

# A Cottage at Heart

Renovated Rehoboth-area home retains character of 1940s beach house

BY LYNN R. PARKS | PHOTOGRAPHS BY CAROLYN WATSON



Drawings of a curlew, left, and an almaco jack by family friend Neil Dougherty

The Rehoboth-area home owned by Jason and Debbie Giles originally ended at what is now the back wall of the dining area. An expansion and renovation, started in January 2020 and ending nine months later, added the kitchen as well as an upstairs primary suite.



Counters are quartz, in "mother-of-pearl" pattern .....

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The renovation project started in January 2020 and was completed eight months later. Workers elevated the roof so that the second story was more spacious; built onto the back to accommodate a larger kitchen and an upstairs primary suite; and added switchback stairs — on the inside of the house this time — to replace the spiral staircase.

The contractor was Lockwood Design & Construction near Milton and the architect was Bruce Moneta of Lewes.

Debbie says she and Jason understood the necessity of expanding and updating the cottage in order to live there full time. "We needed stairs, and we needed a kitchen that could accommodate friends and guests." At the same time, they wanted to maintain the character of the original structure.

"Our ultimate goal was to tie the old in with the new," Jason says. "We didn't want it to feel like an old house that we just built on top of."

The layout of the house's front part remains as it was when Mary Davis lived there. A six-light alder wood front door opens into the family room, kept warm in the winter by a brick fireplace that was built by Otha "Bozie" Furniss Sr.

Furniss, who died in 2013, was the owner of Bozie's Produce, which he operated until 1986 along the Forgotten Mile. (Family members ran it after he died.) "Mary was up there buying produce and told him that her house was so cold in the winter and she wanted a fireplace," Jason notes. "He said he could do that; he was a mason and she didn't even know it!"

Next to the family room, through a set of French doors, is the office. The desk is the cottage's original front door, stripped of its several layers of paint and covered with a thick piece of glass. Bookshelves with cabinets beneath them line the wall behind the desk.

Just behind the family room is the dining area, with an antique pine trestle table and two benches. Tucked into a corner is a small bar, with sea glass subway tile on the backsplash and a tigerwood counter.

The sunroom is in what was a



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① Jason and Debbie Giles asked architect Bruce Moneta to make the kitchen island larger than usual, and to include plenty of space between the island and the cabinets, to accommodate visiting friends. The two lights over the island have no glass in them, to make them easier to clean.

② Debbie and Jason love biking around the "Forgotten Mile" neighborhood in which they live. Jason's mom, Gail, also lives in the neighborhood, as does his brother, Jeff, who is captain of the Rehoboth Beach Patrol.

③ Except for the hearth, which was terra cotta tile, the family room fireplace is as it was when Debbie and Jason bought the house. It gets a lot of use in the winter, Jason says.

④ Jason and Debbie share this ground-floor office. The desktop is the home's original front door.



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In 1978, Wilmington residents John and Gail Giles bought a summer home between Rehoboth Beach and Dewey Beach, just east of Route 1, in an area known as the "Forgotten Mile." Their son, Jason, says he spent every summer there following that purchase.

Years later, when Jason was newly married, he started bringing his bride to visit his parents. Just four doors down from the Giles house was a small beach cottage that the young couple often admired during their walks. "Mary Davis, the woman who lived here, would be out in the garden, working," Debbie Giles recalls. "And I would always say, 'That house is so cute.'"

The younger couple eventually had a townhouse in Canal Corkran where Debbie, a schoolteacher, and their two sons spent summers. But when Jason's dad called to tell him Davis was moving and there was a For Sale sign in front of her home, "immediately, there was a lump in my throat," Jason says of the prospect of finally owning it.

In 2016, the couple sold their townhouse and bought the 800-square-foot cottage, built in 1949, despite knowing that it was going to need work. The only access to the upstairs was by an outdoor spiral staircase. And when the family came to stay at their new home at Thanksgiving, they woke up to a cool 50 degrees inside.



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⑤ The sunroom, originally a screened porch accessed through sliding glass doors, is a cozy spot with plenty of natural light.

⑥ Atop the sunroom is a second-story deck. The former owner of the home, Mary Davis, tried to ensure that her house would not be demolished. She carefully screened potential buyers, says new owner Debbie Giles, and "if she met buyers that she thought were going to tear it down, she wasn't selling to them."

screened porch. Hanging there is an antique clock that Debbie's grandmother, a military nurse, brought to the U.S. from France after World War II. The clock chimes on the hour and then two minutes later. A clockmaker told Debbie that during those two minutes, the clock's owner is supposed to pray.

In the kitchen, a window takes up most of the wall along which the sink and counter sit. Installed in the counter are popup electrical outlets that, when not in use, are flush with the surface.

The original pine floors, stripped of the blue paint that was covering them, are still in the upstairs bedroom where Debbie and Jason's two sons sleep. (Jack is a junior at the University of Delaware, and Joe started studies this fall at the State Univer-

sity of New York Maritime College in the Bronx.) During the renovation process, the Gileses salvaged knotty pine boards that were originally on the bedroom walls; workers put the boards on one wall of the bedroom, now larger because of the renovation, and used other boards to build dressers for the room.

Over the stairway, among several family pictures, hangs a photo of the Giles family taken the day after they bought their beach cottage. Everyone is standing in front of the house and overhead arcs a rainbow.

"We settled on our house on Friday the 13th," Debbie remembers. "But we could not have felt any luckier." ■

*Lynn R. Parks is a frequent contributor to Delaware Beach Life.*

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