

ISLAND THANKSGIVING PLUS CABOT COVE: MURDER  
CAPITAL OF THE WORLD

THE MAGAZINE OF MAINE

# Down East

NOVEMBER 2012

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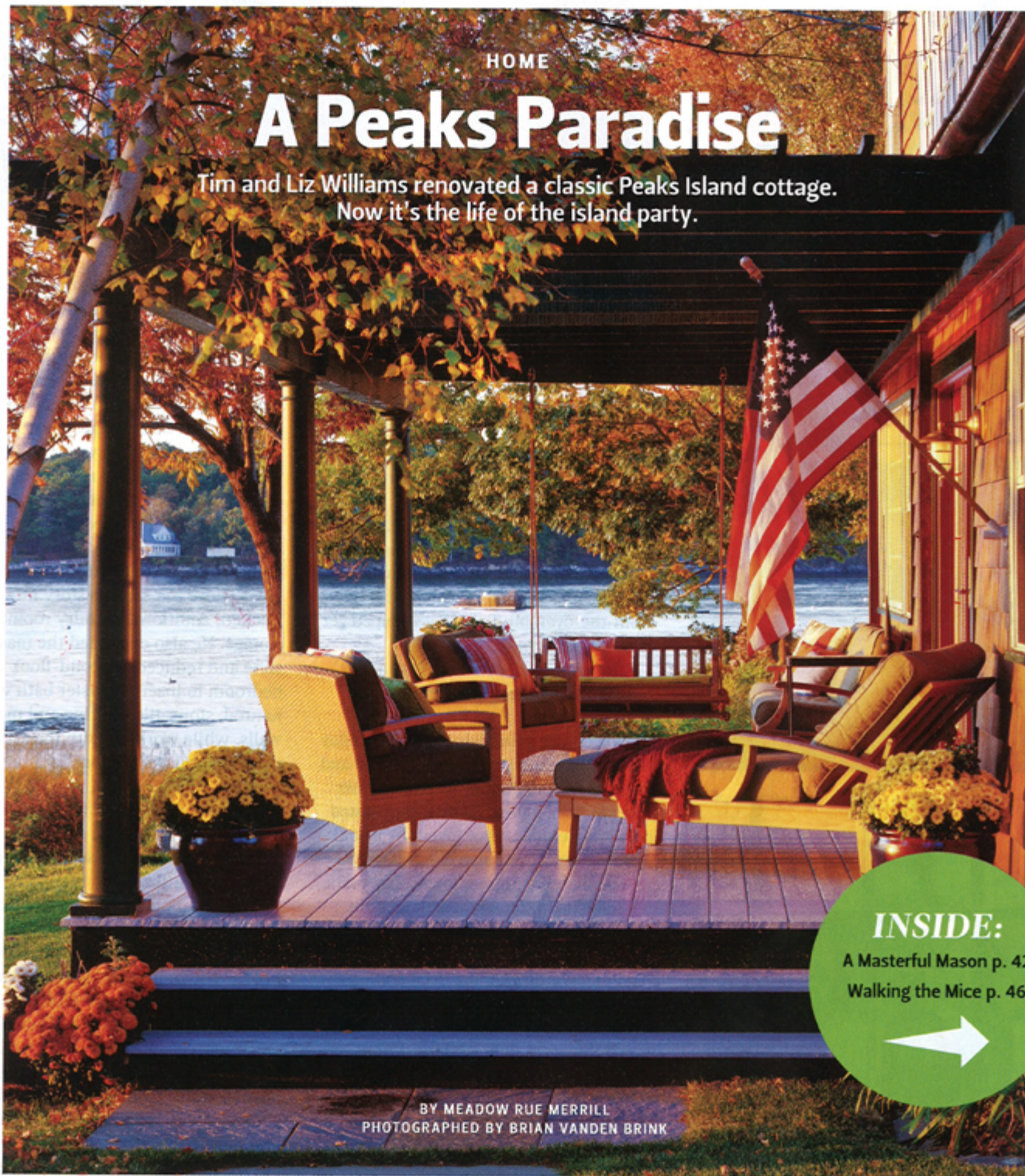




# dooryard

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LIVING THE MAINE LIFE



HOME

## A Peaks Paradise

Tim and Liz Williams renovated a classic Peaks Island cottage. Now it's the life of the island party.

**INSIDE:**

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BY MEADOW RUE MERRILL  
PHOTOGRAPHED BY BRIAN VANDEN BRINK



DOORYARD HOME



**T**im and Liz Williams' classic Peaks Island cottage was in such rough shape the November they moved in that the only heat was from a central chimney with double fireplaces. The wind blowing through the rattly windows quickly extinguished a match. And the interior was barely insulated.

"The local contractors all felt bad for us," says Liz, a vivacious grandmother who loves to entertain, welcoming a guest on a recent fall morning with hot-from-the-oven muffins. "They helped get it battened down."

"It was bleak," confirms Tim, a retired broadcaster who grew up near Portland.

The couple's first winter on Casco Bay brought one hundred inches of snow and an April Fool's blizzard. After thirty-six years in Boca Raton, Florida, they lasted only one here. But they loved the island – Maine's most populated – and have returned every summer for twenty years.

They made some renovations right away – installing insulation and wood-stoves; they picked away at others – adding windows and a deck and turning a downstairs bedroom into a sitting area. But to fix the awkward entry – a sliding glass door into the dining room – and make better use of an attached shed, they hired architect Will Winkelman, who lives on the island and commutes by ferry to his Union Wharf office in Portland.

"We talked about it for a couple of

years, and it just kind of snowballed," says Winkelman, who met the couple at an island party. "They wanted to rebuild [the house] so it was more functional, and it evolved into a need for more space. They also needed a front door so people knew where to go. In my mind, that was the real thing we were fixing. So we worked with it and nibbled on its edges, but we didn't gut it."

Winkelman replaced the shed with an entry hall and easy-to-find front door. Off the end, he added a laundry area. Above is a second-story mini kitchen, additional laundry room, and storage. He also expanded the master suite and reduced a second-floor bedroom to insert a master bath with natural, stone-tile flooring and marble walls, while working with the cedar-shingled house's original flanking gambrel form.

"A lot of times what we design are like boats," Winkelman says of the 2,500-square-foot house. "Every square inch is well utilized."

One example is the new, floor-to-ceiling cabinets in the living room, the top shelf of which holds a collection of books written by Tim's grandfather, Maine author Ben Ames Williams, who is so beloved that the town of Union holds an annual celebration in his honor. Williams most recognized book, *Come Spring*, which features the town, sits above a collection of shells and family photographs.

Winkelman also maximized the view. From the moment one opens the front





The 2,500-foot cottage, originally built in 1903 on Peaks Island, was renovated by architect Will Winkelman. The owners, Tim and Liz Williams, wanted a house where they could entertain and have a functional look that is "bright, happy, sunny, and family-proof."

door, the gaze is drawn through the windows to the water outside.

"At the end of the day, the landscape is more important than the building," says Winkelman. "The house is sort of framing the view."

In keeping with the cottage style, Winkelman chose antique, resawn heart pine for the floors and bead board ceilings, using coffers to hide exposed beams without losing headroom. A pair of french doors opens to a waterfront pergola with generous cushioned chairs and a hanging swing facing a private beach on the bay.

Because the Williamses have a large family and often entertain, the downstairs is designed around five separate sitting areas, including a round entry table, a main table

**"Our neighbors all know, if you see a fire at the Williamses' place, you just come. You just bring your own beer and we sit around the fire and enjoy it."**



beside the kitchen, a group of overstuffed chairs in the converted bedroom, and a couch, table, and chairs in the living room. A downstairs guestroom faces the sand and pebble beach.

A narrow flight of stairs leads to two additional bedrooms and a romantic master suite with an elegant toile canopy, crystal chandelier, and French provincial furniture. The Williamses often sip their morning coffee sitting in a pair of rounded chairs, while watching passing boats.

To maximize the natural light, the interior is creamy white, with splashes of color, such as the red wicker dining room chairs, vibrant area rugs, and throw pillows. Two interior decorators from Roger Christopher Interior Designs, who



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summered on the island, chose the furnishings. The Williamses donated old furniture (a selection of hand-me-downs and flea market finds) to the island's annual auction.

"Bright, happy, sunny, and family proof," is how Liz describes the look she was aiming for. "Nothing is valuable. I don't want anyone worried about dropping or breaking something. It's a place to relax."

The house, which was built in 1903, originally sat by the road, says builder Bill Bunton, of Cumberland, who summered on the island as a kid. It was moved closer to the shore in the late 1960s.

"I was probably seven or eight at the time," says Bunton, who recalls how the house had slipped off its wood cribbing foundation. "I just remember driving by and seeing the house sort of leaning, if you will, on its side. I thought they had torn it down, but somebody had moved it down to the point."

The cottage was built for the unmarried Witlow sisters in exchange for taking care of their wealthy neighbor, Old Man Skillings, who lived just up the hill. But the cottage, which the Williamses call "Ocean Side," didn't come with much land. So they purchased an abutting cottage, which they renovated and nicknamed "Topside," after a house Tim's mother owned in Georgetown. An outdoor fire pit encircled by Adirondack chairs brings the houses – and the neighborhood – together.

"Our neighbors all know, if you see a fire at the Williamses' place, you just come," Liz says. "You bring your own beer, and we sit around the fire and enjoy it."

"Until I tell them, 'I'm going to call the police if you don't leave,'" Tim jokes.

Bunton, who often works on the island, is so in demand the Williamses had to wait more than a year to get him. Building on an island is a challenge. In addition to hauling supplies and

equipment by ferry, he says, "We're forever battling the seasonal clock, trying to get these things done before people arrive for the summer."

Having begun construction in the fall, Bunton finished the following June, just in time for the Williamses' two hundred-person lobster bake on the beach. The day of the party, the landscape crew finished laying sod, and a bluestone terrace flanked by potted flowers funneled guests toward the new front door.

With central air and radiant heating, the Williamses' house is now comfortable enough to live in year-round, but each fall they return to be near their now-grown children. Come June, however, Liz says they'll be back, adding, "There's just no other place like it." 🍷

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**Meadow Rue Merrill is an award-winning journalist who is currently working on a memoir, *Redeeming Ruth*.**

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