New England
HOME
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Points of Distinction

Bespoke details add personality

Making ROOM

Everyday life—not square footage—shaped this waterfront home's most memorable gathering places.

The homeowners brought the living room's painting by Ohio-based artist AJ Oishi with them when they moved to Rhode Island. **FACING PAGE:** Architect Donald Powers broke up the home's massing with layered rooflines and carefully scaled gables, giving the 4,000-square-foot house a deceptively modest presence.

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LEFT: The river elevation unfolds gradually, with porches and terraces encouraging family and guests to move easily between indoors and out. **BELOW:** Between the living room's swivel chairs, artisan Jeff Soderbergh transformed a tree removed during construction into a sculptural table, stacking concentric slices to reveal the tree's growth rings.

Donald Powers wasn't thinking about square footage when he designed this Portsmouth, Rhode Island, house. He was thinking about the Fourth of July.

"How does the house work when it's filled with people?" the architect asked himself. "You need several different places where small groups can gather."

For the homeowners, it wasn't a hypothetical exercise. They bought a Sakonnet River lot to be closer to the husband's brother and his spouse, who live nearby. More than a waterfront retreat, they wanted a place where family and friends would always want to return. That goal shaped every decision. Despite tight Coastal Resources Management Council restrictions, Powers designed a Shingle-style home that feels modest from the street but opens to the river. Inside, it unfolds as a collection of intimate gathering places rather than one oversized great room. "We wanted it to look like it belonged here, like it had always been here," the wife says. "It feels historic."

Interior designers Patti Watson and Wendi Dicely-Scalora soon realized the project wasn't simply about aesthetics. It was about daily rituals.

Rather than asking about finishes, they wanted to know how the couple lived—sharing morning coffee, baking bread, tending the garden, and welcoming family. "They're such family-forward people," Watson says. "What's important is the moments they spend in conversation with each

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Sea Pearl quartzite countertops, leafy ceramic tile, and stools by Rhode Island maker O&G Studio echo the landscape beyond. **FACING PAGE:** Designed to welcome a crowd, the custom-crafted walnut dining table expands with pullout breadboard ends to seat twelve. Overhead, V-groove paneling adds texture and a subtle sheen, giving the ceiling character without the visual weight of exposed beams.

other and in smaller groups."

Those routines drove the design. The husband loves to bake, so the pantry doubles as a dedicated baking room, with a wall oven at a comfortable height and enough warmth to proof bread dough while guests gather around the kitchen island or linger in a nearby sitting area. Throughout the house, quiet textures—white oak, walnut, woven lighting, and softly figured stone—create warmth without competing for attention. "They didn't want anything to shout," Watson says.

Builder Wade Paquin matched that understated

Flexible furnishings—including two ceramic garden stools repurposed as drinks tables—lush native plantings, and broad Sakonnet River views create an outdoor room equally suited to quiet mornings for two and holiday weekends with family.

ABOVE: Designed for two, the shared office includes built-in storage, comfortable seating, and a private balcony, making it easy for the couple to work side by side. **LEFT:** The family dubbed this cozy retreat the Away Room—a place to watch television, read, or simply enjoy a little solitude without leaving the action entirely. **FACING PAGE:** This built-in window seat transformed leftover attic space into one of the homeowners' favorite places to curl up with a book.

approach with what he calls "a high-performance, low-maintenance home," combining energy-efficient construction and carefully selected materials to create a healthy home built to last.

Outside, landscape architect Laura Knosp of Ryan Associates Landscape Architecture and Planning transformed a site overrun by invasive Japanese knotweed into native gardens, reclaimed-granite terraces, and a vegetable garden that satisfies the husband's passion for gardening while extending the home's welcoming spirit into the landscape.

The house is filled with reminders of why it was built. A porch swing looks toward the nearby home of the husband's brother and his husband. The living room's accent table, fashioned by artisan Jeff Soderbergh from a tree removed during construction, was their surprise housewarming gift to the homeowners, preserving a piece of the

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LEFT: The primary bedroom's soft textures, natural materials, and restrained palette create a restful retreat, allowing the architecture and changing light to take center stage. **BELOW:** Walnut cabinetry and Ocean Blue quartzite bring warmth and subtle color to the primary bath. **FACING PAGE:** Landscape architect Laura Knosp designed the grounds as a series of outdoor rooms, with the firepit creating a natural gathering place as the sun goes down.

property—and the family story that inspired the move to Portsmouth.

Powers's Fourth of July test didn't take long to prove itself. "Our first full season, we had forty-eight house guests," the husband says. "It's been an amazing house for that."

Yet it feels just as comfortable after everyone has gone home, when bread is rising in the pantry and the first cup of coffee is carried out to the porch overlooking the Sakonnet.

"We love this house every day," the wife says. "We can't imagine it any other way."

EDITOR'S NOTE: *For details, see Resources.*

ARCHITECTURE: Union Studio
INTERIOR DESIGN: Taste Design
BUILDER: WKP Builders
LANDSCAPE DESIGN: Ryan Associates Landscape Architecture and Planning