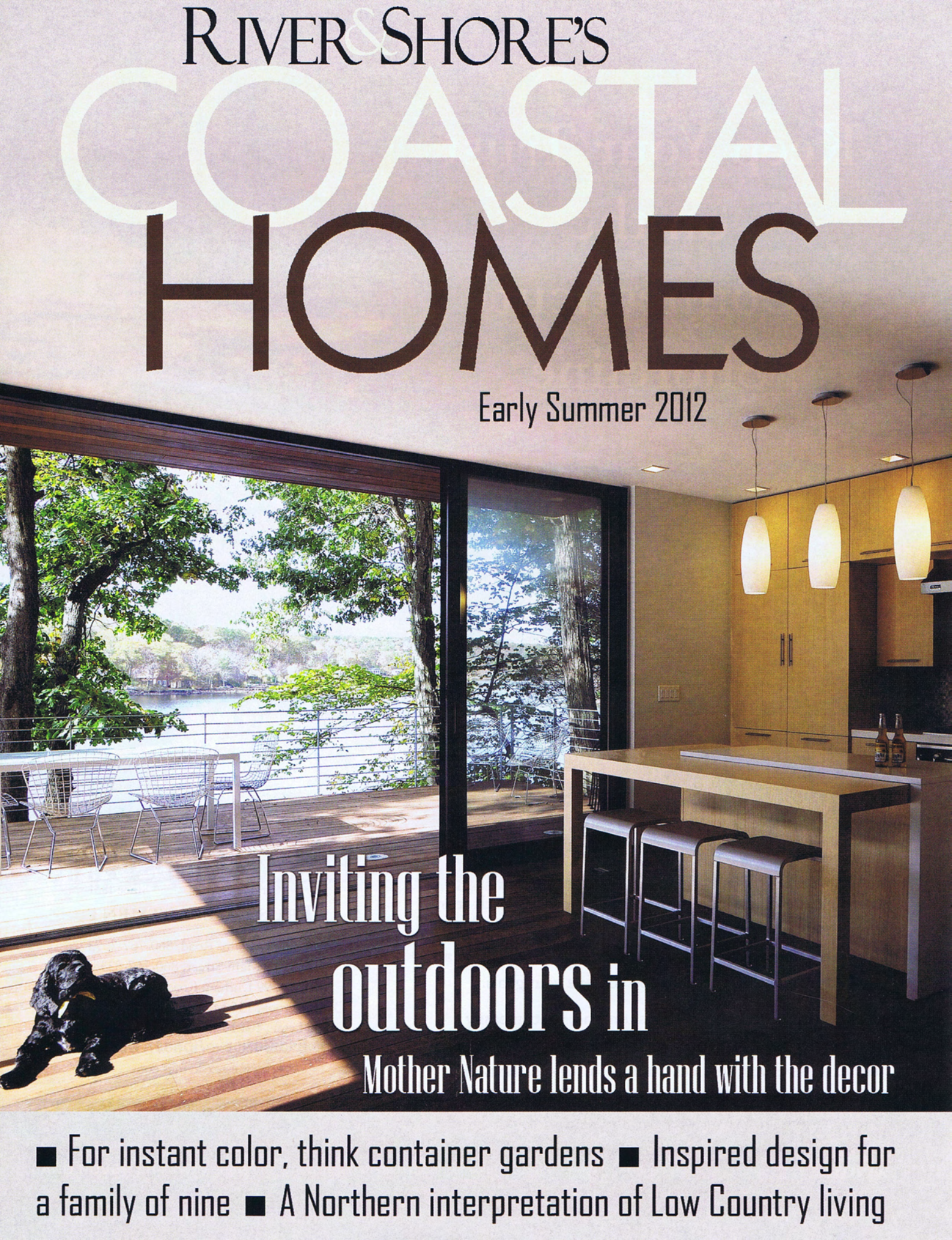


RIVER & SHORE'S COASTAL HOMES

Early Summer 2012



Inviting the
outdoors in

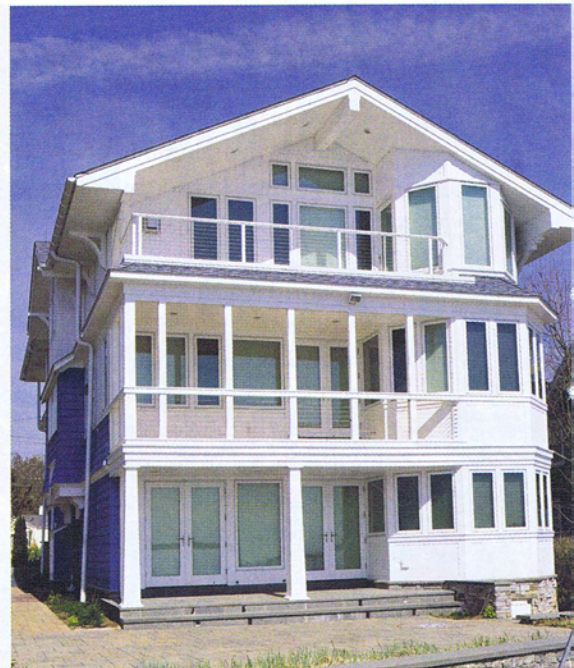
Mother Nature lends a hand with the decor

- For instant color, think container gardens
- Inspired design for a family of nine
- A Northern interpretation of Low Country living



Peter Casolino/Register photos

The view from the porch inspires its owners to stay home more often.



How do you build a big box of a beach house that doesn't look like a big box? That was the challenge the architect faced as he aimed to build a structure with the maximum square footage allowed by zoning.

Narrow lot inspires architect to new heights

By Francis Albis

THE HOTCHKISS GROVE NEIGHBORHOOD IN BRANFORD is the quintessential shoreline community, originally populated with beach cottages and dirt roads. Over the years, as properties along the water increased in desirability and value, the cottages were transformed into year-round residences.

As an architect, my first involvement with that transformation

THE HOTCHKISS GROVE PROJECT



The roof shape may be simple, but the gable facing the water and decorative brackets lend depth and shape.



A variety of siding materials, such as New England shingle siding, board and batten and crown molding visually break up the boxy shape of the house.

occurred in 1993 when my clients hired me to improve and enlarge a 700-square-foot cottage they owned in the neighborhood. While not directly on the water, the house sat midblock on one of the streets that run up perpendicularly from the shoreline. These streets extend uphill, affording views of the Sound that the owners wanted to capitalize on with their renovations.

In terms of shoreline property, the only thing better than a water view is to be right on the water. Fifteen years after the construction dust settled on their first Hotchkiss Grove house, my clients contacted me about another project in the neighborhood. They had patiently watched as properties came on the market over the years and jumped at the opportunity when a site directly on Long Island Sound became available.

The thrill of living literally steps



The street side of the house shows architectural details that give this house curb appeal.



Even the light fixtures on either side of the garage doors have a nautical influence.

away from the water's edge is unquestionable. However, the site was not without its difficulties. On the property was a tiny, unheated beach cottage whose better days were long gone; it was removed without much fuss. The real challenge was the size and proportion of the land, being quite small and narrow. And, as is typical in beach

communities, the narrow dimension of the lot faces the water, so that the spaces in the house must compete for the view.

Also, the owners' requirements for the house called for a fair amount of square feet to be built. The result is that the house filled up the maximum footprint permitted by zoning. In order for the house to accommodate the desired amount of square footage in its small footprint, it would basically have to be a big box.

The architectural design question was how do you make a big box not look like a big box? Or, more specifically, how to give the large flat walls of the house visual interest? Each of the side walls of the house is a flat surface measuring 55 feet long by 25 feet high. The project uses various design "tricks" to give these surfaces interest.

The first is the use of numerous different siding materials. The house sits on a stone-covered foundation that forms a solid visual base around the whole perimeter. Above this base is a story and a half of classic New England shingle siding. Finishing the top of the wall is a band of vertical board and batten siding that also runs around the perimeter. The design incorporates horizontal bands of crown molding trim to break up the surface of the wall. The last major design element is the roof, or more specifically, the roof overhang. The shape of the roof itself

is very simple with a hip on the street side and a gable facing the water. However, the overhangs are quite deep and include large, regularly spaced, decorative brackets to help give some depth and shadow to the flatness of the wall.

There are two places where the house breaks free of the flat walls of the "big box." The first is at the main entry, which is actually located on the side of the house. Because of the narrow lot, a two car garage takes up the width of the first floor at the front of the house. With the entrance being on the side, the dining room on the second floor and the master bath in the attic project out and define the entrance door on the first floor below.

This composition is topped by a simple gable roof and is the one instance where the eave of the main roof is interrupted. The second place the flat walls take a softer line is on the water side elevation. Here, a covered stone terrace on the ground

floor level and two sun porches above are carved out of the simple shape.

These porches and terrace highlight another design challenge inherent in the narrow lot. With the limited amount of wall frontage facing the water, the square footage inside would have to compete for the views. In the final design, it was a mere 14 square feet of the house that solved this challenge, more specifically the 14 square feet taken up by the residential elevator that was installed. By including the elevator, we were able to place the master bedroom suite in the third floor attic without forcing the owners to contend with three flights of stairs to get there. This allowed us to have three levels to share the view. To build only a two story home would have meant that a least one major space would have had to relinquish rights to the view.

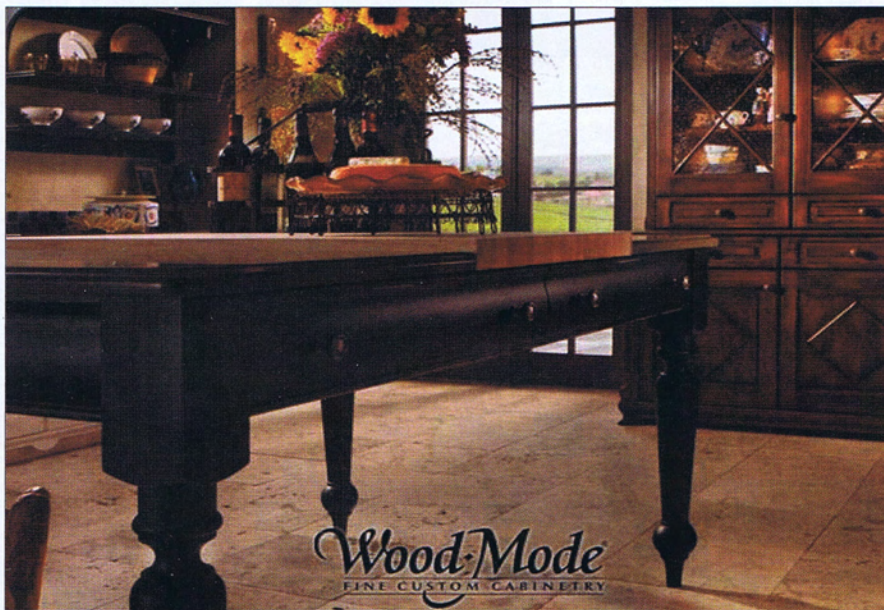
As an architect, it is often the case when designing houses with challenging constraints, that the end result

is actually enhanced by rising up to that challenge. By responding to the narrow lot width by building three stories tall, the main spaces on each floor enjoy the incredible view of Long Island Sound.

On the ground level, French doors in the family room lead directly to the stone terrace and seawall at the water's edge. The main living area is actually on the second floor. Here, the living room, dining room and kitchen all look out over the screen porch to the Sound beyond.

The master bedroom, by virtue of the elevator, is perched high up in the attic. At this vantage point, the views past the windows consist of only the stainless steel cable railing at the edge of the deck and the open water beyond. Without hint of land in sight, it is more like the view from a state-room in an ocean liner than a house on solid ground.

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