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A NEW BEGINNING

LONGTIME RESIDENTS OF WATCH HILL BUILD THEIR DREAM HOME

BY EILEEN MCNAMARA

Jean Severud can sum up her former Watch Hill home's appeal in a single word.

"Hideous."

That's why when it came time to demolish the 1960s ranch house and build new, the only part of the old house that Severud and her husband Bob saved was its basement.

From the gracious circular gravel drive that leads from the street to the New England shingle style house, to the soaring two-story tall ceiling in one of the home's first-floor hallways, the approximately 4,000 square-foot home that rose from that simple ranch foundation bares no resemblance to its innocuous predecessor.

Completed in March, the cedar-shingled, four-bedroom house, set on 1+2/3 acres, might at first intimidate, with its expansive front porch, twin pergolas towering overhead and an oversized mahogany front door.

But inside, the home exudes warmth. Perhaps it's because the first thing to greet visitors, besides the Severud's black Labrador retriever, are rows of books in built-in cases along one side of the front entryway, next to family photographs and mementos from friends.

There's no formal dining room in the home. Instead, a large sun porch does double duty as the main dining area and family room, with a dining set on one side and a large-screen television on the other.

There is a formal living room of sorts, though that space also is softened considerably because it shares a double-sided fireplace with the kitchen.

Bob and Jean Severud built the home, located just a short distance from downtown Watch Hill, after selling their much-beloved renovated Greenwich carriage house that they had called home for about 30 years. Prior to that the couple had summered here in the small ranch house that they bought about 10 years ago.

That home, Jean Severud says, had served its purpose as a summer home but was too small and too poorly built for the expanded living she and her husband envisioned for themselves in Watch Hill.

The couple loves to entertain and one of their two grown children recently started a family. Space, and how it was allocated for their expanding family, was a major consideration.

Planning for the house started about three years ago when the Severuds teamed up with architect Michael McKinley, of Michael McKinley and Associates of Stonington, and began planning the design. The actual work on the project, undertaken by Yankee Remodelers of New London, started in 2006 and ended earlier this year.



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Top, Bob and Jean Severud's new home in Watch Hill. Opposite page, a collage of interior photos. Jeff Evans photos.



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From 20

After consulting with the couple, McKinley says, he and the Severuds agreed that the first floor of the new structure would be the entertainment center of the home and would be where the couple's master suite would be. The second floor would provide the living space for other family members when they come to visit.

To that end, McKinley says, the first floor was built with 11-foot ceilings, to give the space an expansive feel, and the kitchen was designed "not so much as a kitchen, but as a living room...but it's really so much more than a kitchen. It's a gathering place."

The approximately 400-square-foot space includes the fireplace, a massive mahogany counter bar, a sitting area, a small eating area and a long black marble countertop extends from the mahogany bar. Running parallel to that countertop is a white marble counter, where the kitchen's sink is set.

All the flooring on the first floor of the house is 7-inch wide mahogany planks. The upstairs floors are natural knotty pine. The second floor includes three bedrooms, additional bathrooms and office space.

The dozens of large windows in the home, coupled with the high ceilings in the first floor, gives the sense of bringing the outside in. McKinley says that effect was intentional because of the high degree of privacy on the large lot. Surrounded by woods on three sides, there are no other homes visible through the thick trees.

"The 11-foot ceilings allowed us to bring a considerable amount of sunlight into the house and gives it a buoyancy (the owners) really like," McKinley says.

The construction and design of the home also included some significant "value engineering," he adds. Architects scaled back plans for a detached two-car garage to an attached one car garage and were able to use the original ranch home's foundation. Those changes saved the Severuds about \$275,000.



Left, The center of the home. Above, includes twin pergressive mahogany Jeff Evans photos.

The New Design Design

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