

# YOUR HOME / GREEN

# THE BOSTON Globe

MAGAZINE

Positioned for passive solar heat

← Super-insulated

Salvaged from an old property

↑ Locally sourced

↘ Sited for shade

**A RUSTIC  
BERKSHIRES CABIN  
GETS FIXED UP,  
NOT TORN DOWN**

**PLUS: Going Greener by the Sea  
Eco-Friendly and Affordable  
Nontoxic Remodeling  
Don't Throw It Away!**

**REAL ESTATE**  
Lower Your Energy  
Bills This Winter

# Snug Harbor

**SHIPSHAPE** Two dormers – one an “eyebrow” design (above and below) – were the only expansions allowed to the 100-year-old home; the open floor plan (facing page) puts every square inch to use.



**\*** IN THE FALL OF 2006, Doug and Sharyn Howell bicycled by a cottage bordering the sand dunes on Willard Beach in South Portland, Maine. For 30 years they had lived in a large 1760s home in neighboring Cape Elizabeth, where they had raised their family.

They hadn't set out to look for another house, but the location of this turn-of-the-20th-century bungalow struck them. It was uninhabited, so they peeked through windows and saw the close water views. A few years later, they traded their quiet country lane for a public beach that is host to painting classes, field trips, weddings, and more, and now say they couldn't be happier.

The renovation was far from simple. The home's basic layout, made awkward from myriad additions over the years, could not change if the

*The upside of downsizing for one Maine couple? Their beautiful new ultra-efficient beachfront home.*

BY NANCY HEISER

homeowners wanted to keep the structure in the same spot – the spot with those amazing views. The state Department of Environmental Protection had to approve plans, as did the city.

The Howells' two grown children encouraged their parents to make the update as green as possible. And Doug Howell had his own requirement: “It was important to me to use Maine products, materials, and workers. It was 100 percent Maine-made in 1900, and it seemed appropriate to be as near to 100 percent as we could accomplish while updating everything in keeping with the need for environmental responsibility.” (The finished home has the building industry's Gold LEED certification as well as an Energy Star label for being tightly built and low in energy consumption.)

Its grandfathered location – a new structure set this close to the water would not be allowed today – is unmatched. If it weren't for the wail of windows, you could sit in the living room, stretch out your legs, and wiggle your toes in the sand. At high tide, Casco Bay is 150 feet from the house. Spring Point Ledge Lighthouse blinks in the distance.

Environmentally friendly features included water-saving toilets, high-performance radiant floor heat, super-efficient insulation and lighting, low-emissions paint, and energy-saving appliances. A complete systems upgrade rerouted the main heating and plumbing pipes to a centrally located unit on the second floor, a measure that greatly reduced heat loss. Architects Frankie Elmquist and Will Winkelman, both with their own Portland-based firms, worked together on this project. The addition of two dormers – one a graceful eyebrow style – and a garage were the only exterior alterations. They also opened up the cottage's south facade with windows and skylights to allow for views, at the same time maximizing solar warmth and illumination. Transoms on the interior doors allow light to flow between rooms, as well as air, assisted by ceiling fans.

With the move, the Howells reduced their living space by about half.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY BRIAN VAYDEV BRINK

## YOUR HOME \* GREEN



**LOCATION, LOCATION** The home's living room (right) and a bedroom (below) have stunning ocean views; the architects who worked on the renovation found space for a reading nook in a landing (above).

This forced them to shed some belongings and to use their new home's every available nook. (For example, the doors of their closets were made from the same custom tongue-and-groove wood paneling as the walls, but have no visible hardware. They are so well camouflaged that the owners hang artwork on them.) The overall effect is that of an elegant and efficient schooner, where every bit of space is thoughtfully used and often does double duty.

Crafting the open living area into spaces with a distinct feel was the



The home "was 100 percent Maine-made in 1900," says owner Doug Howell. The remodel hewed to tradition when possible.

biggest design challenge, says Winkelman. The architects used varying ceiling heights to demarcate the kitchen, dining, and living "rooms." A bowed ceiling of white planks in the dining area is reminiscent of a boat's hull; a walnut coffered ceiling in the living area suggests a library.

The Howells decorated their new home with muted coastal tones and natural materials, mirroring the colors of sand, dune grass, water, and sky outside. Throughout, echoes of the natural world mingle with graceful and gentle touches of the human world.

"Downsizing is a reality as our lives move on," says Doug. "And we still have lots of space for living." ■

*Nancy Heiser is a writer outside Portland, Maine. Send comments to magazine@globe.com.*



## THE GARDEN MAKEOVER

The homeowners wanted both to control storm-water runoff on their property, keeping pollutants out of the ocean, and ensure that their garden required as little water as possible. Here's what they did:

- \* A heavy application of compost was tilled into the garden and lawn areas to allow the sandy soil to retain more moisture.
- \* An initial planting of sod stabilized the lawn and created an immediate water filter. Every year the turf will be overseeded with a mix heavy in native fescue, which needs less water than other types of grass.
- \* A rain garden of water-loving plants slows down and contains water that runs off the roof, driveway, and neighboring yards. "We want to hold the water in a puddle until the pollutants and dirt filter out and are absorbed in mulch. It's a very elegant little system," says Susan Carter of Gnome Landscapes, Design, and Masonry in Falmouth, Maine.
- \* Pea-stone paths also filter runoff.
- \* A high-efficiency drip irrigation system includes separate zones, a timer, and a rain sensor.