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# Cape Cod

RECONSTRUCTION



AN EAST COAST COUPLE LOVINGLY RENOVATE THEIR



CLASSIC FAMILY HOME WITH **THE BEST OF OLD AND NEW**

For a full decade, Lance and Tracy Isham discussed renovating their classic, shingled cottage on Cape Cod. Why the foot-dragging? In this renovation, there was much more than style and function to consider. There was not only the history of the 1928 home to take into account but also the many city ordinances that preserve the beauty of the Cape. And then there was the even more complex issue of family, and the fond childhood memories that were attached to every room and woven tightly into the furnishings.

This was not a design job for the faint of heart.

The charming house has been in Tracy's family since the 1940s. She had summered in the home with her mother, stepfather, and seven siblings most of her life. When she and Lance, then a vice chairman of Polo Ralph Lauren Corporation, bought the house in 1996, they began thinking about how to make it live better for them—not to mention their newly blended family that included four adult children and now also embraces 11 grandchildren—while preserving the spirit of the home, familiar to legions of extended family members.

"For years," says Tracy, who also retired from Ralph Lauren, where she and Lance met, "I didn't have the heart to make changes. It still felt like my mother's house. It was vitally important to retain the feeling of home for the whole family."

The house was built in 1928 by Billy Mitchell, the former general who was instrumental in forming the U.S. Air Force and was court-martialed for insubordination when his forceful belief in air power wasn't shared by higher-ranking officers. (For you trivia lovers: Gary Cooper starred in a movie based on Mitchell's life—*The Court-Martial of Billy Mitchell*.)

Talk about preservation pressure. What Lance and Tracy wanted, in effect, was a renovation that didn't look or feel like a renovation. Their growing family and post-retirement lifestyle (the two use the place as home base) demanded the structure's overhaul. With young grandchildren summering in the house as well, they needed more space for low-key family gatherings.



**Above:** The living room, adjacent to the sunporch, has three separate seating areas and is decorated in soft gray and ivory linen. **Opposite:** Tracy and Lance Isham enjoy summer from their deck. **Left:** The deck—the stage for many parties, including Lance's annual neighborhood barbecue—and the pool were built by Tracy's parents. **Previous pages:** Perfect for morning coffee and naptime for Lucy ("We call her Lucky Lucy," says Tracy), the sunroom furnishings were left casual, but updated with hard-wearing Sunbrella outdoor fabric. The blues of the room mirror the colors of Nantucket Sound.



**Opposite:** The family's antique dining table was retained; the side chairs were reupholstered in summery stripes. The host chairs were custom-made to provide extra seating.

**Above:** The kitchen once had all the charm of the set of *The Honeymooners*, laughs Lance. Old green linoleum has been replaced by walnut floors accented by marble counters.

**Below:** This triptych is the inspiration for the sun, water, and sky palette in the dining room.





In 2006, they were ready to dive into the renovation of the main house. And they had their dream team. It started with former Ralph Lauren colleagues Mary Foley and Michael Cox, now principals of Foley & Cox design firm in New York City. They also tapped Boston architect Douglas Dick and local contractor Craig Ashworth. The goal was a seamless renovation, blending old with new to conjure up a fresh attitude for year-round living without marring the summerhouse spirit.

The project started as an update of the main living areas, plus a two-story bump-out to one side of the house that would accommodate a master bedroom and sunroom/library/office. Then, when structural issues were uncovered, it snowballed into a complete renovation. "In the end," laughs Lance, "it was in essence a teardown—we just did it on the inside."

And they kept their eye on the initial goal. "We developed an interior concept that would maintain the home's history and continue to reflect the personality of the family," says Cox. "For example, the footprint of the dining room did not change, but additional ceiling height was captured during the renovation, and new wood floors were installed. The raffia-covered walls had been redecorated over the years with white paint. We

took them back to the original concept by choosing an updated, natural raffia-weave wall covering."

The living room layout also remained the same, but larger, more energy-efficient windows replaced their drafty predecessors—adding a real comfort factor for Lance. "It's nice to be able to read the Sunday paper there without having it flapping in the breeze," he jokes.

In fact, the flow of the living room stayed more the same than anyone originally intended. "It was funny," recalls Cox. "We probably drew up 10 different furniture arrangements for the living room, but we ended up using the exact same arrangement the family had long enjoyed."

"All those years of relaxing and entertaining had already shifted pieces into their optimal locations." He adds that the "room is as comfortable for large cocktail parties as it is for small conversation groups." So the room's well-settled sofas

**Above:** Black lacquered walls set off the crisp white woodwork in the Ishams' family room. Horizontal stripes add a fresh twist to draperies. **Opposite:** The newly added library gives Lance a quiet place to work, and its shelves give Tracy space for cherished collections, including a shadowbox by Anthony Antine called *A Gentleman's Club*.



**Above:** A treetop master bedroom was gained in the renovation. Walls are upholstered with a paper-backed linen. **Top left:** Vintage pieces like this writing desk were refinished and refreshed. All of the art in the home was reframed to coordinate and lend continuity. **Left:** In the new master bathroom, Foley and Cox added matching vanities to either end of the room. Matching round mirrors were purchased in London.

were re-covered using such fresh details as the leather welts that now outline the new linen upholstery.

Upstairs, a warren of five small rooms became three amply sized bedrooms thanks to the addition of the second-floor master suite. Ironically, this new space is now one of Tracy's very favorite spots in the house. "I love my bedroom," she says. "My children think there is a real chance I could become a shut-in. In the summer, it feels like being in a tree house when you look out over the tops of the trees. In the winter, there are great views of the water."

Clearly, Tracy is sold on the new look and livability. But the true test came a couple of Thanksgivings ago, when the entire clan converged to see and stay in the newly renovated home. "I was so nervous about my stepfather's reaction. He joined our family when I was young and loved the house, too," says Tracy. "But he came and pronounced that he loved everything we did. The heart of the place is still here, but it's now a more substantial home." ■

**Architect:** Douglas Dick **Interior designers:** Mary Foley and Michael Cox  
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