

Maine Home

July 2011

Winner of a 2010 Folio Eddie Award

+DESIGN

Home for the
Summer

On the **Beach**
On the **Coast**
On the **Farm**

July 2011

\$5.95

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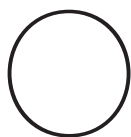
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BREATHING ROOM

A twenty-year courtship with
[Goose Rocks Beach](#)
culminates in a modern marriage of light and space

by Rebecca Falzano | Photography Brian Vanden Brink



n a summer morning ripe with sunlight, before the day's heat has settled in, Johanne Pérusse and architect Carol Wilson stand on the balcony of Johanne's beach house. "You can see the roof—it's right over there," Johanne says, the sound of surf between her words. She's pointing to the house that she and her husband, Pierre, rented when they first came to Goose Rocks Beach twenty years ago. Johanne was pregnant at the time, so their connection to this place is as old as their youngest daughter. "We got lost on the way in, and then we stumbled upon a little cottage," recalls Johanne. "It was perfect." And, like clockwork: "We fell in love."

The following summer, with their kids in diapers, the couple returned to rent another Goose Rocks house. And they kept returning, every summer, to that same house for five years straight, traveling the six hours from their home in Montreal. "We loved it—the place, the people, everything." Eventually, the owners of their annual rental house decided to sell it. "At the time, we had just bought our house in Montreal," says Johanne. They didn't want to overextend themselves with two properties, so they decided to pass. Over the years, they got to know the new homeowner and told her to let them know if she was ever interested in selling. "We liked the location. It was perfect for the kids and it wasn't too big," says Johanne. In 1999, the couple's wish finally came true: the homeowner was ready to sell, and in keeping with her promise, Johanne and Pierre were the first people she called. "We were very lucky. Her mind was set on selling to us." And she did.

For seven years, Johanne and Pierre summered in the house. They raised their children there, sandy feet and all, punctuating their long, dark winters in Canada with idyllic summers on the beach. As the years went by and the children got older, they began to outgrow the cottage, and Johanne and Pierre decided the family needed more room. "It was a great little house when we had young kids. It didn't matter to me if they would come back and sit on the couch with their wet clothes. But eventually it just felt too small," recalls Johanne. Rather than find a bigger house elsewhere, they decided to replace the cottage and build anew on the existing property. "The demolition is still on YouTube," says Johanne. "I've never watched it because, to this day, I can't even look at it without a lot of emotion."

To understand what the couple wanted in their new home, it helps to know what Johanne and Pierre had in Montreal: an old Arts and Crafts-style house built in 1908 that was replete with wood and oddly sized rooms arranged in a closed floor plan. When it came time to build on Goose Rocks, they chose the opposite approach: modern, open, bright, light, and airy. That's when they decided to bring in architect Carol A. Wilson of Falmouth, who is known for her distinctive modern architecture. "When I met Johanne," recalls Carol, "she told me about Goose Rocks Beach and the fact that they were in love with it. I walked around exploring, and I thought, 'There's a lot of very traditional architecture here.' From the start, we were concerned about designing a more contemporary house that would fit the site and its surroundings—and not be an eyesore in the middle of it all."

With Carol on board, they needed to find a builder—not just any builder, but one who could navigate the myriad complications inherent in building on Goose Rocks Beach, an area known for its strict code enforcement. The family hired Shawn Douston of Douston Construction in nearby Arundel. "We had a lot of constraints because the rules here are very strict about lot coverage and setbacks. We were only allowed to build up to 20 percent of

In the light-filled living room (opposite), seagrass chairs provide a pop of color and texture against the concrete floors and white walls. A gas fireplace is a quick source of additional heat when the family comes to stay in the winter. In the summer, glass doors extend the living space outdoors.

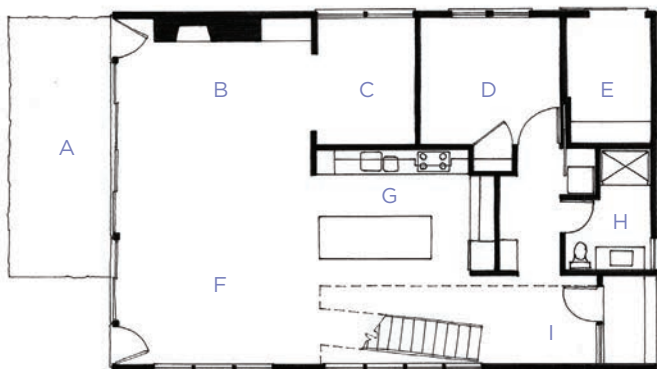
“You need breathing space, blankness.
Every moment doesn't have to be filled.”





- | | |
|------------------|------------------|
| A Terrace | G Kitchen |
| B Living Room | H Guest Baths |
| C TV Room | I Entry |
| D Guest Bedrooms | J Master Bedroom |
| E Storage | K Master Bath |
| F Dining Room | |

Lower Level



Second Level





the lot,” explains Johanne. With the setback and coverage limitations, the team was left with a 30-by-40-foot box to design and build within. “The footprint was a given,” says Carol. “We knew we had a box to design within, and there were some very strong givens,” including the four pine trees—one at every corner—that framed the site. The homeowners wanted the house to sit within the trees because they wanted to use them for privacy. As a result, the construction team was diligent about keeping the trees intact, and during the construction process barely a limb was harmed.

It’s no secret that modern design can be less forgiving. And despite the fact that highly technical modern construction is not Douston’s typical kind of project, the builders rose to the challenge. “I think it made them extra careful with the details,” says Carol. “With wall-to-wall, ceiling-to-ceiling glass, there was little tolerance for error,” says Shawn. “We used some materials that were rather unconventional for us—metal stairs, cable railings, and polished concrete floors. And with the steel frame substructure, you can see the cable running through the rooms—that was new for us, too,” he says. “The fact that we had a good, diverse, long-established crew in place made it work. We had great communication with the homeowners, despite them being in another country. And working with Carol was easy because she is so hands-on.”

The other givens for the design were plucked straight from Johanne and Pierre’s wish list: an open floor plan, a first-floor bedroom and bath, a television area (that could be closed off for the kids and used for guest overflow), and a deck. “I wanted this to be different than a house you live

For their kitchen (opposite), the homeowners were all about white: a “clean, washed out white.” To stay within their limited budget, they turned to white lacquered IKEA cabinetry—a far cry from the custom cabinetry the family has in their kitchen back in Montreal. “It wasn’t exactly what the builders were used to working with,” says Johanne, “but it worked with our budget and the space.”

Poured concrete floors throughout the first floor (above, left) are easy to maintain. “You don’t see the sand on it,” says the homeowner. “And it gets this really beautiful patina. You can see the moon shining on it.” The cable rods between treads on the stairs keep Carol’s open design intact while meeting code requirements. The wall of windows fills the first floor with light in both winter and summer.

Upstairs, bamboo floors bring some warmth to the minimalist design (above, right). Through sliding glass doors, a tree is visible—one of four standing guard, each at a corner of the house.

The buildable lot was a 30-by-40-foot box (immediate right). For the front façade, Carol designed a simple, blank wall with “Goose Rocks gray” shingles and a row of high windows.

Carol's space-saving design solution for the stairway (opposite) was to position it at an angle, breaking up the rectangular grid of the space and leading guests into the home, rather than directly up the stairs.



in year-round,” says Johanne. “It’s a summerhouse, so we always have lots of guests around, and we want everyone to be together. We didn’t want to have to send the kids to the third floor to watch television.” Carol designed a small den off the main living area with pocket doors that can be shut to keep the kids close but separate. She also managed to squeeze in a small laundry area and half-garage where the active family stores their bicycles, kayaks, and tennis rackets. “We had to calculate the square footage down to two decimal points,” says Carol. “Even the shingles had to be cut down—that half an inch mattered.”

With every inch accounted for, Carol had her work cut out for her when it came time to design the stairway. Her space-saving solution was to create an angled stairway that breaks up the rectangular space. “Just by turning it ever so slightly, it feels less static,” she says. Since it is the first thing that greets visitors when they walk through the front door, positioning was key. “Angling the stairway leads you into the space, as opposed to up the stairs,” Carol says. Open risers are prohibited in Maine, so it was also a challenge to build a stairway that was consistent with the home’s airy, open design. “We couldn’t have more than a four-inch open space,” says Carol, “and yet a closed riser would’ve closed up the space and blocked off the room.” The compromise was the installation of small rods between treads for safety.

Carol's talent for directing natural light permeates the house and

contributes to its connection to the outdoors. “In Maine, you want vertical, south-facing glass,” she says. A bank of high windows on the east wall floods the first floor with morning light in both winter and summer. Another hallmark of Carol’s architecture is her use of what she calls “breathing spaces.” That is, quiet areas that don’t shout for attention. The front wall of the house, for example, is a blank vertical canvas free of ornamentation that—as the homeowners learned—is not for everyone. Balancing the house’s modern façade are white-cedar shingles stained “Goose Rocks gray” to match the neighboring houses. “I heard one or two comments about that wall,” says Carol. “People don’t understand that you need downtime, you need breathing space, blankness. Every moment doesn’t have to be filled.”

The same philosophy can be applied to the family’s time in the house. Despite enjoying an active lifestyle (tennis, kayaking, bicycling), they also welcome rest and down time. It’s been twenty years since they first fell in love with Goose Rocks, and now Johanne and Pierre have another object of their affection.

“We used to come for the ocean,” Johanne says. “Now we come for the house.” **MH+D**

For more information, see Resources on page 111.



BRIGHT IDEAS



- Small, simple footprint: less than 20 percent of the site is impervious surface
- Radiant heat in concrete slab
- Very efficient use of interior space; space serves many functions
- All utilities are in a closet on the third floor
- Lots of storage for summer gear
- Durable, no-maintenance materials, inside and outside
- Natural cross-ventilation in all rooms
- South-facing glass with overhangs
- All landscaping undisturbed within 5 feet of the building

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