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Next Generation

A family's summer cottage makes way for a year-round retreat with echoes of the original.

BY JENNIFER CARMICHAEL



Growing up in Woodbridge and Madison, Marilyn Blakeslee and her family would spend every summer at the Westbrook cottage her great-grandparents built in 1928. Through the years, the old shingle-style house was handed down to her grandparents, parents and most recently to her in 2018. Holding much history and wonderful memories, it was strictly a summer cottage — no basement, exposed plumbing, and the water needed to be shut off at the end of every season. Blakeslee hoped to winterize it for yearlong living. However, she quickly learned that a renovation would not be cost effective, and sought to design a new home which channeled the feel of the original.

“I was fine with the house being knocked down,” says Blakeslee, who consulted with architect Sabrina Weisberger Foulke, principal at Old Lyme-based Point One Architects. “My great-grandmother died when I was 10 years old, so I remember her. She was a very independent woman, and she didn’t necessarily like things that were old. So, I know in my heart of hearts that she would not have minded that the old house was gone and that we were doing an update.”

As soon as Foulke got to the property, she knew it wasn’t a house that could be saved. While the cottage had been a beautiful home of its period, the interior was dark and its simple structure did not meet today’s requirements. Plus, most coastal buildings in the 1920s were constructed with little, if any, insulation, and they were not designed to be wind resistant.

“If you go in and try to renovate these old





Firestarter home: The layout was largely determined by the placement of the first-floor fireplace. While it couldn't be preserved as it was in the old cottage, its fieldstones were used to rebuild a new one to replicate the look of the original.



Then and now: Both the homeowner and the architect agreed that the 1928 summer cottage was beyond the point of renovation. They would build anew, preserving the soul of the first structure.



All-around Sound: Whether from the covered porch or the dining room, there are water views aplenty, which was very much intended, of course.



Light and bright: Formerly at the rear of the cottage, the new open kitchen is now part of the first-floor living spaces and features Shaker-style cabinets and light-colored quartz countertops.

Splashes from the past: Elements from the original structure, including a clawfoot tub and bathroom sink, were saved and used in the new home.





They saved what they could throughout the house. Glass doorknobs, a cast-iron kitchen sink (now in the laundry room), lighting, a bathroom sink and a claw-foot tub (now in the primary bathroom) remain.

houses, it's just not worth the money," notes Foulke, who also worked with colleague and project manager Greg Echtman. "It's one thing if you can keep everything and just set it down on a new foundation, but if you want to open up rooms and make it work with a modern lifestyle, you'll spend a fortune trying to save something that cannot be saved. Marilyn wasn't wedded to keeping it and just wanted the spirit of the new house to feel similar to the spirit of the original house. I think we achieved that."

They saved what they could throughout the house. Glass doorknobs, a cast-iron kitchen sink (now in the laundry room), lighting, a bathroom sink and a claw-foot tub (now in the primary bathroom) remain. One of Blakeslee's primary concerns was keeping the fieldstone fireplace in its original location. While somewhat of a design challenge, Foulke built around it, making sure "to get in everything that Marilyn wanted."

But when it came time to demolish the house, Rick Brauchler of Rick Brauchler Jr. & Co., the Clinton-based builder Blakeslee tapped at Point One Architects' recommendation, said there was no footing under the chimney. And while he couldn't save the fireplace, Brauchler hired Sean Scott Masonry of Deep River to work some magic. "He took all of the fieldstone off of the face of the fireplace, numbered it, built a new chimney, and then put the original fieldstone back on the face of the fireplace," Blakeslee says. "I actually have a picture of my great-grandfather sitting in front of the original fireplace and you can't tell the difference from what he rebuilt and what was there."

During the design process, the fireplace dictated the flow of the house and where the living spaces would go around it. It also directed the location of the new home on the property. Foulke notes that if they had known that the fireplace and chimney were going to come down, they might have moved the fireplace to another wall, or placed the house closer to the water. "Typically, when designing a room, you don't want the fireplace and views to have to compete with one another, but Marilyn was accustomed to having the fireplace just where it had always been," says Foulke, who

