

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

An upside-down layout elevates this Rhode Island home's ocean views.

Written by JENNIFER SPERRY Photography by WARREN JAGGER



SV Design arranged the main living spaces of this coastal home on the second floor to better capture light, views and breezes. Extra-wide, generously proportioned stairs lead to the upside-down entry gable and custom front door by Captiva.



Embracing simplicity and a Bahamian feel, the living room blends neutral colors, warm wood tones, and woven textures, including light pendants by Mood and a wall mirror from Made Goods.

Sometimes a place just gets in your blood. For a Boston-based couple with a blended family of six children (some in their teens, others married with kids), that place is Westerly, Rhode Island. The husband has summered in the quietly chic beach community since childhood, and his wife adopted it as a summer spot as well.

Three years ago, the pair decided it was time to make their relationship to the nostalgic destination permanent and purchased a lot just one house back from the beach. "We've worked on houses I've lived in and houses he's lived in, but this house we finally did together," says the owner. "We really made it our own."

Over the years, the pair used one design firm, Siemasko + Verbridge (SV Design), consistently for their house projects, and this new venture was no different. With the house set back from the water, the first consideration was how best to capture the views. The agreed-upon answer: an upside-down layout, with the main living spaces plus a master suite above and guest bedrooms plus a second master suite (for their children with kids) below.

"It's something that's very commonly done on Nantucket," explains SV Design principal and lead architect Thad Siemasko. "The primary reason for an upside-down design is the views, followed closely by being able to better capture both breezes and light. It also allows the common areas to have more interesting ceiling shapes, and guests can enter their lower-level rooms without disturbing the family life happening upstairs."

One caveat with the upside-down decision was that the owners didn't want their front entry on the lower level. To mitigate the steep approach of a second-story front door and the required stairs, SV Design tiered the land against the house with hardscaping. "This trick makes you feel like you are on level ground until you get to the base of the wooden stairs," explains the architect.

Using the language of Shingle Style, Siemasko achieved a look that he calls "Southern New England Coastal," observing that "it's very beach oriented." The gambrel roof and shingle details, including occasional diamond punctuations and a wave pattern on the

gable over the front door, are all common to the beach community's historic architecture. "We didn't invent anything that wasn't there already," he contends.

The interior checks off one of the owner's musts: lots of sunlight. "I am a huge proponent of light; the running joke is I would build a glass house if I could," she admits. But it also represents a departure from her previous preference for big, bold color schemes: "This time I desired more simplicity; I wanted to just walk in and relax. We also spend a lot of time in the Bahamas," she continues, "where interiors are typically white with splashes of color, and that's the look I wanted here."

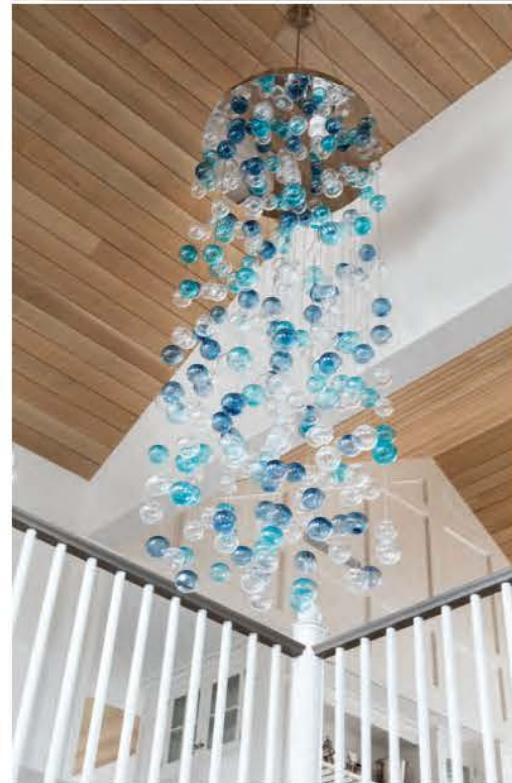
"There are lots of neutrals, textures and natural woods, with pops of color here and there," describes SV Design's Shelby Littlefield, ASID, who collaborated with the couple on the décor. But the interior has its playful side too, including a 12-foot-long "bubble" chandelier streaming down the front stair. Other whimsical strokes include a bunk room (complete with miniature door to the bathroom), surfboard bench in the mudroom, and synchronized swimmer wallpaper by Dupenny in the powder room.

Perhaps the most amusing flourish of all is the slide running between the upper and lower decks for the grandchildren. "It was in the back of our minds from a past home project, and we couldn't resist finally incorporating it here," notes the owner. Siemasko's idea to connect the guest cottage and main home with a bridge is another travel courtesy: "It wouldn't be very hospitable to make guests walk down then back up again," says the architect.

Even the owners' initial hesitation—the property's distance from the water—ended up working in their favor. "We're surprised by how much we love it," they say. "It's quiet and you feel like you're in the treetops. The beauty was not that far away after all." ■



ABOVE: Design details like Benjamin Moore's "Violet Mist" on the walls and a woven bed from Made Goods pay homage to the master bedroom's coastal setting. **OPPOSITE TOP:** A built-in bar separates the kitchen and dining area and provides easy-access snacks and drinks to those on the back deck. **OPPOSITE BOTTOM:** Sleepovers are encouraged in this whimsical bunk room, complete with a kid-sized "mouse" door leading into the adjoining bathroom.



TOP LEFT: Architect Thad Siemasko decided the guest quarters above the garage deserved a walkway to the main home. The arched pass-through underneath frames the ocean views beyond. **TOP RIGHT:** Two decks, a kids' slide in between, and two outdoor showers encourage outdoor living on the home's ocean side. **BOTTOM LEFT:** In the front entry, hand-blown glass balls in coastal hues stream down this 12-foot-long "bubble" chandelier by California-based Studio Bel Vetro. **BOTTOM RIGHT:** With a busy home regularly filled with family and friends, the owner wanted her kitchen to feel quiet and serene. Textured subway tiles shift in tone from light to dark blue, while quartz countertops mimic the look of marble without the maintenance.

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