the street the house looks like a single-story cottage. As the land pitches toward the water, the house expands to three levels. "We wanted to make a dramatic impact on the water side," Hammond says, "but we made a deliberate attempt to have the house fit in with the neighborhood and blend in with the other houses." They brought the roofline low to reduce the scale of the house and give it, as Frank says, "a demure street presence," and they used the slope to their advantage, tucking the garage under the house and orienting it so that it is not visible from the street or the water side of the property. As the homeown-

er puts it, "They designed a very large house that looks modest from most vantage points, and every room has water views and catches the sunrise."

The entrance to the house shares an axis with the pier, which extends into the water from the property's edge. The center hall design creates a series of progressions leading from house to porch to stairs to an expansive lawn to the water. Inside, a series of rooms serves various purposes: a dining room for as many as twenty-two, living room, kitchen, game nook, and four-season waterproof porch (with interchangeable screens and sashes). Upstairs, the house includes a master bedroom with a deck, two bedrooms for the children, two guest rooms, and a room for sleepovers affectionately called "The Dormitory". Wherever you are in the house, the water is always there, which presented another architectural challenge—incorporating glass for all the views while maintaining the traditional feel of the house. As Frank explains, "Our solution was to set the windows and doors back off the face of the house to downplay the volume of





LEFT: A master bedroom with a private deck offers quiet seclusion. The mood is echoed by the subdued blues and simple whites of the décor.

BELOW: A room for sleepovers is affectionately called “The Dormitory.”

kitchen and a modern, industrial one,” the homeowner says. To accomplish this, Sagel employed what she calls “quiet color,” soft hues punctuated by the bolder accents of the kitchen chairs, stainless appliances, and granite countertops.

Another important design element in the home is light. Numerous fixtures add focal points to the classic design, which is something Sagel feels is important. “I like to put emphasis on lighting fixtures,” she says, “because they can bring a room together and add to the architectural experience of a house.” A prime example is in the game nook (which doubles as a breakfast nook) on the main floor. Hammond and Frank designed a rounded room to avoid an oppressive roof gable and to expand the views. A simple square table, four chairs, and subtle window treatments allow those views to dominate, but unexpected secondary focal points come by way of an intricate ceiling design and an 8-candle spherical chandelier.

Throughout the house, there are numerous illustrations of the home’s greatest achievement: a chameleon-esque ability to do two seemingly opposite things at once. To the street, it offers a quaint face; to the water, it offers an open face. To the family, it offers all the comforts of home and the capacity to host a party straight out of *The Great Gatsby*; this is a house suitable for a family and fit for a king. Most importantly, perhaps, the home offers what Gibson Island itself offers: beautiful views, sunrises, and water, water everywhere. ❖

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glass; we incorporated columns and roof overhangs.” They also designed a wraparound porch that spans the width of the house, allowing access to the views and creating a boon of outdoor space. By breaking the glass, so to speak, Hammond’s team gave this large house the look and feel the homeowner desired, that of a seaside cottage.

While the exterior of the house was inspired by the vocabulary of Nantucket shingle and Hamptons-style waterfront architecture, the interior takes its inspiration from nature and the Gibson Island Club. Interior designer Marcy Sagel worked closely with Hammond, Frank, and the homeowner to create an airy,

comfortable interior that she calls updated classic. It employs clean lines and bold colors, yet never forgets that the main attraction of the house is just beyond the windows. “It’s a simple design, overall,” Sagel says. “The art and beauty of the house is the art and beauty of the views, so we developed a design around that idea.” Call it interior as supporting actor, but don’t think there are any small parts in this interplay.

The client wanted the home to be informal and livable yet large enough for entertaining, so Sagel opted for comfortably upholstered seating in bold, uplifting blue and yellow fabrics. Wool carpets in natural and muted shades help warm the hardwood floors. The large kitchen, like much in this house, was designed to achieve two opposite goals simultaneously. “We wanted the room to be a compromise between an old-fashioned