





SIMPLY ELEGANT

*Restoring a 1910
Craftsman Home*

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Previous page: The reception hall features natural woodwork, coffered ceilings, and original stained glass windows. A grand piano and ocean view provide the perfect backdrop for entertaining. | This page: Subtle faux painting of the ceiling in the formal dining room softens the room, allowing the view to take center stage. | Facing page: Porcelain floors brighten up the spacious kitchen, which overlooks a vast patio.





The Arts and Crafts movement began as a response to the mechanization and mass production of the Industrial Revolution. It espouses the values of natural materials, skilled craftsmanship, economy of form, and honest expression. At its core, the Arts and Crafts movement celebrates the relationship of artisans to their crafts.

The bungalow is perhaps the most well-known of architectural styles to come out of the Arts and Crafts movement. But this grand, 1910 Craftsman on the Massachusetts North Shore also has its philosophical foundation in the Arts and Crafts movement. The first floor features spacious rooms with beautiful, natural woodwork and an abundance of windows that allow sunlight to stream into the house and highlight the beauty of the outdoors. It is typical of the large, rambling homes built in New England around the turn of the last century.

In 2004, the home was purchased by a local family. Lynda Onthank, ASID, of Onthank Designs was consulted even before the closing. “This house was in horrible condition,” Lynda says. “It is quite a big house, and over the years it had just fallen into disrepair.”

Much of the woodwork was damaged and the

electrical wiring was dangerously outdated. But the bones of the house were strong, and it was easy to see what it must have looked like when it was first built. That is, if you could see beyond the bold colors and décor from the 1950s.

Before the restoration work could begin, architect Jason Gove needed to finalize the floor plan and turn the maze of small bedrooms on the second floor into an inviting space. “There were so many rooms,” Lynda says. “So the very first thing we did was work out a floor plan to reconfigure the upstairs. We also had to plan for new wiring—which meant that many of the walls in the house would have to be taken down.”

At that point, Wayne Towle of Master Finishing & Restoration, Inc. was brought in to restore the woodwork. “The wood finishes were in terrible condition,” Wayne says. “We had to strip and refinish the wood to bring it back to what would look like a period finish.”

“Wherever possible, the architectural details were maintained and either restored or recreated,” Lynda explains. “A lot of care went into restoring the home to its original condition.”



As is common in a Craftsman home, the woodwork was finished with a simple stain to highlight the natural grain patterns of the oak, ash, cypress, and gum woods. “All the wood used in the house was felled locally and was very common to the area,” Wayne says.

But the use of so many types of wood was not born of economic necessity. Rather, it was a way to showcase the natural beauty of the woods and celebrate the artisan’s creativity and craftsmanship. “The floors are all quartered oak, which is very striking; the grain pattern on ash is much larger and bolder; and the cypress and gum are lighter in color,” Wayne says. “The person who designed the house certainly didn’t hold back in creativity.”

Each type of wood required a custom finishing process. “In refinishing these woods, we try to bring out the best of their characters,” Wayne says. “You want to play up the character of the wood in relation to each room and to the other wood in the house. The quartered oak floor was the one thing that tied all the rooms together.”

The prevalence of natural woodwork also influenced the interior design of the home. “We knew we wanted to add a lot of color on the first floor, and we knew we had to work with the colors in the wood,” Lynda says.

To start the design process, Lynda worked with the homeowners to select the floor coverings. “I build my design for each room around the carpeting,” Lynda says. “We picked out all of the oriental rugs in one day.”

In selecting the floor coverings, furnishings, and accessories, Lynda followed the guidance of William Morris, one of the founding fathers of the Arts and Crafts movement. In a lecture before the British Birmingham Society of Arts and School of Design in 1880, he offered the following advice: “Have nothing in your houses which you do not know to be useful or believe to be beautiful.”

Over the course of the last century, that simple guideline has become a cornerstone of interior design philosophy. In the case of this home, evaluating each object for its usefulness or beauty established a solid foundation for the overall design. In a process that lasted more than three years, a remarkably small number of changes were made to the original design concept, and the foundation pieces—the oriental rugs and floor coverings—never changed.

Today, the bulk of the design work is done and the homeowners have settled into the beautiful space, which is both a tribute to the Arts and Crafts movement and a celebration of their love of color. It is also the perfect space for entertaining. “The success of the design is that it looks like it has always been here,” Lynda says. “It’s ageless, classical design but with a good bit of color.”

Entering from the foyer into the large reception hall, visitors are greeted with a spectacular view of the Atlantic Ocean and the Boston skyline. This one room holds all the elements of the Arts and Crafts style and highlights the

Above: This 1910 Craftsman showcases the natural beauty of local resources and celebrates the craftsmanship and creativity of the artisans of yesterday and today. | Below: The bluestone patio offers a spectacular view across the Atlantic Ocean to the Boston skyline.



natural beauty of the woodwork, the high coffered ceilings, and original stained glass. It also features one of seven original fireplaces. The rest of the house radiates out from the reception hall, which is the very heart of the home.

At the top of the grand stairway is a luxurious master bedroom suite. Large windows allow you to take in the view from almost any vantage point. The colors are simple so as not to compete with the view. “A blue and white bedroom is just the way to go with a room like this,” Lynda says. “The colors are soothing and relaxing—toned down a little bit from the color everywhere else.”

The master bath contains a large whirlpool tub and glass-enclosed shower. His-and-her dressing rooms connect the bedroom to the master bath and feature custom woodwork that hides the floor-to-ceiling shelving and closet space. Simple, contrasting chairs define the individual spaces. “His dressing room has a modern, straight-lined chair, while her dressing room features a beautiful bergère chair,” Lynda says. “The curvy wooden frame is very feminine and offers a nice contrast to the more masculine, modern piece.”

Downstairs, a hall behind the stairway leads to a large, modern kitchen and a charming breakfast room with original windows and a truly stunning view of the ocean. That view can also be enjoyed from the formal dining room, which is located to the right of the reception hall. “The dining room has a beautiful arched ceiling, which really shows off the bones of the house,” Lynda says.

Across the reception hall is the living room and study. “French doors go all the way around the room and lead out to a covered porch with a gazebo,” Lynda says. “The study next door is about half the size. This was the one major addition we made to the house. The fireplace is original, but all the woodwork is brand new.”

Dartmouth Woodworkers built and installed the architectural millwork in the study. But the finish on the woodwork was done by Wayne Towle, and getting virgin wood to look 100 years old is no simple matter. “When we strip the finish off old wood, we still have the patina of the wood,” Wayne explains. “A clean, brand new board just off the planer—there’s no patina to that wood. Our goal is to put that patina back into the wood; to soften the wood and give it character.”

To develop the color of the wood, Wayne uses aniline dyes, toning products, and oil glazes. “Think about different pieces of glass that are different colors,” Wayne says. “When you put one piece of colored glass on top of another, the resulting color changes. With wood, you’re getting a reaction. When I put orange on wood, the board doesn’t turn orange. If the board is brown to begin with, it’s going to turn a warm brown.”

The butternut wood in the study has a particularly warm tone. “Butternut is very, very refined,” Wayne says. “It is a hard wood, but it’s very soft in character—the grain



Above: The woodwork in the study is butternut. Although the wood is new, the finish creates what appears to be a period patina. | Below: Original windows in the breakfast room showcase the craftsmanship of the era and provide a truly stunning view of the ocean.





Above: A simple blue and white color scheme creates a relaxing environment for the master bedroom and showcases the ocean view. The millwork hides a built-in television. | Below, from left: The blue and white color scheme continues in the master bath. Downstairs, the sunroom frames spectacular views of the Boston skyline. | Facing page: Custom woodwork hides floor-to-ceiling shelving and closet space in his-and-her dressing rooms. Contrasting chairs, one sleek and modern and the other curvy and feminine, define the space.





pattern is muted a little bit and very delicate. The room is like a jewelry box. You open it up, walk in, and are just enveloped into this nice warm environment.”

The warmth of the study is in direct contrast to the cool, breezy feel of the adjacent sunroom. Originally a simple covered porch, the sunroom features cool white carpeting, large windows, and hand-crafted McGuire furniture. “The sunroom wasn’t going to be done when we started,” Lynda says. “Now it’s one of my favorite rooms.”

Outside, a vast bluestone patio runs the length of the house and incorporates an outdoor kitchen, al fresco dining area, large fireplace, several sitting areas, beautiful gardens, and a hot tub. Integrated into the patio are beautiful container gardens, designed by Michael Barbuzzi of Barbuzzi Landscaping.

“In choosing the plants, we had to make sure they would be able to handle the wind and salt spray from the ocean,” Michael says. “It’s a different ecosystem when you’re working so close to the coast.”

But selecting plants that thrive on a coastal property was only the first step. Michael also needed to define the various outdoor rooms on the patio. “We wanted to mix colors and textures of both the plant material and the planters. The height, size, colors, and textures of the planters are all different, but they complement each other nicely and help to define the space.”

It has been six years since the restoration work began. The gardens outside are maturing and the architectural woodwork is starting to develop its own natural patina. But each person who worked on the project still speaks about it with a distinct fondness—both for the owners and the home itself. For Lynda, the connection is personal and her satisfaction with the end result is tinged with just a hint of sadness.

“My grandmother and grandfather had a house very, very similar to this that was also built in 1910,” Lynda says. “Every time I visit this house, I remember details of the house where my mother grew up.” ■

Design Details

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