



Midsummer Dreams

A Prouts Neck house preserves the season year-round

by Deborah Weisgall
Photography François Gagné

On the southern rim of Prouts Neck, the rambling house, pale gray the color of mist, sits on a small rise. Terraces and a lawn overlooking the water invite leisurely breakfasts or afternoon Frisbee or twilight games of tag. Inside, broad window bays offer nooks for reading or napping on cloudy days. Four dining tables suggest abundant possibilities—feasts for friends or quiet family gatherings.

The house promises—and delivers—an idyll. It is a summer ark, sleek and welcoming and capacious, that feels as if it has witnessed countless summers, though it is replete with twenty-first-century amenities. It was begun only five years ago, constructed in the spirit of the late nineteenth-century cottages that characterize this peninsula jutting into Casco Bay. The couple who built the house have a long connection to Prouts Neck, its summer sports—golf, tennis, sailing, fishing—and its easy way of life.

“It’s simple here,” says the wife. “You can ride your bike everywhere. Kids can be free. My husband’s family has been coming here for a hundred years. They still have a house here.” But generations multiply, and dividing a summer house among numerous offspring becomes higher math. The couple rented for years before finding a suitable piece of land.


Finally, they were able to buy two lots: one, back from the shore,

contained an old cottage; the waterfront parcel featured a 65-foot-high World War II concrete observation tower once deployed for spotting enemy vessels attempting to enter Casco Bay. It had evolved into a precarious climbing structure. “It was beginning to deteriorate,” the wife says. “It was becoming a hazard, and it blocked the view. We had to take it down.”

The couple had a clear idea of the house they wanted. It was, the wife says, “something simple, functional, and romantic. We wanted to build a house that our kids could always come home to and bring their families. We wanted everybody together.”

But in this century, time doesn’t stall for two months in the summer. Work goes on, and serious sports continue year-round. Both the husband and wife are athletes; in college she rowed crew and he was a nationally ranked tennis player. Their children, who are in boarding school and college, carry on the family tradition. “We are the first mother and daughter to go through the Princeton boathouse,” says the wife. Between practices and other activities, the family’s Maine summers are often condensed into weekends. “We spent more time here when the kids were younger,” the wife continues. “Recently, we’ve discovered the beauty of Prouts Neck in the off-season.”

The couple, who live in Connecticut most of the year, commissioned the late New York-based architect Elliott Rosenblum to design the



house. Rosenblum sited the structure to ensure water views from almost every room; he borrowed vocabulary, including the big window bays, from the Queen Anne style of John Calvin Stevens, the prolific Portland architect who designed some of the original houses on Prouts Neck.

While the house was being framed, the family asked Linda Banks of Banks Design Associates in Falmouth to oversee construction and design the interior architecture. She worked closely with builder Larry Wagner of Eider Investments, respecting Rosenblum's original intent while bringing the 8,000-square-foot house closer to New England understatement. The wife says: "Linda was a huge simplifying force in toning down the high style of the original design."

Banks sees her work as giving physical expression to the desires of her clients. "My favorite thing is to de-sheetrock a home and give it soul," she says. "Our strong point is to make the house appear fresh and updated with old details." Her secret—how she manages the illusion of age and family history in a new construction—lies, indeed, in the details.

Inside, Banks consistently breaks the space into vignettes, leading the eye to intimate arrangements of furniture and decoration, combining antiques, family heirlooms, reproductions, and pieces of her own design. Rosenblum and Banks play a theme and variations. Many of the details refer to ships and sailing—prints of seashells, of a whaling expedition, kitchen drawer pulls in the shape of boat cleats—even though, the wife says, "my husband hates the water."

The house combines the expansive architecture of the Gilded Age with the precise detailing of an ocean liner. Window lights in the

Broad, curved window bays on the ocean side of the house (opening page) let in light throughout the day and give the house the feeling of an opulent ocean liner. Their ample volumes recall the Queen Anne style of architecture that John Calvin Stevens, who designed many of the houses on Prouts Neck, brought to Maine at the end of the nineteenth century. The two stone chimneys bracket the airy structure and anchor it to its site.

The architect designed the curved stairway (left) with its ebonized railing to rise to the second floor past porthole-shaped windows. Linda Banks added the ropelike molding.



Banks designed the hooked rug (above, left), which she calls a “future heirloom.” It is 24 feet long and was made in Maine, to incorporate nautical and local symbols: a lighthouse, a seashell, the Prouts Neck grasshopper. The homeowners bought the map of Prouts Neck at an annual fundraiser for the community’s Women’s Auxiliary. The hand-tinted maps, showing the houses on the peninsula, are updated every generation. The bamboo bench is a reproduction.

The late architect Elliott Rosenblum introduced the nautical motif at the mahogany front door (above, right), constructed with paneling and window lights that suggest a ship’s wheel. The family bought the front hall carpet for their first house more than twenty years ago. It retains fond memories of their various dogs. The gull prints are reproductions from the Linda Banks Collection.



shape of a ship’s wheel embellish the front door; a captain’s shipboard desk, exquisitely compact and painted, stands in the front hall. For the second-floor hallway, Banks designed a hooked rug in shades of gray with motifs of shells, a lighthouse, and the Prouts Neck grasshopper. The pattern mitigates the length of the hall; it’s easy to imagine the next generation of children playing hopscotch on its squares.

Family pieces are everywhere, too; they give the house its heart. “There’s a corner cupboard from my mother-in-law, who was an antique dealer,” says the wife. “It holds my great-grandmother’s collection of Blue Chelsea china. It’s very hard to find, but sometimes I’ll see a piece. We also have a table my grandfather made. He was a woodworker. There’s an old American flag with thirty-six stars in the family room. In Prouts Neck when you buy a house, it comes with all the contents. I have cut-crystal dishes, bone plates, candlesticks—all stored in the corner cupboard. We kept a random kitchen stool, made from wood and rubber; I’ve never seen a better one. And in my son’s bedroom, there’s a mounted fish—his first fish that was a keeper.” An oil painting of a seascape that belonged to the husband’s great-grandfather and left to him by his grandfather hangs in the foyer. A tin storage box-on-stand

“ Inside, Banks consistently breaks the space into vignettes, leading the eye to intimate arrangements...”





Indigo-striped chairs in the eaves of one of the boy's rooms (opposite) on the third floor provide a private place to hang out and listen to music. The arched casement windows are by Marvin. The zinc-topped table was made for Simply Home.

At the top of the tower (left), the husband's office commands views across the cove to the mainland in one direction and across the Prouts Neck Bird Sanctuary on the other. The desk and storage units are built in, in keeping with the ship-like themes of the architecture and design.

Banks designed a triple vanity for the bathroom of three boys (left, bottom). The hooked rug of a spouting whale is one of the decorator's humorous touches. Another is a poster advocating "Save Water" above the urinal, whose flush is activated by an electric eye. An old ship's lantern hangs above the tub.

The painted blue wall behind the bed (below) is horizontally laid wide-board shiplap poplar, called "nickel gap" because the boards are spaced a nickel's width apart. This treatment has become one of Banks's signature ways to "de-sheetrock" a room. The print *Jonah and the Sailors* over the bed and the knot board on the wall beside the window are both available through Simply Home. The rope-handled chest at the foot of the bed came from the homeowners' family.





The living room (above, left), with its delicate furniture and play of whites and off-whites, provides a more formal entertaining space for this active family. All the seating in the living room is from Hickory Chair. It is slip-covered in Belgian linen. The pattern of the hand-hooked rug, made in Maine, is adapted from an Indian crewel-work fabric. The painting over the fireplace, *Majestic Sky*, is by Stephen Bach.

In the breakfast room (above, right), a round table and six butler's chairs provide a haven for a quiet family dinner. The octagonal room is one of three stacked in this tower. Above it is the master bathroom, and above that the husband's study. These smaller spaces provide an effective counterbalance to the openness of the larger room.

In the dining room (opposite), mellow paneling suggests the warmth of an early New England homestead. The corner cabinet comes from the husband's mother, who was an antique dealer, and it contains the wife's great-grandmother's collection of Blue Chelsea china, along with earthenware and crystal belonging to the original house on the site. The Windsor chairs were custom made in Pennsylvania; there are more chairs in the family room to provide enough seating for big dinner parties. The chandelier and lobster prints are available through Banks and Simply Home, who also found the English dining room table, whose top is a single plank of elm, in an antique store in Connecticut. On the table is a brown and white transfer-ware tureen.



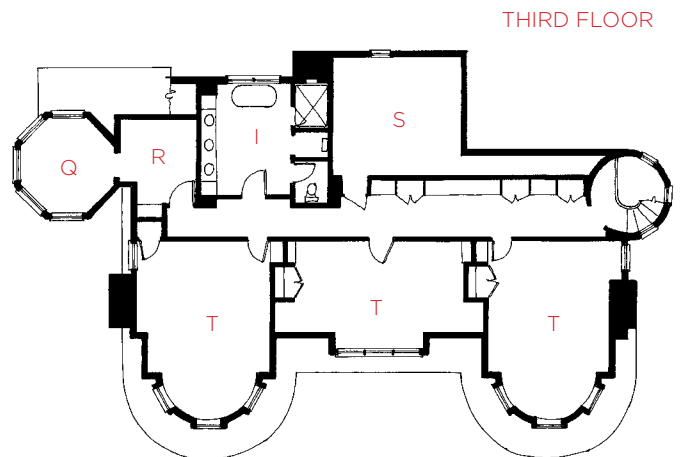
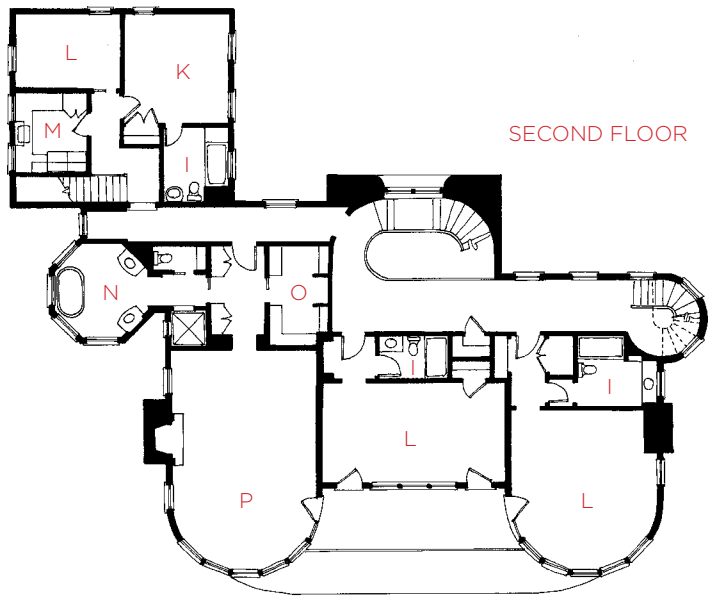
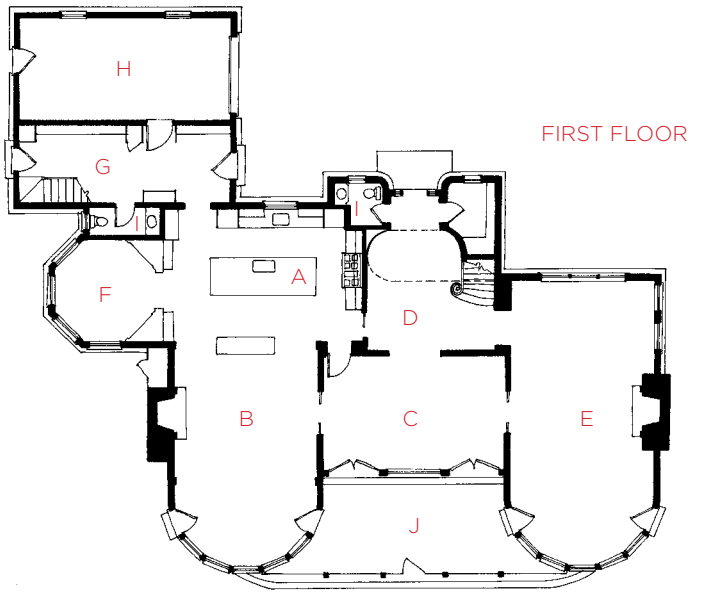
from Henley recalls the wife's—and now their daughter's—brilliant rowing careers.

Small towers, one round and one octagonal, balance the large bays and big rooms. A round table and six butler's chairs completely fill the octagonal breakfast room—just space enough for family. The light, airy master bathroom above the breakfast room is simply furnished with two sinks and a claw-foot tub. On the top floor, like a lighthouse tower, the husband's office, paneled in dark wood, commands views of the ocean and the bird sanctuary on the inland side of the house.

The landscape architect, Eric Groft, of Oehme, van Sweden & Associates in Washington, D.C., anchored the house to the site with terraces. Oversized Lunaform planters act like boulders, breaking up broad expanses. Bright flowers, including delphinium, irises, bee balm, coreopsis, and black-eyed Susans punctuate the bleached sea light, and high-bush blueberries provide a rich crop for the wife's pies, pancakes, and chutney.

Lying on a window seat and looking out through the curved banks of windows, the water seems to be just outside, the house a vessel sailing serenely through the season. Even on a cloudy day, the colors inside seem sun-washed: pastels everywhere, pale blues and greens. In the dining room, a set of custom Windsor chairs is painted with blue-gray milk paint. The dining room tabletop is a single plank of wood that the wife found in an antique shop in Connecticut. Blue granite on the kitchen counters picks up the color of the rock along the coast, and





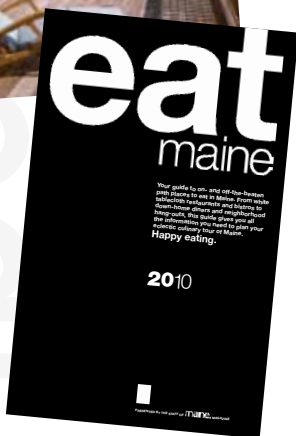
- A Kitchen
- B Family Room
- C Dining Room
- D Foyer
- E Living Room
- F Breakfast Room
- G Mudroom
- H Garage
- I Bathrooms
- J Covered Porch
- K Exercise Room
- L Guest Rooms
- M Laundry Room
- N Master Bath
- O Master Closet
- P Master Bedroom
- Q Home Office
- R Office Sitting Area
- S Storage
- T Bedrooms



Dark wood and pale gray-blue walls in the master bedroom (opposite, top) echo the seaside light, which is more about contrast than color. The paintings, *Minot's Ledge*, *Red Nun* and *A Cloud Like a Wedding Veil*, are by Brita Holmquist. The blue and white lamp and the Canton vase make reference to those Maine ships that plied the China trade and returned laden with exotic booty.

Banks designed the scalloped-skirted marble-topped cabinet for the sink in the daughter's bedroom (opposite, bottom). The walls are beadboard painted high-gloss white.

A large Lunaform planter on the granite-paved terrace (above) matches the ample proportions of the house. Thyme softens the paving squares and is fragrant underfoot. Catmint, goat's beard, and purple pansies add intense country color to the informal garden, while the pergola offers another nook, another private place to pass a summer afternoon.



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mirrored French doors on kitchen closets reflect watery light. When all the doors in the family room are open, Banks says, “the whole thing is like a giant screen porch.”

“We built this house with the idea that we would never sell it, that we would retire here,” says the wife. They have built a house for our time and for generations to come, a home that holds dreams of summer for all seasons. **MH+D**

Refinished, painted gray, and fitted with blue cushions, the wicker furniture on the oceanside porch (above) came from the original house. The driftwood table is from Simply Home, while a hand-screened pillow designed by Erin Flett adds a playful touch. This porch has become the homeowners’ favorite place to have breakfast and feel the peace of their home. The wife says: “We sit on the porch and read the paper and feel the sun streaming in and look at the islands.”

For more information, see Resources on page 108.