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Creating a New Old House

by Russell Versaci

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A HOUSE OF SALVAGED BONES



It takes an artist's eye to assimilate antique materials and finishes into a new house so the look of age is convincingly authentic. Done by inexperienced hands without the vision for traditional forms, the combination of salvaged materials and reproduction fittings with new finish details can easily look clumsy and cobbled together.

The interior of this new old Cape Cod house has a light touch of Federal period detailing rather than heavy panel moldings of the earlier Georgian style. The door and window frames are simple pilaster-style casings.



John and Ginger Laytham recreated a classic Cape Cod cottage by hiring Gregory Schipa, a designer and builder with a historian's eye for detail, honed by years of working on restorations. Although the house is not a restoration, the casual observer could easily be fooled. Greg blended new architectural details with antique building parts inside and out to create an authentic reproduction of a Cape Cod house, finished in the Greek Revival style that was popular in New England from 1820 to 1850.

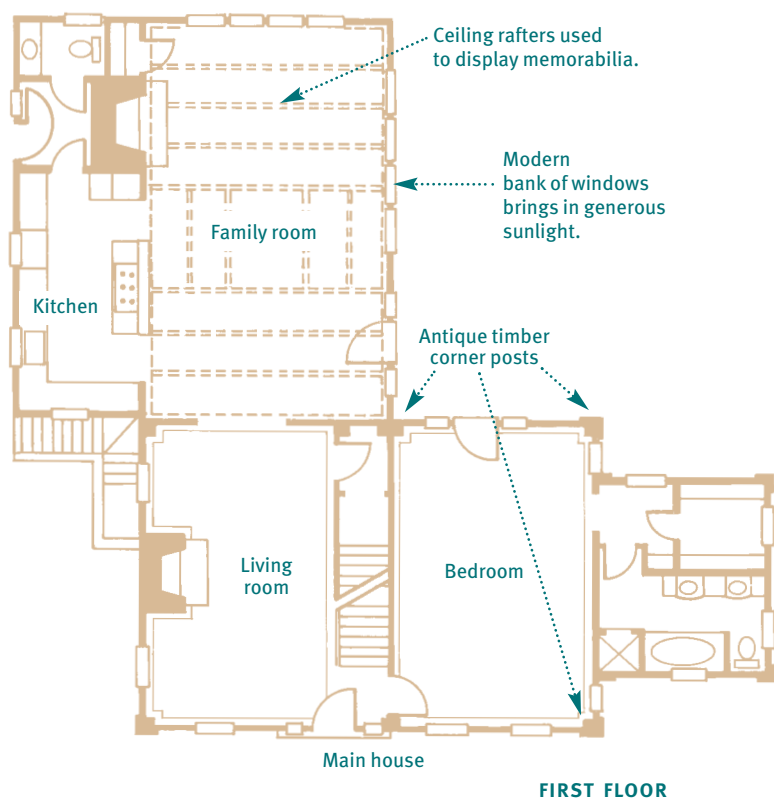
The framework is a post-and-beam timber frame pulled from an 1836 Cape Cod-style house the builder dismantled in Vermont. Greg combined the Vermont structure with the timber frame of an

old Nantucket fisherman's cottage to create an L-shaped wing for the Cape. But the foundations and wall finishes are new work crafted with authentic accuracy. The custom moldings and trimwork were fabricated with historic profiles and dimensions to match vintage fittings. As a result, the new house looks as if it had aged gracefully, because it is built with a blend of reproduction and salvaged materials.

A CLASSICAL COTTAGE SURPRISE

Though Nantucket is famous for its weathered shingle cottages from the early colonial days, the Laythams' recreated house dates to the beginning of the nineteenth century, when whaling brought prosperity to the island. Early cottages with simple unadorned shapes and sober shingle exteriors were later refined with the classical details of the Federal and Greek Revival styles, a historic architectural evolution reflected in this new old house.

A Vintage Framework



The new Cape Cod has a straightforward gable shape and a pitched roof without dormers. The white-painted facade is a hallmark of the Greek Revival style.



The traditional parlor is designed with Federal-style trimwork, a decorative style that continued to be used in the interiors of later Greek Revival houses. Unlike a traditional Cape, the staircase and doorway open to the parlor, a modern design that brightens and enlarges the front room.

Recycled pine floorboards, recovered from old New England buildings, cloak the rooms with a persuasive patina of age.

While the house is still considered a Cape, because it maintains the traditional story-and-a-half shape, the new house is a classical surprise. It is decorated in Greek Revival style, with some details that are new reproductions and others that are saved from an old Vermont house (circa 1836). Almost all of the elegant millwork patterns have been reproduced from remnants of the Vermont house. The vintage timber frames are wrapped in authentic Greek Revival details that look as if they dated back to the 1830s. These classical elements, painted white, are hallmarks of the Greek Revival style. White



The front facade of the guest cottage is covered in painted clapboards and has a decorative door surround. The gable ends are simple weathered shingles, dating the look of the cottage to the mid-1700s.

became the color of choice for New England houses after the Greek Revival took hold in the 1820s. In keeping with history, the new house is painted white to symbolize purity of character, a traditional virtue expressed in the style.

The front door's surround is elaborately framed by a pair of classical square columns that support a frieze and cornice. Classical pilasters wrap each corner



The antique front door in the entry vestibule was salvaged from an early nineteenth-century Vermont house. The painted green-black door has deep panel moldings and delicate multi-paned sidelights typical of the Greek Revival period.

of the facade, and a wide frieze band runs across the front above the pilasters.

A Traditional Back Ell

Though the facade appears symmetrical, it is actually unbalanced, with two windows on one side of the front door and only one on the other. This renders the cottage a three-quarter Cape, rather than a full Cape, which would have balanced pairs of windows. Many early cottages started out as a half Cape, with an off-center front door and two windows, but over

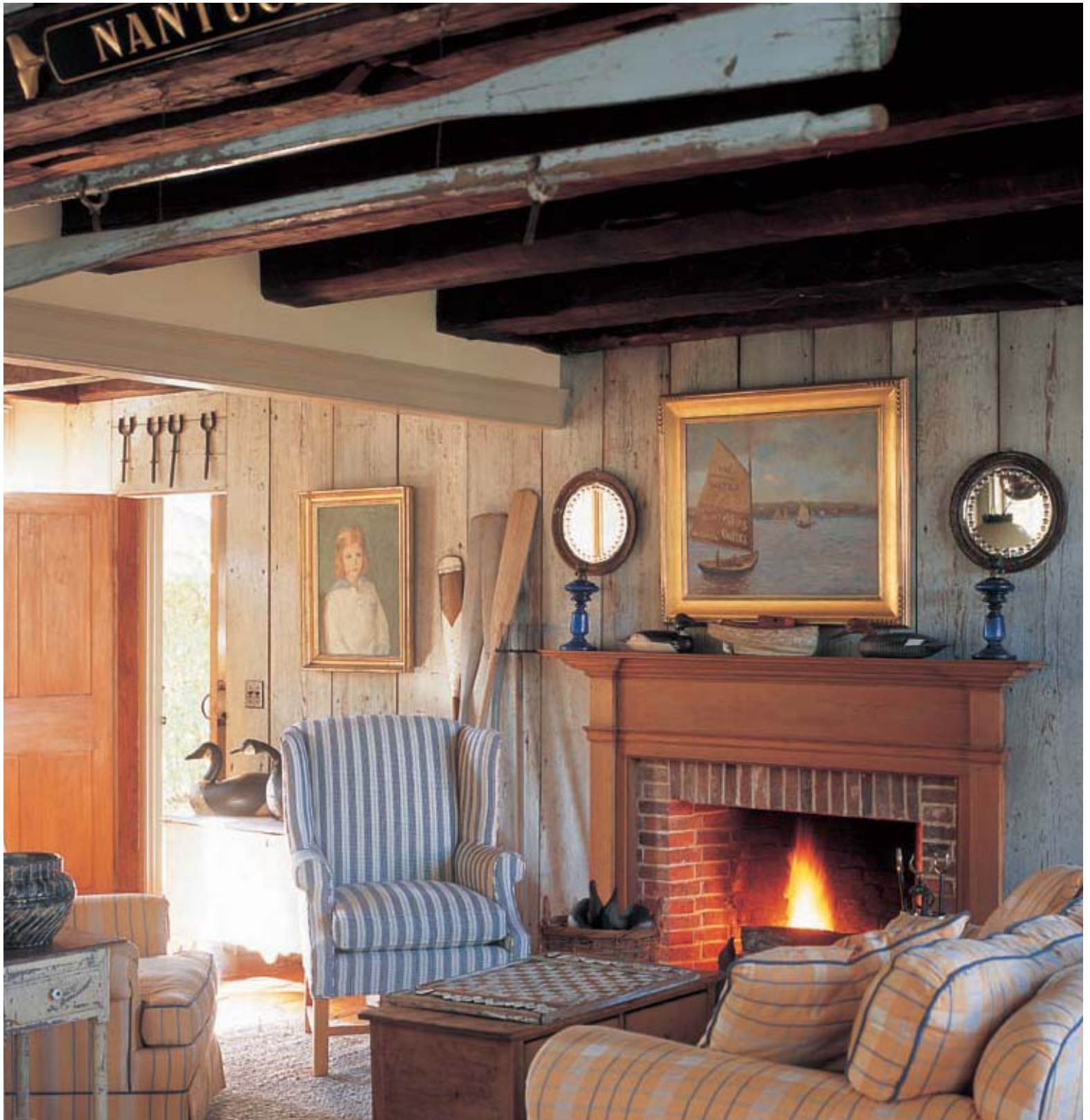
hallmarks of style THE CAPE COD COTTAGE

The Cape Cod style developed from the simple one-and-a-half-story colonial houses of eighteenth-century coastal New England. These houses were built by English settlers in a hall-and-parlor layout around a massive center chimney.

The earliest houses were covered with wattle and daub and thatched roofs, but the settlers soon discovered that hand-split wood shingles were more durable and versatile. As colonists prospered, they added two bedchambers above and then a lean-to addition out the back for a kitchen and larder, creating the New England saltbox.



By 1800, these colonial houses became known as Cape Cod cottages. The Cape-style house is distinctive because of its lack of ornamentation; plain boxed cornice; squared window heads; a door surround made of flat, square-cut boards, and naturally weathered shingles. Some later houses were sided with formal clapboard. A Cape embellished with classical details takes on the characteristics of the Georgian or Greek Revival style.



Inside the guest cottage, comfortable colonial period rooms are created with antique materials gathered from around New England, including wide plank floors, hewn ceiling beams, and walls of old wood paneling

ARCHITECTURAL DETAILS

CLASSICAL ENTRANCE PORTICO

➔ An elegantly wrought classical entrance portico is the signature feature of this Greek Revival-style Cape house. The millwork details are reproductions of an original portico from an

1836 Vermont house. The portico is a framed doorway that surrounds the front door, also called a frontispiece, and is composed of classical parts that simulate columns that hold up a horizontal frieze and cornice. Set in high relief against the clapboard wall, the sides of the portico are square Doric pilaster columns with faces that are fluted, or grooved. The original front door and sidelights from the Vermont house are incorporated into the new portico. Delicate muntins, or wooden grilles, divide the panes of the two sidelights and companion transom window that surrounds the front door.



time, they were extended in length to double the size of the house. Wings were often added off the backs of Capes to add depth to the house, forming a traditional kitchen ell.

The back ell of this house closely fits the classic image of a shingled Nantucket home. There are almost no decorative details on the exterior walls, which are covered in weathered pine shingles, except for simple flat corner boards and window trim painted white. The shingled walls and roof express the taut and spare look of early New England frugality.

The Greek Revival front and shingled back ell look as if they had settled into the property over

Finely crafted wooden moldings, which reproduce traditional profiles, decorate the corners of the house. In this detail, a square pilaster column anchored to the corner of the house supports the triangular cornice return. Deeply carved profiles accent the otherwise simple shapes of the moldings.





An antique mantelpiece brought from a New England Federal period house surrounds the fireplace. The dusty hue of the painted khaki woodwork gives the room a colonial cast.

many years, convincing some Nantucket natives that the house is historic.

A SPACIOUS ENTRY

Once across the granite threshold and through the dark green black paneled front door, visitors are immediately struck by the beauty and authenticity of the floors. Recycled pine floorboards, recovered from old New England buildings, cloak the rooms with a persuasive patina of age. The aged boards are the color of amber—some 12 in. to 15 in. wide, with a curiously gnarly texture, and their faces are pocked with worm tracks left long ago.

The front door of the main cottage opens directly into the living room parlor instead of into a foyer (shown on page 131). An original Cape would

The new house and guest cottage look as if they have aged gracefully, because they are built with a blend of reproduction and old salvaged materials.

have had a vestibule as a buffer to keep cold air from the rest of the house. In this house, the vestibule is opened up to make the parlor spacious.

A COMPANION COTTAGE

A guest cottage was built across the front walk from the main house (shown on page 132). Although it is new on the outside, the cottage's interior is finished with salvaged antique parts for the floors, walls, ceiling beams, doors, and hardware.

The molding profiles of the cottage's facade are simplified in keeping with the structure's secondary importance. The white-painted clapboard front and weathered shingle sides and back offer an example of how early-eighteenth-century New England houses looked. Often, early homes were unadorned, built by struggling colonists who had no time for ornament. Once settlers prospered, they embellished the front of their main homes, leaving the rest plain.

Antique materials woven into the construction of the cottage's parlor simulate an authentic interior (shown on page 134). Old square-hewn barn beams form the ceiling, and the fireplace wall is paneled in vertical boards with the original timeworn slate blue milk paint still intact. Period details that create a convincing portrait of an authentic colonial interior include the flat-panel doors with their cast-iron thumb latches.



Timber framing is the classic structure for a barn, but the same methods were used for house framing through the mid-nineteenth century. Two bedrooms fit in the attic, where traces of the old post-and-beam frame have been left exposed.