

Two houses,



one home

With kids in one wing and parents in another, the great room between brings a family together

BY JESSICA KEENER



British-born Kate and Aiden Petrie liked the idea of building two houses—one for the kids and one for the adults—connected only by a long great room, though it surprised some of their American friends. The transplanted couple—she is English, he is Scottish—felt that separate bedroom quarters, more commonly seen in England, would give their three young daughters their own space and encourage their independence.

Their architect, Peter Twombly of Estes/Twombly Architects, however, admits to having premonitions of teenagers slipping out the windows at night when he heard the idea. Kate, trained as an architect and now a passionate photographer, gave Twombly a detailed drawing of her concept. His worries faded as he envisioned making dual houses come together, noting that the Petries' design was still basic enough for him to have a significant impact on its form and function.

The collaboration begins

Over the next year, the Petries met weekly with Twombly, relying on his expertise to work out such complexities as lighting, plumbing, electrical, and construction plans. "It was my task to figure out how to make their concept buildable," he says. He started by pushing the two structures





A GREAT ROOM CONNECTS THE TWO WINGS
The living area of the great room is defined by a thick indigo Turkish rug and three comfy places to sit. A huge painting of the Petrie girls, done by a family friend, adds personality to the room.



AN INTIMATE SPACE IN A LARGE ROOM
Colorful touches along with traditional furnishings make the great room a melting pot of style drawn from the formality of the parents' house and the fun of the childrens'.

closer together. Says Kate Petrie, “He roped in the size; made better use of dollars spent to square footage.”

With waterfront land on Rhode Island’s Narragansett Bay, the Petries wanted to capture the ambience of elegant but informal early-20th-century beach houses without copying them. Twombly fashioned a more contemporary structure using materials typical of the beach house style—like weathered shingles and painted clapboards—and adding details such as exposed rafter tails.

“The old beach houses had formal, closed-up floor plans with strict separation between areas for service

and areas for entertaining,” says Twombly. While the Petries wanted a home that was more open and flowing, they still wanted to maintain the separation between the kitchen and great room. To that effect, the great room and the rooms adjacent are connected by passageways rather than doorways.

At each phase of the design process, Twombly presented the Petries with drawings, which in turn generated discussion and revision. Aiden Petrie, an industrial engineer and owner of a product-design company, relished the process of creating a home from scratch. “What are

The heart of the house

The one-story great room connects the second-floor bedroom areas—one for children, the other for parents. The room's long, narrow shape allows lots of light to pour in, making it bright and welcoming. It also makes the house feel spacious and uncrowded, even with three kids, two parents, and occasional house guests.

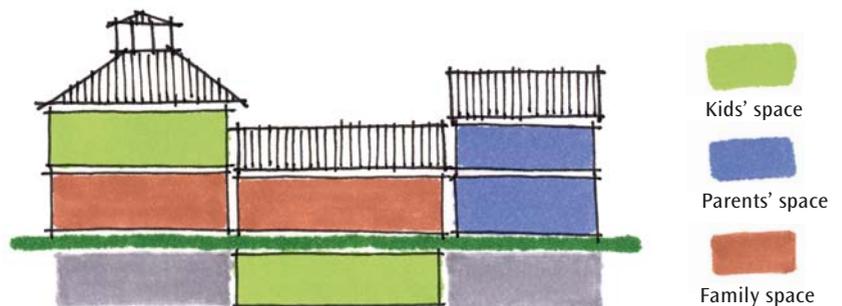


our priorities? How do we live? How do we want to present ourselves? How should the house relate to the land? I loved building from the ground up," he says.

Creating separate domains

To answer those questions, Twombly set out to make the two structures compatible but different, so that each side would reflect its unique function. He gave the parents' tower a formal, upright appearance. A wide widow's walk sits plainly atop a simple, flat roof. The

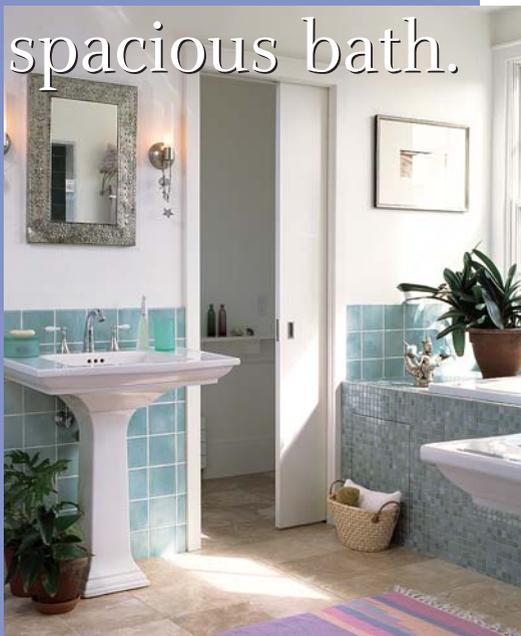
A place for everyone





The calm of the
parents' suite
is carried over into
the spacious bath.

AN UNUSUAL HEARTH IS THE FOCAL POINT IN THE MASTER BEDROOM
Muted colors create a sense of calm, and the beadboard wall is a throwback to early beach houses. Quiet, watery colors are used in the master bath as well.



small balcony off the master bedroom suite drinks in a sea captain's view of the ocean from a modest, rectangular frame.

In the master bedroom, the white walls and numerous windows bring to mind a serene summer cottage. The calm of the master suite is carried over into the spacious bath, which is bright, open, and symmetrical. Below the master suite are the study, with its own cozy fireplace, and a guest suite.

The children's tower, by contrast, is whimsical with its deep, sheltering roof overhangs and six-paned cupola. Kate's notion for the hexagonal cupola came from nearby Beavertail lighthouse. Shedding daylight into the children's foyer, the cupola glows like a beacon at night.

Twombly extended the hexagon idea by making the entire upstairs foyer six-sided—from floor to roof. The three bedrooms, a bath, and a stairway all open onto it. "It became more of a sculptured space, a room rather than just a hallway," he says.

The sense of fun continues down the stairs, with its cattail-inspired balusters and wavy window seat. The first floor houses the entry, the kitchen, a mudroom, and another flight of stairs leading down to a walk-out playroom.

A great room connects the towers

The Petries knew they wanted openness and flexibility. The concept of the great room, for example, came about, in part, to satisfy their love of entertaining. "We wanted to be able to push the furniture aside for big parties and Scottish dancing," says Kate.

Determining the great room's final shape, however, took some hashing out. Figuring out the amount of wall space versus windows and doors—an important consideration for hanging art—took "six to eight times to get it right," says Twombly. Another design challenge involved structurally incorporating the tie rods—steel tension rods that keep the roof from sagging—to line up properly with the windows.

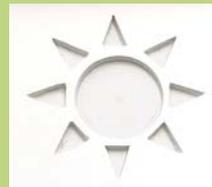
"Every stage was a discussion," says Kate Petrie. "The process involved compromise on both sides. But in the end we were definitely barking up the same tree."

At one point, Twombly proposed lining the vaulted ceiling with Douglas fir and painting it white. The Petries agreed in theory, but when the carpenters started nailing the unfinished wood up, the Petries fell in love with the natural wood color and couldn't bear to paint it.

"The contractors had to scramble a bit and prepare the wood differently," admits Twombly, "but it's one of those things that gets adjusted as you go along. Owners can have a change of heart." In the end, the great room, with its natural-finished wood ceiling, has a gracious, boathouselike feel.



The children's tower
is whimsical...the cupola
glows like a beacon at night.



**THE SUN, THE
MOON, AND
THE STARS**

With the girls' rooms all the same size, how did each child choose which to call her own? Each bedroom has a cutout of a sun, a moon, or a star in the door frame above the door. Flooded with light from a cupola, this fat little hallway with its bookcase and lighthouse for dolls is a cozy place for the girls to play.

KIDS RULE THIS PART OF THE HOUSE

Bright colors and whimsical decoration are telltale signs that you're in the kids' house. While identical in size, each room has its own color scheme and original art work—by the girls, of course.





Ocean waves are reflected in the window seat on the stair landing. The balusters are made to look like cattails, native to the Rhode Island landscape.



Above, from left: Some of the bathroom accessories look like washed-up sea glass. A bit of whimsy arrives in the master bath in the form of an exotic mermaid. Shells of all kinds are found throughout the house. Shades of beach stones are reflected in the slate tiles and black granite countertops of the kitchen (facing page).

Colors and shapes from nature found their way inside the house: a wave-inspired skirt on the window seat, a hearth made of beach stones, and walls the color of green lawns.



Grass-green walls in the great room are a nod to the lush lawn encircling the house, while the periwinkle door was inspired by the inside of a mussel shell.

While the shape of the house was derived from the needs of the family, the design details in the house come from their love of the surrounding landscape. They have literally and figuratively brought nature inside: rocks and shells are found throughout the house, the color palette for paint and tile comes from nature, and other interesting shapes are inspired by locale and legend.

Locally gathered stones were used to create the master bedroom hearth.





Details bring it all together

Totaling 3,200 feet, the house offers a medley of communal and private spaces. Except for the great room and the kids' playroom directly below it in the walkout basement, none of the rooms are extremely large. The adult wing is 18 feet wide. The girls' bedrooms are 12 feet by 13 feet.

To achieve the simple elegance of an early-20th-century beach house, Twombly introduced materials like bead-board for a cottagey feel. At the same time, he dressed things up by adding 8-inch baseboard to the great room. In the kitchen, he custom-designed crown moldings for the cabinets.

Understatement defines much of the interior. The first-floor office and mahogany deck extending off it are perfectly suited to tête-à-têtes. The built-in office bookcase, which Twombly designed, is without fancy trim so it won't detract from Aiden Petrie's prototypes and artwork hung on the walls. Says Aiden, "Our emphasis is on our living habits and, understanding that, keeping the whole place relatively low key."

Kate took charge of interior design and decoration. Throughout the house she chose colors that embraced the outdoors (see facing page).

But sometimes the array of design choices seemed overwhelming. Kate admits to obsessing over what materials to use. In the great room, for instance, the Petries opted for wide-cut floor planking, though contractors warned that it could buckle in moist, seaside communities. In fact, the weathered cherry boards do swell slightly in the summer, but the Petries have no regrets. "We like it that way," says Kate. "It gives the room texture."

As for the kid side versus adult side concept, in reality, says Kate, "It's about the division of activities. What's good is that everything circulates through the great room, but it doesn't feel like a passageway at all. It's spacious, light, and airy; it's really the hub of the house." **H**

Jessica Keener teaches writing at Boston University and writes about home design.

See Resources on page 90.

COMBINING CUSTOM AND STOCK FEATURES
In the kitchen, the simple crown molding is custom, but the cabinets are stock—a great way to create a unique look without breaking the bank.