

Building a New Cottage to Look Old

Reclaimed materials and exposed wall framing disguise a state-of-the-art structure

BY SAM HILL

Nantucket venerates its old buildings. Without them, this Massachusetts island would be a far more ordinary place. A prosperous whaling outpost in the years before the Civil War, Nantucket now does a booming tourist trade. Visitors pile off the ferry and amble along cobblestone streets where exquisitely proportioned clapboard and brick buildings house gift shops, galleries and restaurants. They go to outlying villages and marvel at weather-beaten 18th-century cottages. Old is good.

Given the island's stock of architecturally pristine buildings, I wasn't surprised by the ideas that a friend and neighbor had for his new cottage. He owned a magnificent lot overlooking Sesachacha Pond and the ocean beyond near the village of Quidnet. His plan was to tear down an old fishing shack on the property and replace it with a modestly sized cottage. Although the cottage was to have the feel of a place that had existed for a long time, he said it was to be built with the finest methods and materials.

The owners, working with local architects Lisa Botticelli and Ray Pohl, had produced a design for a one-story, four-room structure that borrowed a number of elements from traditional cottage construction and detailing (photo right). Recycled building materials—on floors, in cabinets and in interior doors—unmistakably said the cottage had been around for a while. New lumber and

modern materials would help the cottage to meet current energy codes while making it snug, weathertight and comfortable.

Exposed rough-sawn framing gives the building an informal feel

Older Nantucket cottages are usually simply built structures with exposed rough-sawn framing. In keeping with that theme, the 21-ft. by 25-ft. living room got rough-sawn framing with no interior wall coverings (top photo, p. 110). We produced full-dimension 2x4s for studs, shoes and plates, 2x8s for rafters and 2x10s for ridge poles by ripping high-grade spruce staging planks that we picked with care. We left the factory rough edge toward the room to maintain a consistent texture. To minimize the number of jack studs and cripples, we laid out the living room so that doors and windows fell between the common 16-in. centers of the wall studs.

Wherever possible, we hid fasteners. In framing the walls, we nailed through the faces of plates and shoes into the studs (no toenailing). Rafters were lagged from above where they landed on the top plates and were set into dados cut in the ridge and then blind-nailed. The two trusses spanning the living room were built on site from 4x7 beams that had been reclaimed from an old carriage house in Etna, New Hampshire.

To complete the effect, all the exposed wall sheathing was made from reclaimed hem-





Classic cottage detailing. Cedar shingles, open rafter tails and stone-veneer foundation walls give this modern cottage the look of a weathered Nantucket old-timer. Photo taken at A on floor plan.

lock barn board from Pennsylvania, which we straightened and ripped to widths of 5 in., 7 in. and 9 in. New framing lumber and old sheathing were blended together with two coats of whitewash (really just a thinned white paint), commonly seen in old Nantucket cottages.

Both the kitchen (bottom photo) and the bedroom (top photo, facing page) got the same open, whitewashed ceiling as the living room but also have finished wood walls. In the bathroom (bottom photo, facing page), framing in both walls and ceiling is completely covered.

Interior detailing uses old lumber but thoroughly modern windows

The flooring is reclaimed pumpkin pine. It looks timeworn because it is, but it arrived not only in random widths but also in varying thickness—anywhere from $\frac{3}{4}$ in. to $1\frac{1}{4}$ in. We thickness-planed the wood to a uniform $\frac{3}{4}$ in. by removing all the material from the rough-sawn side, then ripped the boards to three common widths: 6 in., 8 in. and 10 in. It is installed with 10d cut nails from Tremont (Tremont Nail Co., Wareham, MA; 800-842-0560; www.mazenails.com). Then, to retain the character of this old flooring, all the surfaces were scraped by hand. Sanding would have removed all the bumps and natural patina that make the wood so attractive. The finish is stain, four coats of oil and, finally, wax.

Interior doors and the kitchen cabinets are made from the same Pennsylvania hemlock barn board that we used for exposed sheathing on the ceilings and living-room walls. We surfaced the wood to $\frac{3}{4}$ in. thick on a thickness sander, which left much of the color and texture of this old wood intact. To make interior doors, we laminated two layers of material to get the $1\frac{3}{8}$ -in. stock we needed for rails, stiles and panels. Doors were finished with only wax to let the natural feeling of the wood speak for itself.

When it came to windows, the owners expressed an interest in old-fashioned double hungs that operated with the help of sash weights. I had resigned myself to making my own from new window sash and reclaimed sash weights and pulleys when I learned that modern versions of old-fashioned double hungs are made by Dover Window Inc. (Harrington, DE 19952; 302-349-5070). We were able to get true divided-lite sash in mahogany that operate smoothly and also are made with the most modern window technology available.

The east side of the cottage facing the pond presented special difficulties for win-





Exposed framing masks modern insulation. White-washed sheathing and rough, full-dimension framing make the living room look old. Foam panels in walls and roof help the cottage to meet modern energy codes. Photo taken at B on floor plan.

A new kitchen from old wood. Cabinets are made from recycled hemlock, the same wood used for exposed roof sheathing. An Aga cooking range and stainless-steel counters keep the kitchen up to date. Photo taken at C on floor plan.



An open ceiling reflects lots of light. A whitewashed ceiling and light-colored walls help to create an open, airy feeling in the cottage's north-facing bedroom. Photo taken at D on floor plan.

Modern conveniences in a period package. Beadboard walls, a claw-foot tub and a painted floor design suggest a turn-of-the-century informality in the bathroom. Photo taken at E on floor plan.



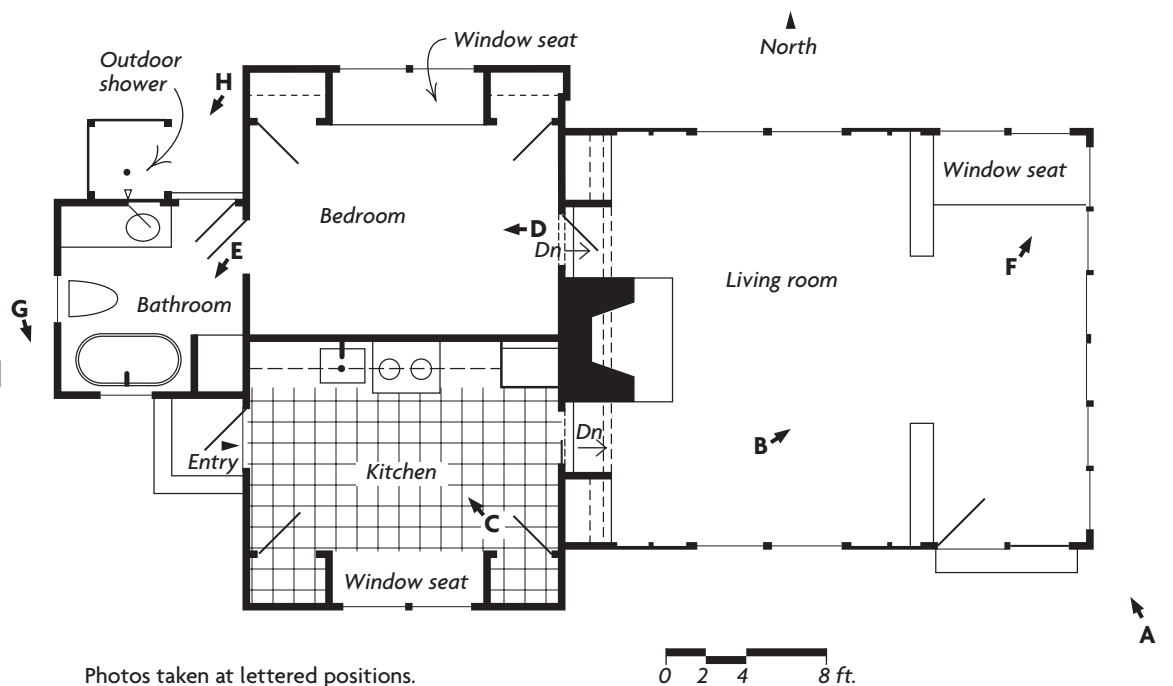
Ventilation and storm protection in one. A pair of telescoping windows span a 21-ft. width on the ocean-facing east wall of the cottage. They can be closed quickly in bad weather. Photo taken at F on floor plan.

A COTTAGE BUILT FOR TWO

Just down the hill from a large summer residence, this Nantucket cottage was built for a couple in search of a little more privacy. Windows in the east wall of the living room face Sesachacha Pond and, beyond a spit of sand, the Atlantic Ocean.

SPECS

Bedrooms: 1
Bathrooms: 1
Size: 1,061 sq. ft.
Cost: N/A
Completed: 1997
Location: Nantucket, Massachusetts
Architect: Botticelli & Pohl
Builder: Hill Construction



Photos taken at lettered positions.

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dows. The owners wanted that end of the living room to be screened, yet weather that can blow in suddenly would make it tough to keep the room dry. Dover solved that problem with weathertight sliding windows along the 21-ft. wall that can be closed in only a few moments if weather approaches (photo facing page).

We made the exterior doors in our shop to match the style and the profile of the windows, and we added solid board-and-batten cedar storm panels for all the exterior doors and windows to protect them from Nantucket winters.

Exterior detailing starts with a layer of rigid-foam insulation

Choosing whitewashed barn board for exposed wall sheathing gives the cottage a relaxed look, but the building still had to meet Massachusetts energy codes. In the living room, we installed 1½-in. thick foam panels on the outside of the sheathing, then added ½-in. CDX plywood. In addition to insulating the room, the foam had an added benefit. It gave us a place to snake electrical wires for outlets and lights so that wiring would not show. We used 4-in. thick foam panels faced with 7/16-in. oriented strand board over the exposed barn-board roof sheathing. Where walls were conventionally framed with 2x6s, we used fiberglass insulation.

Because the owners wanted exposed rafter tails at the eaves, we had to find a way to hide the edges of all those foam-insulation panels in the roof. We cut rafter tails from western red cedar, then screwed them to the fascias from behind to conceal the fasteners. The completed fascia boards could be hoisted into place as a unit, looking as if standard rafters ran all the way from the ridge.

The sidewall shingling is detailed with a curving flare where the wall meets the stone-veneer foundation wall (top photo). Walls are framed straight but set in from the outside edge of the foundation by 4 in. Over the plywood wall sheathing go tapered furring strips, then another layer of plywood to form a slope. When the white-cedar shingles are added, they naturally create a curve. At door openings, we added a curved red-cedar board to close the gap between the curved skirt and the door casing. Shingles are woven at the corners. One of my favorite exterior details, though, is the outside shower (bottom photo). Tucked around the back of the cottage, just outside the bathroom, the cedar shower is private and practical. □

Sam Hill has been a builder on Nantucket for 20 years. Photos by Scott Gibson.



Walls with a flare. By furring out the lower part of the walls and attaching a second layer of plywood sheathing, the author created a curved finish to the bottom of exterior walls. Photo taken at G on floor plan.

Outdoor shower is practical and fun. An open-air shower outside the bathroom door is one way of keeping sand from getting tracked all over the house. Cedar walls won't rot. Photo taken at H on floor plan.