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A Saltbox Home Is Revamped to Embrace its Sublime Cove Setting

A Brooklyn-based family enlists an architect to radically modernize their 1970s vacation home in Martha's Vineyard.

Text by
Kelly Dawson

There was never a question about the goal of this home renovation—in fact, it was a rare opportunity to capitalize on an obvious perk.

"The home is located on a cove on Martha's Vineyard, surrounded by farmland. There are expansive views in all directions," architect Maryann Thompson says. "A nearby silo and an adjacent cove are both focal points of those views."



Western Red Cedar with a clear vertical grain was paired with vertical and horizontal shiplap for the exterior siding.

Chuck Choi

Photo Categories: exterior, saltbox roofline, house building type, wood siding material, shingles roof material, metal roof material

Yet the young couple who bought this property couldn't see much of it from the existing saltbox architecture, which was originally built in the 1970s. They imagined a much brighter vacation home for their family to escape to from Brooklyn, New York; a place where the sights were as easy to come by as the breeze.

They also asked that there be enough room for more guests, in case anyone else they knew wanted to see the stunning surroundings for themselves. With these needs in mind, Thompson got to work on a clear mission to bring the outdoors in.



"Because the living room occupies the gable, the resultant space is triangular in feel," Thompson says. So she heightened that look with an oversized triangle window, which maximizes views of the cove. Western red cedar was chosen for the walls, and three-inch red oak was chosen for the interior floors. The windows are encased in Alaskan Yellow Cedar.

Chuck Choi

Photo Categories: living room, coffee tables, medium hardwood floors, sofa, chair, pendant lighting

"We used the existing footprint and basic saltbox shape, but we radically modernized the house inside by opening the interiors up to light and the landscape," she says.



Thompson wanted to create "layered and veiled spaces" inside, which was achieved with multiple places to gather in the main corridor. The corridor is open from the second floor down to the basement, and has a combination of skylights and windows for ample light. Paradis MetalWorks supplied the rail and stair stringers.

Chuck Choi

Photo Categories: staircase, metal railing, wood railing, wood tread

She cleared the home of its decades-old mildew and created a "reverse" layout that placed the living area upstairs and the bedrooms below. In that common space, a large triangular window was installed to provide a place to see the cove beyond, and Thompson made room for full-length seating directly below its glass.

A few steps away, Thompson went one step further with the view-heavy design. "A second-level outdoor shower is located in a small niche at the top of the stairs, which creates an interesting ambiguity between indoor and outdoor space."



A second-story outdoor shower sits at the top of the stairs. California Faucets supplied the shower head and shower arm. Eco Arbor interlocking deck tiles were used on the floor.

Chuck Choi

[Photo Categories: outdoor, shower pools, tubs, showers](#)

The downstairs renovation solved the potential need for more room. Two bedrooms can sleep four, but the third, well, it can sleep 12.

"The bunk-bed room can handle all the kids," Thompson says. "There are also two small nooks off the hallway for spontaneous get-togethers, or for alone time."



"The two queen bedrooms can handle two couples, while the bunk-bed room can handle all the kids," Thompson says. She also made sure every bunk had a window, to act as a "mini room."

Chuck Choi

Photo Categories: bedroom, medium hardwood floors

And to make sure that the downstairs and upstairs felt united, Thompson used one natural product throughout the home that's another nod to its setting: red oak.

"Wood was chosen as a main feature of the property for three reasons," she says. "It sequesters carbon, so its use indoors is good for the environment. It also feels cool to the touch in the summer, and warm in the winter. The third reason is that a wooden interior references the old fishing cabins on the Vineyard that were built without insulation."



"We took a 1970s kit greenhouse off the west side of the house, which was making the home overheat, and replaced that area of footprint with a covered porch that shades the western glass," Thompson says.

Chuck Choi

Photo Categories: [exterior](#), [gable roofline](#), [wood siding material](#), [house building type](#), [saltbox roofline](#)

Given the home's many skylights and large windows, as well as its multiple sliding doors, it's safe to say that Thompson achieved the overall goal.

"The site has such beautiful views," she says. "We just had to find ways to open the house up to them."

Project Details:

Architect: [Maryann Thompson Architects](#) / [@maryannthompsonarchitects](#)

Builder: [Tate Builders, Inc.](#)

Structural Engineer: [Sourati Engineering Group](#)

Civil Engineer: [Schofield, Barbini, and Hoehn Inc.](#)

Landscape Design: [Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates](#)

Interior Design: [Shelter](#)

Cabinetry Design: [Herrick and White](#)

Photography: [Chuck Choi](#)