

AS SEEN IN...
DESIGN
 new england

modern

LIKE MOST HOUSES in Provincetown, Massachusetts, Madeliene Abling and Vicky Keith's renovated modern residence is packed tightly between street and neighbors. Keith reclines on the new front deck, while Abling leans against the rough-sawn cedar gate to her painting studio. Wooden doors on barn-style hinges shield the studio's sliding glass doors in the off-season.

history

A STUDENT PROJECT TURNED ARTISTS' HAVEN, A TINY MID-CENTURY HOUSE IN PROVINCETOWN, MASSACHUSETTS, IS UPDATED WITH ITS AVANT VIBE INTACT

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LIKE SO MANY HISTORIC DISTRICTS IN NEW England, the one in Provincetown, Massachusetts, protects buildings of a certain vintage, most of them built at the turn of the 20th century, some even earlier.

Except for one. Well, two, really.

Tucked away on a dead-end road off busy Bradford Street in the East End of this tiny town on the tip of Cape Cod sat a 1920s garage and a 600-square-foot house that was designed and built in the 1960s by an architecture professor and his students as a summer project.

Over the years, the house and shed welcomed a series of artists into the cozy spaces, the minuscule living quarters the site of wine-fueled late-night discussions about art and philosophy, and the garage transformed into a painting studio. Long a rental unit, the buildings took on the unique imprints of each successive tenant. Along the way, an intimate deck was added connecting the studio and house. By the time artist Madeliene Abling and her partner, Vicky Keith, began spending summers on Cape Cod rather than at their Florida home, it was the very definition of a funky artists' property.

"It was so P-town," says Abling, who owns Abling Gallery on Commercial Street where she shows her paintings.

When the property came up for sale, the two quickly scooped it up. But as charming as the bohemian vibe could be by candlelight, there were some not-so-charming daylight realities. The structural integrity of the house had played second fiddle to the

ALTHOUGH JUST 300 square feet, an open plan gives the kitchen (TOP LEFT) the illusion of spaciousness. A tile backsplash references glass tumbled by the sea, and a bi-level counter offers extra seating. The owners asked architect Mark Hammer to design the living room (LEFT) to accommodate a baby grand piano, no small feat in such tight quarters. New clerestory windows and sliding glass doors gave artist Madeliene Abling's renovated studio (FACING PAGE) the light she needed to work on her paintings.

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Architect Mark Hammer came up with a plan to expand the house by enclosing the space where an open deck had connected the two buildings. That became the new kitchen, which has ready access to the outdoors via both a front and back entry. Hammer also added a full bath and laundry room. The new living room, delineated from the kitchen by its warm wood floor, is a public domain in three segments: a central seating area, a reading nook, and a space big enough to fit a baby grand piano (an 11th-hour request). The adjacent bedroom suite runs the depth of the house. The living room ceiling was raised with clerestory windows that create a dialogue between the house and the taller studio, where new windows bring in much-needed light for the artist.



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students' avant-garde ideas. The roof leaked terribly. The walls lacked insulation. As Don DiRocco, an associate at Hammer Architects in Cambridge and Truro, Massachusetts, says, "Some of the construction was experimental — cool, but pretty light."

The owners were familiar with the work Mark Hammer, the firm's principal, had done renovating other mid-century-modern buildings on the Outer Cape, and they approached him with a proposition: Turn their low-lying house into a livable summer home by going vertical. Hammer had another idea.

"We proposed an addition [where the deck was], putting the kitchen there and linking it to the studio," says Hammer, who started working on the project in 2006. "Originally they were horrified at the notion [of losing the deck], but the more we looked at it, by changing some things in the backyard, they could capture a lot of outdoor space they weren't using."

Hammer's solution became more enticing when he explained that structurally the existing nonconforming buildings would not support a second story. In order to build up, they'd have to tear them down, and to meet zoning requirements, the new house would have to be set back much farther from the property line, which would mean losing square footage.

Hammer and DiRocco presented their plan in perhaps the quickest approval hearing ever by the Provincetown Historic District Commission. "They had never done a modern building, so they deferred to us, saying, 'This looks right. We think you are doing the right thing,'" says Hammer. "We got approval from them on the first try."

THE NEW BACK patio (RIGHT) is a favorite hangout on warm summer evenings. Here, Keith collects tomatoes from the couple's vegetable patch. The new front deck opens to the kitchen (FACING PAGE), which replaced a deck that had connected the house and studio. With a house this close to the street (ABOVE), the encircling fence creates a comfortable sense of privacy.

The new kitchen added a scant 300 square feet to the existing 600-square-foot house, so each inch was planned for maximum storage. After living on a boat for many years, Abling and Keith were comfortable meeting the challenges of small-space living.

"We used pocket doors in the bedroom and bath. That allows [the owners] to keep them open," says DiRocco. "It feels larger with no swinging doors to catch the breeze and slam shut."

Although he was able to create new patio space by claiming an untamed back garden and hide mechanicals in a new 600-square-foot basement, Hammer's benchmark achievement was meeting Abling and Keith's most important goal — he retained the home's cozy, casual, arty atmosphere. "It goes against what so many people are building," says DiRocco. "It's one of our smallest jobs, but the most fun." ■

