

RIVER & SHORE'S

COASTAL HOMES



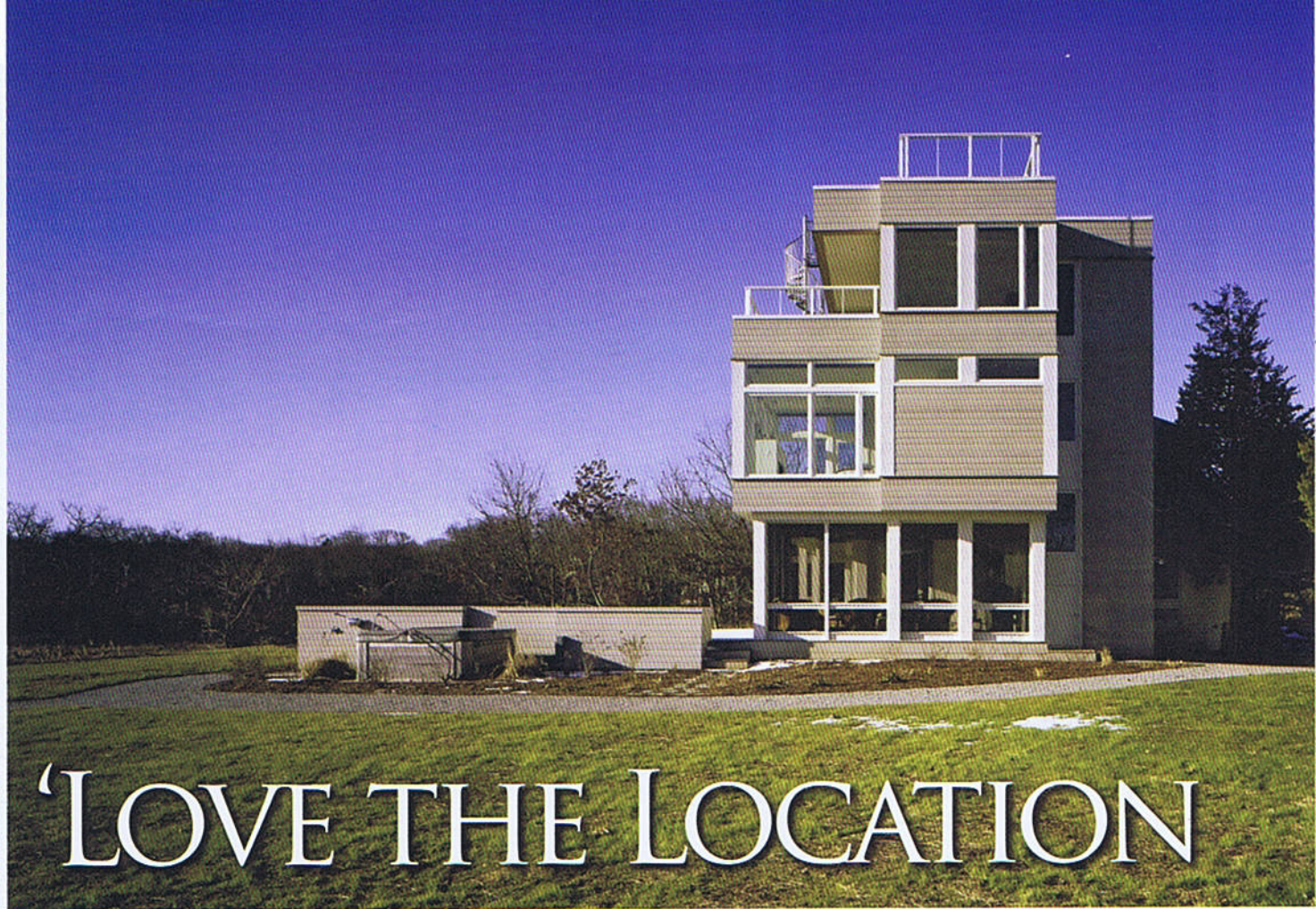
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'LOVE THE LOCATION

– HATE THE HOUSE'

Architect and homeowners work in concert to change that sentiment

By Francis Albis

“DO YOU THINK we can go up higher to get a better view?” the homeowners asked at a point well into the renovations of their Guilford home.

They could not resist the urge for an even higher vista, and the roof above the third-floor studio addition was their focus. They asked if we could also build a deck there.

We discussed the logistics of the request with the framing contractor, master carpenter Sal Laudano of Laudano Building & Remodeling, who

gladly accepted the challenge.

Accessed via a new exterior spiral stair from the studio's deck, the effort was well worth it. Anyone who braves the vertigo-inducing trip up the spiral stair is treated to unobstructed 360-degree views of Long Island Sound, the beautiful salt marsh in the foreground and back toward the town green with its surrounding church steeples.

This one example of a desire for view was the theme for the entire project, which began in 2008 when the homeowners contacted us, asking if we would be interested in helping them renovate a home they recently



Top, a room with a view ... or should we say rooms with a view was the theme for this project. Left, the homeowners wanted a modern look, but with a New England coastal character. Photos by Woodruff/Brown Architectural Photography

purchased in Guilford.

Their description of their new property was succinct: We love the location. We hate the house.

The house in question was a nondescript, circa 1980s home, which sits on a uniquely private site along the coast. The long trip up the crushed Stony Creek granite driveway brings you to a sheltered setting; an opening between the existing house and the detached garage reveals the salt marsh and, glistening beyond that, Long Island Sound.

The new homeowner's overriding criticism of the house was that it took no advantage this wonderful setting. In fact, it seemed as if there was almost a conscious decision by the original designer to avoid the views.

The master bedroom was on the first floor, had two small windows and no water view. Also, on the first floor on the waterside, a corner of the house with the most exposure to the salt marsh and view of Long Island Sound was occupied by a windowless laundry room.

The same corner on the second floor was no better; a closet was located there. A greenhouse addition on the first floor blocked even more of the

impressive landscape.

The situation wasn't any better on the balance of the second floor, all of the windows on the waterside were set into deep recesses in the roof, the sides of which acted as blinders to the view.

First and foremost, the homeowners requested that the house take much more advantage of the view. They also wanted to have a modern aesthetic yet include vernacular design characteristics of the New England coastal town of Guilford.

The spaces created, as well as the palette of materials used, were deliberately kept simple and quiet in order for the house to serve as a backdrop to the beautiful site.

The design solution consisted of two main components, the first being a complete renovation of the existing block of the house, including all new windows and interior finishes. The second component was to "bookend" the existing block with additions to create a new living room on one end and a new master bedroom suite on the other. To break down the scale of the exterior, we wrapped the new work in a different siding material from the existing. All of the work on



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The living room offers a panorama of the marsh, rock outcroppings and Long Island Sound in the distance.

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The master bedroom is minimally furnished: The stars of the show here are the three walls of floor-to-ceiling glass.

the existing house was sided with classic clapboard siding painted a soft white. The additions were finished with a cedar siding that was left unpainted and allowed to weather a silvery gray.

The cedar tongue-and-groove siding is based on a pattern that has been around for a long time, but it installs very flat and tight with sharp, clean, shadow joints. It is a material that bridges modern and traditional aesthetics nicely.

It is also a fairly unforgiving material to install without a lot of room to play and the design calls for all of the outside corners to be mitered, including the 33-foot-tall corners of the new stair tower.

It helps when you have a perfectionist like Sal Laudano doing the work. Each mitered corner is tighter than the next — it is furniture-grade craftsmanship at the scale of a house.

On the waterside and facing the renovated swimming pool, the two bookends on the first floor are connected by a “back porch.”

While the homeowners love the outdoors, they informed us that they



The kitchen is bright, airy and opens to the view.

are not “sun worshippers” and wanted protection from direct sunlight. The solution was a continuous porch roof covered with a soft gray standing seam metal. The depth of the porch was carefully considered, deep enough to provide shade but not so deep as to compromise the views from inside.

On the inside of the home, the revised first-floor plan is a modulated sequence of spaces, both in terms of scale and view. The existing front entry opened up to the back side of a masonry fireplace — and no view. This obstacle was removed and replaced by a two-sided fireplace, which is shared

with the dining room beyond.

The living room sits free in the plan, having expansive amount of glass on three sides offering the best panorama of the marsh, rock outcroppings and Long Island Sound.

This space also has the highest ceilings in the home, with a single gentle pitch rising to a 15-foot-wall of windows. Connecting the dining room and living room is a space the homeowners refer to as their "winter" living room because of its more intimate scale.

While this space still affords beautiful views, its lower ceiling and white oak and black granite-faced fireplace make it an inviting spot when the winter winds rush in off the water.

The two major changes on the second floor were the opening up of the existing stair hall and the addition of the new master bedroom suite. A new shed dormer was added at the top of the stair, creating a space lined with bookshelves and a window seat bringing in soft light from the north. The bookshelves continue down a hallway leading to the master suite.

The bedroom itself is a modest size, with room for the bed, a minimalist stone-clad gas fireplace and a vintage Hans Wegner lounge chair and not much else. The stars of the show here are the three walls of floor-to-ceiling glass.

When one enters the room, the eye is immediately drawn to the horizon

beyond with the linear bands in the windows reinforcing the horizontal convergence of marsh, water and sky beyond. The view even plays a big role in the master bath. A wall of mirrors in front of the custom vanity reflects the view of Long Island Sound behind you.

While we had primary control of the design and materials of the house's exterior and the overall interior layout, the homeowners played a much more involved role developing the interiors. Both have design backgrounds, in architecture and in literature, and both are avid painters.

The homeowners had strong opinions about what they wanted for the interior spaces both in terms of the feeling of the rooms and for specific materials to be used.

The interior palette is simple but warm and casual. The flooring throughout the first level is natural quartzite stone tiles, the second and third levels have oak hardwood and organic wool carpeting. The overall color scheme could not be simpler: All of the walls, windows, doors and trim are painted the same soft white.

The kitchen and bath carry on with the subdued themes of natural stone floors and counters, reclaimed ceramic tiles with accents of glass mosaics.

The homeowners were also responsible for all of the furniture and accessory selections.

For an architect who does residential design, the most stressful part of

the process is toward the completion when we turn over "our baby" to the rightful owners and they bring in their own furnishings. It can be a very disappointing experience. However, for the Guilford house, it was just the opposite. The homeowners have impeccable taste.

The furniture is a comfortable blend of midcentury modern classics along with clean modern choices. A simple sectional sofa occupies the living room and the space is anchored by a massive driftwood table. In the winter living room, the homeowners blended Art Deco split reed lounge chairs, a warm wood Mid-Century coffee table, clear Lucite occasional tables and a super deep shag area rug; an unexpected collection that works.

As an interesting contrast, the homeowners have placed some antique pieces as a nod to the old New England location. The husband is an avid collector of antique ship models and nautical prints, which are carefully placed throughout the home. The artwork, much of it their own, is hung to great effect with much care given to the scale of the art and the rooms where they are displayed.

The end result of this collaboration between the architect/builder and the homeowners has not gone unnoticed in the construction and design community, the house is the recipient of a HOBI Award from the Home Builders Association of Connecticut, as well as a People's Choice Award from the Connecticut Chapter of the American Institute of Architects.

However, the architect and the owners both agree that the true success of this house renovation is how gracefully it recedes to allow the view to take center stage.

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