

Seaside

A young designer's imagination

This house is my design lab," says Nicki Bongiorno of spaces in Kennebunkport when describing her oceanside home. "I've had the ability to experiment and problem solve in my own space. I'm freer to take risks here, freer to let my imagination soar." The young designer, who is developing a reputation for her fresh interpretation of classic New England style, has created a comfortable yet sophisticated oasis for her extended family and friends.

The floor-to-ceiling windows on the main level of the house flood the room with light—clear and intense on sunny days, soft and muted when clouds roll in. Throughout the house Bongiorno worked with a palette that relies heavily on neutral colors—cream, ecru, and white abound—and surfaces that reflect the abundant natural light. The furniture she chose is sleek and unfussy, with an occasional antique for punctuation.

Her house, a graceful Shingle Style cottage sitting just steps away from the ocean's edge, commands a panoramic vista of sand and rocks, waves and distant islands. It is nestled into the shoreline in a neighborhood of houses built at the turn of the

last century. Above the driveway is a small pond dotted with water lilies, and on this day a family of snapping turtles basks in the brilliant afternoon sun.

Bongiorno first came across the house four years ago. Although it was relatively new, it had already passed through several owners and fallen into a state of neglect and disrepair. The magnificent setting and unsurpassed views were the deciding factors in the purchase. "I fell in love with this neighborhood when I was visiting friends next door," she explains. "When I heard this house was available, I knew it was the one for us."

At first, Bongiorno's remodeling plans were relatively modest. In choosing a contractor for the job, she looked to Bowley Builders of Kennebunk, a company with a thirty-five-year reputation for quality residential and commercial construction. Heading the project was Geoff Bowley, who was raised in the business started by his father, Steve. As work got underway, it became apparent to both homeowner and builder that the house would require a near total renovation. "There were major problems with water damage and leaking," recalls Bongiorno. "Every time they opened up a wall, we discovered something

Chic

is set free on the water's edge



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by Candace Karu
Photography Trent Bell

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The designer’s house (previous page) is set at the end of a quiet, winding lane surrounded by a lush rolling lawn that leads to the water’s edge. The yard, pond, and beach are teeming with wildlife—herons, seals, Canada geese, foxes, woodchucks, turtles, and muskrats are all members of the neighborhood.

“This isn’t a seasonal house,” says Bongiorno. We live in it all year, so it has to be functional.” Creamy linens and an upholstered headboard are used on the guest room bed, with bolster pillows from Chelsea Passage at Barney’s New York. The upholstered cornice hides electric blackout blinds so guests can sleep in.





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new that had to be fixed.” What started as a quick turnaround job soon evolved into a major undertaking.

“This job definitely threw something new our way every day. In addition, it was a classic design/build,” says Bowley. He and his crew had to be nimble as new challenges revealed themselves. “We were always running into new problems,” Bowley says, “then having to revise our plans on-site. But that really is what can make a job interesting.”

Bowley is intrigued by the opportunities his profession reveals to him every day. “The people I work with are a constant source of ideas and information,” he explains. “Working with a homeowner who is also a designer was great. Nicki has incredible taste; her style is not what you see every day in Maine. I have enormous respect for her talent.”

The artful collaboration between designer and builder is expressed throughout the home. Bongiorno found particular delight in working on the bathrooms. “I love the components that go into a luxurious bathroom—tile, marble, wood—it’s all about surfaces,” she explains. “And I love the sculptural qualities of beautifully designed hardware and the elegant lines of a bathtub.”

The elegant master bathroom (left) has incomparable ocean views. Three-inch by 12-inch gray granite floor tile from Waterworks blends with the 12-by-12-inch white Thassos marble wall tile and countertops. The corner table, from William Switzer, is made of eucalyptus wood with brushed nickel hardware, and the aluminum vase is from Michael Aram.

Vintage French club chairs (right, top) upholstered in green brushed cotton create a quiet retreat in the guest room. Bongiorno designed the master bath vanities (right, middle) that were executed in crotch mahogany with hardware from Waterworks. The master bedroom wall (right, bottom) is upholstered in gray-green silk damask, and is flanked by vintage black-and-white botanical photographs from Berlin.



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A Murano glass chandelier from Venice crowns the dining room (left), finished in the palest shades of cream, green, and blue. The William Switzer chairs are upholstered in buttery vanilla leather. The Elizabeth Stockton oil painting is from The Scott Bundy Galleries in Kennebunkport.

Bongiorno uses this 19th century French burl walnut chest (above) to store gift-wrap. The milk glass lamp is from Pallian & Company in Wells.

The designer's office (right) has painted wood paneling (C2 Fresco), with crisp white accents like faux suede upholstered chairs, a lacquered Parson's table, and a square Capiz shell lamp that sits on clear acrylic nesting tables.

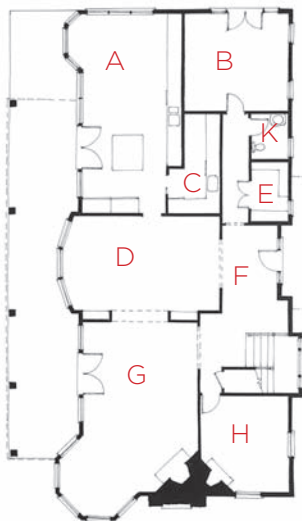
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A custom stainless steel and chrome La Cornue island is the centerpiece of Bongiorno's kitchen, where diners and cooks alike enjoy the wrap-around view. Cream-colored Poggenpohl cabinets sit on 5-inch plank walnut floors. The designer used easy-to-maintain, snake-pattern embossed vinyl to cover the island stools and chairs.



- A Kitchen
- B Family Room
- C Pantry
- D Dining Room
- E Mud Room
- F Entry
- G Living Room
- H Office





- I Fitness Room
- J Bedroom
- K Bathroom
- L Master Bath
- M Hall
- N Master Bedroom
- O Laundry
- P Master Closet
- Q Family Room

The spare furnishings in the living room (top) include a vintage, mid-century leather and chrome bench, a brushed chrome and glass coffee table, an Art Deco reproduction burled walnut chair, shag pillows, and the designer's childhood piano. The ocean-side porch (bottom) is furnished with all-weather rattan chairs and tables from Restoration Hardware. The mahogany bead-board ceiling and bluestone floor keep maintenance to a minimum.

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Bongiorno knew that the view would be the focal point of the master bath, so she chose Thassos marble for floor, walls, and vanity tops. The milky-white marble, free of any perceptible veining, is a perfect complement to the colors of the sky and sea beyond. The vanities and mirror frames are custom made from crotch mahogany, a rare wood of unusual depth and beauty. “The master bath is probably my favorite room in the house,” she says. “It is elegant, beautifully proportioned, and very, very relaxing.”

The kitchen, too, has an enviable view, which was enhanced when Bowley and Bongiorno designed a new rear elevation for the house, opening up the entire ocean side of the structure with floor-to-ceiling windows on the ground floor. “There were cabinets on the wall with windows above,” explains Bongiorno. “The kitchen felt very closed in. Now the view is part of the design scheme. We lost some cabinet space, but were able to make up most of it in ways that left the view intact.”

Both the living room and dining room are a reflection of Bongiorno’s aesthetic sensibilities and lifestyle—they are at once spare and dramatic, with an occasional nod to the eccentric. The living room is reminiscent of a Japanese tearoom, albeit with a European flair. It’s topped with a mirrored disco ball, a tongue-in-cheek nod to the designer’s favorite kind of nightlife. The piano she took lessons on as a child sits in the bay window, framed by an ever-changing seascape.

The dining room chandelier, made of Murano glass, is one that Bongiorno found in Venice. Its curves add drama to the lines and angles that dominate the room. Playful Salvador Dali prints top a pair of built-in mahogany sideboards flanking the living room entrance.

The craftsmen on Bowley’s team were eager to help Bongiorno realize her unique vision. “The materials I specified for this job were not necessarily run-of-the-mill, but they were always willing to work with my ideas,” she says. “They did an amazing job and brought a lot of their expertise and experience to my designs.”

After almost a year of construction, Bongiorno has finally moved into her home, which she describes as classic with a modern sensibility. She acknowledges that the house, which is constantly changing, reflects both her personal evolution as a designer and her playful personality. “I can’t take myself too seriously,” she says. “But I have to admit: I take my work very seriously.” **MH+D**