

# the barefoot home



dressed-down  
**design** for  
casual living

Marc Vassallo



Openness. A lack of clutter. The two ideas are not exactly the same, but in a barefoot home, they often go hand in hand. Boston real estate developer Dave understood this intuitively when he decided to pare down and simplify his life. He took a few months off work and went on a road trip across the country,

## uncluttered home, uncluttered life

looking for ideas about the kind of house he wanted but mostly just chilling out. When he came back to New England, he bought a run-down cottage on Peaks Island, which sits in Casco Bay, three miles from Portland, Maine. He moved to the cottage and

Here's how to turn a cramped cottage into a bright, airy barefoot home: Blow out the walls, cut a hole in the ceiling, fill a gable full of windows, and refashion the interior with birch plywood, sandblasted glass, and ground steel that glints in the light.





The steel mesh that gives the interior much of its barefoot panache is a clever sandwich of two perforated screens, one with little holes, one with bigger ones, a combination that lets through a little light and view, but not too much.

found a new, less-stressful job in Portland. He went from wearing a suit and tie in the big city to pulling on a pair of jeans and ambling down to the ferry in the morning for a 15-minute boat ride to town. When Dave called architect Will Winkelman to remodel his home, he was ready to make his cottage as uncomplicated as his life.



## Cottage on the outside, loft on the inside

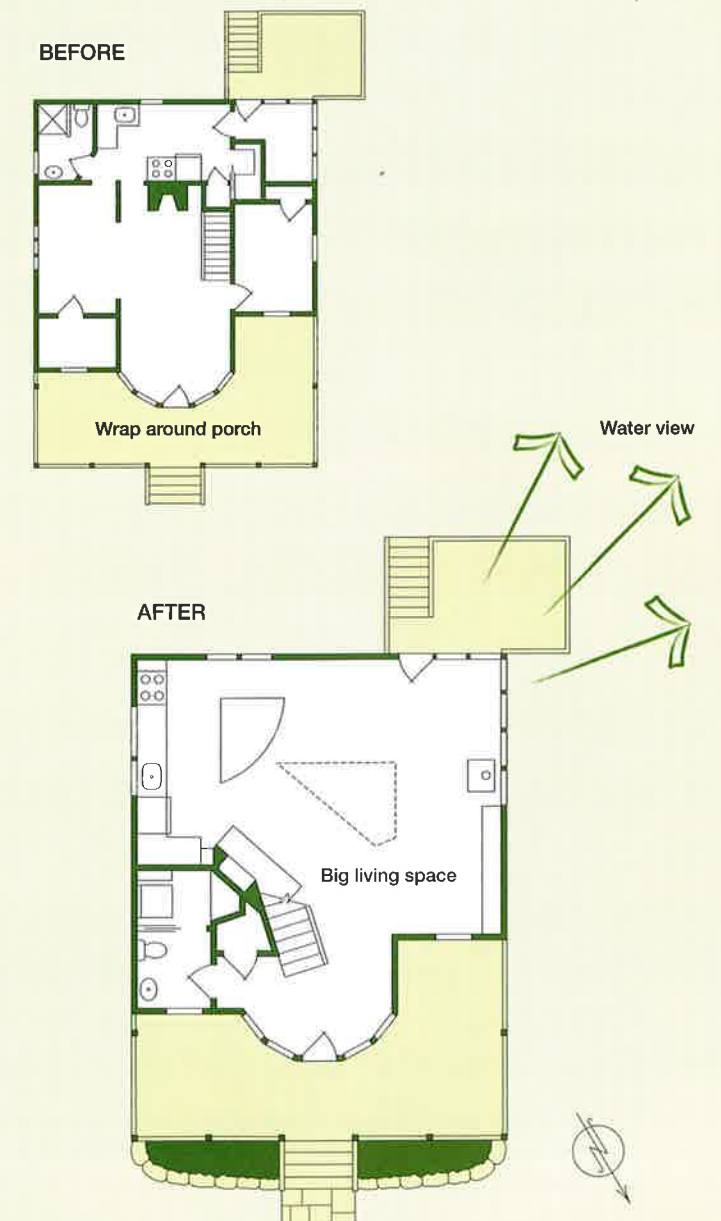
The existing cottage was cramped and confused, a funky rabbit's warren of tiny spaces, bedrooms barely 7 ft. wide, and a living room at the center completely cut off from light and air. "It was totally inboard," Will says, putting it in suitably nautical terms. The good news was that the shell of the cottage was well built and worth keeping. Will and Dave began by replacing the windows, doors, and siding and by adding more windows for light and views, all without knowing exactly how they'd change the interior.

But there was never any question they'd open up the inside as much as possible, nudging the little cottage toward the light and airy feeling of a loft. Dave was satisfied with two bedrooms under the eaves instead of the original three, which freed up the space between and gave Will the idea to cut a hole in the floor and let light from the newly glazed southern gable end spill downstairs. Will also shifted the location of the stairs, setting them at a rakish angle to add dynamic energy and allow the back of the house to become one big light-filled living space.

◁ The freshly clad and painted cottage projects a sunny disposition but only hints at its open interior. It's as fit for its traditional neighborhood as it is for barefoot living.

## footprint

The difference between the original cottage floor plan, with its warren of cramped rooms, and the new floor plan, with its open living space, is the difference between a buttoned-up home and a barefoot one. Take note of the dotted line on the new floor plan: It represents the opening in the ceiling that lets sunlight in from above—and that really changes everything.





In place of the maze of walls that cut up the old interior and starved it of light, a dynamic composition of angled glass, steel columns, and curved mesh livens up the new interior while maintaining its bright, open feel.



The sunny southeast corner of the open living space is the sweet spot, bringing together the warmth of a wood stove with a glimpse of the water, plus a full look back at the entire, light-filled interior.

## A new world order... beginning with the stairs

Dave worked right alongside builder Jim Peletier until the transformation of the interior was complete. Now as you enter the house from the front porch, you experience the stairs as a sculptural element within a tall space, which expands toward the far southwest corner of the house, where there's a narrow water view. The stairs angle in line with the view, and this new orientation is reinforced even more strongly by a grid of plywood floor panels.



As tight and efficient as a ship's galley, the kitchen epitomizes the simple, open, uncluttered feel of the remodeled cottage. It's an unfussy space for turning out an unhurried meal.



# barefoot spirit

"This house is an expression of me after I decided to slow down and unclutter my life."  
—Dave

The remodeled interior is an entirely different cottage from what you'd expect from the outside—a roomy, comfortable place that perfectly fits Dave's streamlined life. The big space has discrete spots for cooking, dining, listening to music, reading by the fire, and working at a desk; and yet it doesn't feel cramped or crowded. Partly that's because Dave keeps it free of tchotchkes and knickknacks, but mostly it's because Will and Dave stuck to a limited palette of clean, barefoot materials: blond birch, sandblasted glass, and plain ground steel.

## A yellow glow

Dave has always been drawn to loft spaces because they're clean, spare, and full of light. Funny thing is, when he worked in Boston, he lived in a basement apartment. Now that he's on a Maine island, he has his loft. It isn't spacious—his bedroom is only slightly larger than a walk-in closet—but it's bright, cozy, and warm. And at night he looks out and sees the stars. By turns, neighbors walking by say Dave's cottage has a yellow glow to it. It's a simple cottage for a simple life.



Putting a skylight over the bathtub was an impromptu decision, made during remodeling, but it makes all the difference to this small space tucked under the eaves.



## what makes it barefoot

If the cottage has a barefoot secret, it's the wall of windows that fills the gable end facing south to the backyard. Sunshine comes pouring in, filling the upstairs with dramatic light and—more important—spilling down through an opening in the floor to light the living space below. The windows also draw air up through the opening, ventilating the whole house on warm days.