

EAST COAST HOME+DESIGN





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Builder of Fine Homes



A large, light-colored house with a stone wall and a body of water in the background. The house has a prominent chimney and a gabled roof. The stone wall in the foreground is made of smooth, rounded stones. A white picket fence runs along the top of the stone wall. A large, leafy tree is on the right side of the house. The sky is blue with some clouds.

At Land's End

After falling in love with life on the Long Island Sound, a couple turns to Hemingway Construction and Pagliaro Batels Sajda Architects to make their dream a reality

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In many respects, this renovation has all the elements of a classic story: A determined family with a dream. A group of skilled artisans focused on making it happen. And the iconic Long Island Sound, which served as the picturesque backdrop for a certain F. Scott Fitzgerald novel.

For the customers, a couple looking to transform their beach house into space worthy of Jay Gatsby himself, there was only one builder they could trust to work on the project: the team at Hemingway Construction. “We’ve had the pleasure of working with this client for years, coming together for a total of eight projects,” explained Hemingway Construction’s CEO Peter Sciarretta. “Our founder and president Sal Sciarretta has had a long working relationship with the wife, so there was complete trust as we started on this journey.”

Beautiful Beginnings

It was this familiarity that first convinced the couple to turn to Hemingway when they decided to purchase a secondary summer home on Bell Island, CT, in 2004. At the time, the homeowners were simply looking for a beachfront getaway to entertain guests and escape fast-paced big-city living.

After taking ownership of the home, the couple partnered with Hemingway along with the design team of Pagliaro Bartels Sajda (PBS) Architects to make it over. As a result of the initial hard work and creativity, the project was honored by the Home Builders & Remodelers Association of Connecticut as the “Best Renovation Under \$1 Million.”

Almost a decade after that noteworthy accomplishment, the husband and wife realized they wanted to slow down and enjoy the sandy beaches full-time. That meant they would have to adapt their home into something that could accommodate more extended wear and tear.

The transformation would prove to be quite a task. Not only did the couple have to be mindful of updates that would provide the necessary creature comforts of daily life, but they also had to get past extensive regulations prior to breaking ground on their endeavor. “The regulatory process was quite a hurdle at the beginning,” said PBS Architect founding partner Christopher Pagliaro. “In many respects, we were limited in our initial planning because of the zoning issues as well as FEMA

Outside, the couple created a patio area for sunbathing and lounging in private.



guidelines.”

Fortunately for the resolute homeowners, Pagliaro’s design firm had someone on staff who was well versed in dealing with government restrictions on coastal construction. Eventually, the team was granted the permits needed.

Wide Open Spaces

Upon starting the reconstruction, Pagliaro and Sciarretta both realized that one of their biggest challenges would be making the best use of existing space. The house had a slim, front-to-back split-level layout. Due to some of the aforementioned restrictions, they were unable to do any dramatic expansion beyond the addition of a third level complete with an eagle’s nest. And because the couple’s new beachfront home was essentially a downsizing for them, the team



Due to the open design of the layout, ceiling designs serve as a way to distinguish between rooms.

was tasked with how to fit the homeowners' most beloved furnishings, many from their much larger residence in New Canaan, into this approximately 3,000-square-foot domicile.

"The beach home itself was rather narrow," Pagliaro explained. "When we looked at how we could assist them, we saw it would be a good idea to make the space as open as possible." After a careful

review of their options, they elected to remove many of the house's walls and columns to create a light and airy atmosphere. And while this proved to be aesthetically pleasing, it left them with the problem of how to distinguish between the different rooms.

Amazingly enough, the answer lay literally above their heads. "We figured out that the best solution was to use the ceiling to



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define the areas," said Sciarretta. "It was such a natural solution." Each room prominently featured a uniquely designed ceiling that was carefully crafted to bring a clear identity to each location: A coffered ceiling served as the perfect match for the living room's custom baseboards and elaborate crown molding. A glass block ceiling offered just the right elegant illumination to the formal dining room. The eagle's nest made use of beams reminiscent of a nautical post.

Honoring the Sound

Another main objective of the couple was to make the stunning beach atmosphere an essential part of the home's interior design. "They had a huge love of the sound," Pagliaro said. "It was really important for them to bring in views of the water whenever possible. We kept this in mind as we worked with them to design the space."

To accommodate this request, the team installed large European-style windows with Marvin glass in the kitchen, living room and

dining room. They also included strategically placed windows and skylights on angled walls to help illuminate the space while bringing the best of the beach indoors.

The Floating Staircases

One of the most architecturally beautiful components of the home's final design is the pair of free-floating staircases that serve as one of the home's centerpieces. What makes them so phenomenal is the fact that they are not attached to any outside wall, but appear to be freestanding, so that anyone on the reinforced steel steps would be treated to an almost 360-degree view of the surrounding room. "The staircases are definitely one of my favorite features of the house because they are just cool," said Sciarretta with a smile. "Walking on them feels like you are floating on air instead of climbing endlessly."

It's All in the Details

Due to their prior relationship with both the builders and architects, the clients felt very comfortable taking a lead role in the final







planning stages. Most of the furnishings and artwork were carefully curated from their personal collection, with many of the rooms specifically designed to showcase them.

As the clients had a very formal sense of style, they chose a monochromatic color scheme to better allow their signature pieces to come alive with color. And although the wife had a lot of experience with decorating, the couple decided to work with their long-time interior designer, Chris Gulotta, to better meet their expectations. “I have worked with them for close to 25 years, and have been fortunate to help them transform numerous residences to reflect their design vision and lifestyle,” said Gulotta. “We pay close attention to current trends while maintaining a classic, timeless look, reflecting their amazing taste and attention to detail.”

And, indeed, the customers’ attention to detail was evident in some of the finishing touches in the home. The master bathroom boasts floor tiles made of mother-of-pearl, and most of the home was custom milled with elaborate paneling.

Since entertaining guests was also important to the clients, some modern touches were added to make the house a much-sought-after place for formal events. Nineteen flat screens in a variety of sizes were installed in the house, including one in the family room that rises from the floor on demand. Outside, the team created a lush ex-

One of the couple’s favorite features is the pair of free-floating staircases connecting the three levels.



terior landscape featuring an elegant stone barbecue and a brick seating area that is perfect for gathering friends and family.

Finishing Touches

When the project was completed after 10 months, the husband and wife were thrilled to take ownership of a home they had a direct hand

in designing. But for Sciarretta, the project is more than just an elegant property: it illustrates the larger power of collaboration. "There's no question that everyone's egos were checked at the door with this project," he said. "The two teams spent hours working together on-site to meet the client's vision. And it was a privilege and an amazing experience to work with PBS Architects."



The clients wanted to include as many views of the sound as possible. Here, Marvin windows open up to a veranda overlooking the water.

The clients were heavily involved with every aspect of the home design, including the elegant mother-of-pearl tiling on the floor in the bathroom.



In fact, Hemingway Construction was so dedicated to completing this project that the firm actually turned down additional work during this time. It's a reminder that, beyond the awards and accolades, what is sometimes most revered is the simple satisfaction of a job well done.

Gatsby's Nick Carraway himself would be proud.





The rich blues of the Long Island Sound offer the perfect pop of color in contrast to the monotone hues in the home.



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