

# Down by the River



**Inside Riverbend**, Donna and Frank Doyle's 4,600-square-foot home at the mouth of the Herring River in West Harwich, windmills are as much a motif as nautical accessories and the creamy color palette. One windmill in particular—built in 1924 overlooking a secluded inlet—is a centerpiece here. The windmill is rendered in countless photographs and paintings throughout the home, including several on a wall just past the home's entrance way. It's also the subject of an image mounted above the fireplace in the living room, a work supplied by Orleans Camera derived from a photograph Donna's late father shot of the windmill. This windmill also once graced the cover of an issue of *Cape Cod Life*.

Some 50 years after Donna first began visiting the house as a child, the blades on the actual windmill have long since been dismantled. But the structure and its beautiful surroundings are still there—just crane your head away from the fireplace and stare through the colossal picture window in the Doyles' living room for a look.

The renovated living room is a cool oasis of khaki and beige accented with lime green. An abundance of windows amplify natural light.

A wide-scale renovation in West Harwich is one for the generations.



by jeff harder | photography by dan cutrona



The scene has been the backdrop for countless summer memories that stretch back to when Donna's parents first began visiting Harwich in 1952. She recalls days of swimming, sunbathing, family feasts, and fishing. A stone's throw from the house, her faded initials "DS 1959" are still etched in a wall by the jetty. The area around Herring River is a special place, she says, a refuge she shared first with her mother and father; then with her husband, Frank, and their two daughters; and now with a legion of grandchildren. To accommodate this ever-growing family (the seventh grandchildren arrived this past August), Donna and Frank chose to renovate the home. With the services of Ralph Cataldo of East Falmouth's Cataldo Custom Builders, Helen Baker of Helen Baker Interiors in West Harwich, and Gordon Clark of Northside Design Associates in Yarmouthport, the renovation was rapid, thorough, dramatic—and a total success.

Before deciding on a builder, Donna leafed through stacks of magazines and noted the most appealing projects. "I looked at all of these magazine photos and Ralph's name was on most of them," Donna says. Once she met Cataldo—and subsequently saw glowing testimonials on his web site—the decision was simple. Baker, who had helped Donna upgrade several rooms after she and Frank purchased the home in 1996, was a natural choice with her proven talent and the close proximity of her studio. Clark, who had designed a house on Wychmere Harbor that Donna adored, was a natural fit for the team.

Once they decided on the crew, Donna issued the challenge to Cataldo: *My husband does not want to miss a season.* After getting all of the permits by Christmas Eve 2008, the team set a deadline of late June 2009 to finish what was realistically nine months of work. That meant a schedule of six-day weeks through harsh snow storms and temperatures that sank as low as three degrees—with waterfront gusts, the windchill dropped even lower. But while the pace was quick, the process wasn't rushed or haphazard. Cataldo and Baker collaborated on a number of details throughout the house. While applying the trim, Cataldo's men built out the moldings for a set of first-floor windows to accommodate plantation shutters.

The time crunch wasn't the only challenge. "We had to work within a height restriction, so we had to design a lot of things along the way," Cataldo says. The transformation of the third-floor attic into a spacious master bedroom and bath required the most careful thought. The original two-by-10 rafters were removed and replaced with engineered



CLOCKWISE FROM OPPOSITE LEFT: An intimate living room features a linen-wrapped coffee table and club chairs; the outdoor splendor is mirrored in images throughout the home, including above the fireplace in the family room; the centerpiece of the renovated kitchen is an 11-foot marble island; canoe-paddle-shaped supports add a special touch to the staircase.





Pivot doors, flanked by French serving areas and space-boosting mirrors, swing 180 degrees between the dining area and a smaller living room. OPPOSITE: The second-story bedroom is warm and cosy with antique furniture, alabaster lamps, custom fabric flourishes, and one of the most enviable views in the home.

lumber and shed dormers to allow more natural light and maximize head room, while staying within the home's original 30-foot-high roof line.

To call the project an overhaul is an understatement. After removing the original home's kitchen fireplace, the kitchen, dining area, and living room became extensions of one another, all bound by the magnificent perspective afforded by walls of windows overlooking the largest of seven decks. The windows are variations on a theme: French door grills, clerestory windows, and a giant picture window, flanked on either side by double-hung windows with six-over-twos. "You take a geometric pattern like that and mix it up, instead of doing too many different kinds of windows," Baker says. The centerpiece of the new kitchen is a custom-designed, 11-foot-long marble island with toast top edges, surrounded by soapstone countertops above classic white cabinets, a waterworks-tiled backsplash with a Greek-key mosaic border behind the stove, and a travertine marble floor bearing rectangles and squares arranged in a random pattern. The kitchen flows into the dining area, distinguished by a straight racetrack table—rounded at the edges to shoehorn those

last four guests in at dinner. For diners whose backs are turned away from the outdoor scene, large mirrors over the two French-style serving areas reflect the seascape.

Adding to a palette of aqua, celadon, sand, taupe, turquoise, and white, the spacious living room is awash in monochromatic khaki and beige, with lime green accents corresponding to the lining of the massive book cases on the north side of the room. Rustic furniture, a game table, and a sign emblazoned with "Riverbend" above the largest of the windows complete the room. With few exceptions the accessories and artwork all were purchased from Cape vendors. "Everything is here on the Cape if you look hard enough," Baker says, "and if it's not, someone will make it for you."

From the dining area, pivot doors swing 180 degrees into an intimate living room, one of the most traditional-style rooms in the house, complete with an off-white sofa flanked by two bamboo chests, a pair of club chairs, a linen-wrapped coffee table, and two nautical charts mounted on the dusty turquoise walls. An exit from the kitchen leads to an office/living room furnished with a desk, three club chairs, an antique drop-leaf mahogany table, a rattan lamp, a massive seashell-encrusted mirror, and a black-and-white photo of Donna with her grandchildren on the French wallpaper-adorned walls. Because the house was designed for ease of maintenance, there are few carpets, uncomplicated window treatments, kid-friendly fabrics, and simple decorations throughout the home.

A railing with supports styled to look like canoe paddles leads upstairs. Two nearly identical rooms set aside for each daughter and husband feature beds and furniture from their grandparents, antique alabaster lamps, sea grass blinds, and floor-to-ceiling windows that lead to porches possessing views of the river and Nantucket Sound that rival any other in the house. The children's bunk room features sets of bunk beds, storage trunks, and nautical blue vinyl golf lockers affixed with nautical symbols for each grandchild. The largest of the three second-floor bathrooms is windowless, but a mirror stretching from the door to the back screen of the shower keeps the light glimmering off the Carrera marble floor.

Above the garage, the game room is outfitted with oversized furniture including an Ultrasuede couch, a pine coffee table, a billiard table, autographed pictures





The third floor master suite and bath underwent a transformation from attic to renovation highlight, with a mix of natural and formal colors and simple window dressings. The bathroom features special touches like a rare four-leaf clover chair and a towel rod mounted just below the sink.



of various sports celebrities on the walls, and a mammoth flat-screen TV. A bronze Moravian star lantern hangs from a cupola.

Up another set of stairs, the newly created master suite and luxury bathroom is a regal feature of the home. The room is handsome with contrasting formal and organic elements, bathed from floor to ceiling in a chamois shade. The king-size bed with bamboo frame and raffia headboard is surrounded by a Queen Anne loveseat and two dressers. Two sets of doors exit to the wraparound deck, and the window treatments with white linen draperies are intentionally simple in order to accentuate—not distract from—an incredible view.

The six-bedroom, five-bathroom home required new windows, siding, roofing, electrical work, flooring, and interior finishes. Still, the renovation was completed inside the home's original footprint, and many pieces from the original home were either donated or recycled. The entire kitchen—cabinets, countertops, sink, and all the rest—was dismantled and donated to a newly married couple in a fixer-upper in New Bedford with a limited budget.

In sum, Riverbend is a marvelously functional, well-designed house for a 12-person family. The children can play pool in the game room, the adults can host a dinner party, and others can doze upstairs all at the same time without anyone disturbing anyone else. Five decades in with a renovation in the books, this summer retreat is poised to stir memories for generations to come. 

*Jeff Harder is managing editor at Cape Cod Life Publications.*

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*Before*