

BUILT TO ORDER

AFTER 30 YEARS, JOHN HARTNETT REPLACES HIS PLUM ISLAND CAMP WITH A HOUSE METICULOUSLY DESIGNED AS 'A STATEMENT OF JOHN.'

BY JOEANN HART

John Hartnett lived in a former duck hunters' camp on Plum Island for 30 years, and as he got older and his Newburyport excavation business, John Hartnett and Son, grew more successful, he wanted to enjoy life more. He retreated to a Florida condo with a 35-foot cigarette boat in tow, but he and the Sunshine State just didn't mesh. Luckily, he had held onto his Newburyport property, and when a municipal water and sewer system expanded the building possibilities on the island, he decided the time to create his dream house was "now or never."

He moved into his garage during construction, sleeping on a cot near his Harley-Davidson for close to two years. Last Christmas, he wiped his feet and stepped into a house that had been so meticulously designed around his needs and tastes that his architect, Andrew Sidford, calls it "a statement of John."

"I listened to everyone, then decided for myself," says Hartnett, who worked on many building sites over the years, learning what he did and didn't like. He also noticed that Sidford was not stamping out the same house for every client but creating something original for each.

"John wanted something different and interesting, yet with a traditional feeling," says Sidford. Most of all, he wanted a sense of living right out on the salt marsh, retaining the hunting-camp spirit. To achieve that, Sidford left the bleached-out framing exposed to the roofline, creating a lofty space that welcomes natural light.

Artificial light comes from small bulbs that hang from curvy tracks running throughout the house and, along with the industrial air ducts, keep the eye moving, creating a unifying element. To make this large area comfortable for a single person, Sidford employed an L-shaped layout to define sections, so that the interior remains spacious yet intimate. Floor-to-ceiling windows line the inside of the L, embracing the view of the marsh. Some interior walls are shingled, like the exterior, which adds to the illusion of being indoors and outside at the same time.

EXPOSED Revealed framing and shingles on interior walls give the house a rustic sensibility; the eucalyptus coffee table is by McCullough Wood Products; the black-lacquer and Italian-leather end table is a L'Origine limited edition. The sawhorse dining table and chairs are by Fox Brothers.



OPEN PLAN The first floor "is basically one big room," says owner John Hartnett (below, at right), with architect Andrew Sidford and designer Nancy Lohrer. Bottom: A row of small panes and a round window fill the master bedroom with natural light. Right: The cherry kitchen cabinets were built by McCullough Wood Products; in the dining area, a bar by French furniture maker Felix Monge doubles as a buffet. Facing page, bottom right: The master bath has a glass-block and tile shower, a cedar ceiling, and a vessel sink.



An enclosed spiral staircase, which helps distinguish the living area from the dining area, leads up past the second floor to the top of a tower, where, in a glass cubby full of pillows, the world opens up to a 360-degree panorama of marshland.

On the second floor is Hartnett's office, where a black-lacquer and teak desk by L'Origine sits under a dramatic round window, one of three in the house. A walkway over the kitchen connects the office to the billiard room and gives the upstairs a whimsical treehouse sensibility. Billiards players can look out on the marsh from a large hemispherical window, which adds interest to the rear elevation of the house, conforming to Hartnett's dictum that a house should "look as good from the back as the front."

Indeed, even the side looks good. Hartnett wanted a wind block for the patio without offending his neighbor, "a great gal," so Sidford's office designed a friendly privacy fence that is only slightly shingled and looks like it was simply left by the tide.

Another "great gal" is interior designer Nancy Lohrer, who produced an interior wall color that mimicked "sea grass in the fall," per Hartnett's wishes, then added plum and sage to the palette. He told her he wanted the house furnished to look as if it had been assembled over time, as a camp would. Lohrer worked with him to choose warm wood and leather pieces that had distinct character yet blended together. Most of the furniture came from Milieu, her Newburyport shop, but some was made locally, such as the custom sawhorse table with subtle asymmetrical curves by Fox Brothers of Newburyport, which also produced the kitchen stools of flame birch.

The natural materials complement the floors of travertine marble, which are pale and porous, like sunbaked sand. Hartnett insists the heated floors are carefree, "although I wouldn't want kids crawling around with peanut butter sandwiches." A possibility that seems unlikely for this single guy; peanut butter stays in the kitchen, probably in one of the many drawers. Even the Fisher & Paykel dishwasher is in a drawer, although it remains untouched. Hartnett is a wash-by-hand man, and he wanted not one but two roomy stainless-steel sinks. The kitchen counters, of rain-forest granite, are tall by request. "I'm too old and fat to bend over for anything," he jokes. The range is oriented so he faces the marsh while he cooks, but he wanted his guests at the counter to enjoy the view, too. "He wanted it both ways," says Sidford, who designed a curved island so Hartnett and his friends could be face to face yet still take in the view of the salt marsh, where an aluminum skiff and an egret complete an idyllic scene. "I have a great life," Hartnett says, and this time he's not joking. ■

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