

ON THE WATER



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The land between the house and its side yard was terraced and landscaped to create a garden and family lawn that open to panoramic water views. *See Resources.*

GARY BREWER, PARTNER AT ROBERT A.M. STERN ARCHITECTS,
DESIGNS A SHINGLE-STYLE STUNNER ON LONG ISLAND SOUND

FRONT



THIS SHINGLE STYLE HOUSE

occupies a privileged spot atop Blue Water Hill. Once the location of a grand estate, the area was subdivided in the 1960s and small ranch-style houses were built in the ensuing decades, most of which were subsequently demolished as the town's real estate values escalated. Thanks to its panoramic views of Long Island Sound, our clients, a couple with two children, owned the best lot, but the existing house, at 1,700 square feet, was too small from the day the family moved in. They came to us requesting a shingle residence—one that, despite a considerable increase in size, would express a contrasting discretion.



We began by reversing the most common expectation of a shingle style house—that it have brown shingles. Evoking the name of the area, we specified shingles hand-dipped in blue stain, set off by white shutters and a gray roof. We also decided that the house should suggest the simplicity of the nineteenth-century beach cottages on Nantucket or Mackinac Island rather than making a big statement. Marking the entrance are a white picket fence, three discreetly scaled shed dormers above trelliswork trained up with roses, and a cheerful painted porch.

While the front facade features small double-hung windows and shutters appropriate to the style, we exchanged those on the water side of the house for nearly full-height glazing to capture the magnificent views. Within, we explored our interest in period detail to craft animated surfaces that infuse even the “serious” rooms with exuberance and delight. The entry and stair hall set the tone, with ceiling beams crossing v-joint boards, high wainscoting and robust casings, and classical elements deployed in a freeform manner characteristic of the historic shingle style.



In the entry (THIS PAGE), the elliptical main stair, board and beam ceilings, and decorative details establish the expressive play of materials and forms in the house. The porch (OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP), with exposed rafters and custom light fixtures, spans the living and dining rooms and looks across the pool to the Sound. The family room, at the end of the pool, is its own pavilion and connects to the main block of the house through the breakfast room and kitchen. The front door (OPPOSITE PAGE, BOTTOM) is framed by custom leaded side lights and a transom, which create a welcoming entry. See Resources.





The dining room (OPPOSITE PAGE), which incorporates a cork-finished ceiling with a herringbone pattern, can be closed off from the living room with pocketing oak doors. In the kitchen (ABOVE), white tile, marble countertops, and glass-fronted cabinets all evoke an earlier era. In the family room (BELOW), the tall octagonal trayed ceiling captures the space beneath the roof. See *Resources*.





THE HOUSE SHOULD SUGGEST THE SIMPLICITY
OF THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY BEACH COTTAGES
ON NANTUCKET OR MACKINAC ISLAND



The living room (ABOVE) continues the motif of ceiling beams crossing V-joint boards. The custom mantelpiece draws the attention inward; fully glazed walls open to the expansive views. French doors connect the master bedroom (TOP RIGHT) to an ensuite sitting room with a wood-burning fireplace. See Resources.



The plan developed primarily in response to the waterside location, and the requirements of a young family. We oriented the major rooms toward the water—the living room with its projecting cylindrical bay, dining room, kitchen, breakfast room (which share a wraparound porch), and family room are all lined up along the L-shaped perimeter. On the second floor, the master suite and two children's rooms are on the water-facing side of a single loaded corridor arrangement. A fourth bedroom for guests, like the library directly below it, overlooks the side yard.

The main level is divided into two zones: there are the more formal rooms—the entry/stair hall, living and dining rooms, and the library, which are often used for entertaining—and the more casual suite of spaces in which parents and children typically spend most of their time, i.e., the kitchen, and breakfast and family rooms. The master suite is set above the public areas because they are quieter, and is accessed via the main stair; the kids' rooms

are over the informal zone, and a secondary 'back' stair links them to it. The American preference for open-plan living saves the two halves from Balkanization: A strong visual connection dissolves the divide, as does the shared view.

Ordinarily, when architects discuss contextualism, the conversation focuses on design—that is, how a new building will relate, aesthetically, to its surroundings. Here we concerned ourselves with contextualism of a different sort. As is often the case in highly desirable communities with much sought-after building sites, the project came with challenges—planning and zoning conditions, height limitations and setbacks—that, taken together, had a significant impact upon our design. Yet with thoughtful planning and imagination, we were able to answer all of the town's contemporary requirements while still producing a modern family house that would have been entirely at home in an earlier century. ●

—Gary Brewer, project partner