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A YOUNG FAMILY
REVIVES TIP O'NEILL'S
HARWICH PORT HOME.

WHILE SERVING AS A MASSACHUSETTS congressman and eventually speaker of the house, politician Tip O'Neill summered in Harwich Port, away from the demands of Cambridge and Washington, D.C. His family's single-story ranch was constructed in the mid-1900s and set on an acre of land by the beach. When the property sold recently, the new owners faced a dilemma: how to personalize the home while honoring its late owner and maintaining "Tip O'Neill house" references in local lore.

Working with Chris Hereford, principal of HMD Architects, LLC, a design/build firm based in Harwich, the homeowners embarked on a renovation and remodel to suit their busy lifestyle, which involves three young children and a steady stream of summer guests. "My clients appreciated the fact that it was Tip O'Neill's house, but they came to it at a different time and with different objectives," explains Hereford.



HMD Architects renovated Tip O'Neill's old Cape ranch in Harwich Port.



by jennifer sperry | photos by eric roth



Inside, the sprawling U-shaped ranch was outdated; its shag carpeting, wood paneling, cherry cabinetry, and low ceilings combined to form a dark and uninviting interior. Achieving a more modern aesthetic involved stripping away the materials and starting afresh with the existing bones. Meanwhile, two key features called for preservation: the wide-plank flooring of soft pine throughout and the great room's fireplace (with much of its brickwork hidden behind plaster).

Lighting and spaciousness were priorities as Hereford reworked the interior. He expanded the living spaces vertically, allowing for higher, more detailed ceilings. In the great room, an overhead attic made way for a vaulted ceiling, whose impressive shape is now in scale with the newly exposed and commanding fireplace. Sunlight enters through opposing clearstory dormers as well as French doors, which open to the rear terrace and pool.

The theme of increased vertical height continues in the kitchen, where uplights running along cased beams illuminate another vaulted ceiling. A row of windows topped by a clearstory dormer looks out to the enclosed backyard. Cottage touches, such as painted maple cabinets, mingle with country details, including the farmhouse sink; granite countertops, honed to mimic soapstone; new pine floors, finished to match the existing flooring; and an eating area, previously an enclosed dining room, populated by a farm-style table and chairs.

Set apart from the main living spaces is the bedroom wing, which was expanded into three complete bedroom suites connected by one hallway. The master suite comprises a bathroom, walk-in closet, and office. The children share a bedroom filled with boat-shaped beds and a bathroom whose toilet and tub are tailored to fit their small sizes. The guest bedroom also has its own bath.

Storage and other functional features—products of Hereford's thoughtful detailing—make a daily difference for a family of five. In the sun room, toys and games are neatly stowed in the custom mahogany bench seat. The side entrance's open shelves and hooks make for quick and easy organization. Even the powder room, lined with handmade glazed tiles in a sea blue, doubles as a full bath: Its glassed-in shower accommodates guests after a day by the pool.



The spacious kitchen offers views out to the yard and pool. Opposite top: Arts and Crafts elements are introduced at the front entryway. Opposite bottom: A built-in bench seat adds a nautical feel to the sun room.



Whenever possible, the architect incorporated creative lighting—"a cost-effective way to add drama and another level of detail," he points out. "Oftentimes, a home is fitted with decorative lights and fixtures; however, building lights into the millwork makes them an integral part of the architecture." Up-lights, installed in the sun room, kitchen, and eating area, and perimeter cove lighting, tucked into soffits in the great room and front entry, provide soft, indirect light; dimmers control the mood in each space.

Hereford accomplished a wealth of upgrades without dramatically increasing size or proportions. "Small additions opened up spaces," he says, "but still maintained the integrity and scale of the house. We also minimized vertical development, staying within the neighborhood's existing scale."

Continuing to swap outdated features for practical charm, Hereford tackled the lackluster front entry by introducing an oversized front porch. In comparison to a token farmer's porch, the mahogany deck is deeper and therefore more functional, and it also balances the off-center front door. "It relates to the dormer above, and now the approach to the house flows with a subtle consistency," says the architect.



Above left: Handmade glazed tiles in sea blue decorate the powder room. Above: Hereford exposed the brick fireplace and opened the ceiling in the great room.

*"The house
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Overhead, a radius roof mimics the form of a wave, a nod to the home's coastal surroundings. Complete with a set of rocking chairs and a flared stone walk, the porch addition communicates a sense of welcome lacking in the original façade.

A front door of solid fir leads to a tiled entry, where a built-in bench rests above a curved base, an echo of the porch's curving roof. Tapered pilasters mirror the front porch's columns. This purposeful balancing act between exterior and interior detailing ties the two together and improves the flow of space, notes Hereford.

Redefining a ranch as a contemporary cottage is no small feat, but the transformation generated a home with subtle and purposeful style fluctuations. "It has a unique character," Hereford says of the whole. "It's not overly busy, yet it has high-

end detailing and style. It's very functional. There's a contemporary edge, but also a traditional feel."

"They are very happy with the way the house performs, the way it functions," sums up Hereford. Its best qualities were protected, with the remainder shaped to fit their needs.

Best of all, the structure still possesses its signature characteristic: It continues to be known as the late speaker's house, a summertime reminder of a year-round public servant. **h**

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