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Photography by: Peter Vanderwarker, Erik Roth & Diane Anton

SEVEN MONTHS & SEVEN DAYS

A MAJOR UNDERTAKING
COMPLETED WITH MINIMAL
STRESS

Even under ideal conditions, refurbishing a century-old home to replicate modern times, without sacrificing its character, would pose a daunting challenge. But toss in two months lost to permitting, the fickleness of New England winters and the myriad issues related to a house of that age, and Randy Gardner at Gardner Woodwrights Custom Home Building knew he was facing considerable obstacles in completing a project that involved nearly every inch of what would become a 7,200-square foot home.

“We turned the house over in just seven months and seven days after we got the building permit,” said Gardner, owner of Gardner Woodwrights. “The pace of this job, the involvement with the client, the architect, the designer and the landscaper was all done in unison. It just went so smoothly.”

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Builder: GARDNER WOODWRIGHTS

Architect: HAMMER ARCHITECTS





In a word; perfect. This turn-of-the-century home is regal, yet not showy, refined yet not ostentatious.

Landscape Architecture: KEITH LEBLANC LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT Landscaping: LANDSCAPE CREATIONS Interior Design: WH DÉCOR

Appliances: GIL'S APPLIANCE Architectural Hardware: BRASSWORKS



This sweeping veranda, with sweeping views, is reminiscent of a Victorian-era hotel.

The project was a testament to teamwork, thanks to the efforts of Gardner, locally renowned architect Mark Hammer of Hammer Architects of Cambridge, MA, landscaper designer Keith LeBlanc of Keith LeBlanc Landscape Architecture of Boston, Landscape Creations of Saunderstown, R.I., designer Bill Hulsman of WH Decor of West Palm Beach, Fla., and architectural hardware, including custom doorknobs, doors for the fireplace and fixtures for the cabinets, were provided by Brassworks of Providence.

Approximately 2,000 square feet, including two wings, two balconies, a 12- by 13-foot screened porch and a 46- by 38-foot L-shaped wraparound deck, was added to the Watch Hill, R.I. home, built around 1900. In addition, the kitchen and family room were expanded, while the basement was converted into living space that now features a pool room, wine cellar, exercise room, bathroom and a wet bar. Existing dormers were modified, the original chimney was brought down to the roof line and rebuilt, two upstairs bathrooms were added, cabinets and vanities were custom-fabricated at Gardner Woodwrights, and windows and doors were replaced.

All in time for the client to move into the property by mid-June. During the process, more than 200 tons of debris was hauled away, and nearly 100 yards of stone was brought in to fill in the basement and to match the existing fieldstone columns that give the house its distinctive appearance.

“The client’s intent was to maintain the integrity of the original structure,” Gardner said. “We emulated the additions, the wings and the porches, the hardware and the woodwork, and the bead board on the ceilings was all custom designed to match the original.”

The attention to detail can be seen from the front of the house, where a distinctive eyebrow window, also custom-fabricated in Gardner Woodwrights’ shop, was craned onto the new wood roof. The sashes in the stately home’s original windows were brought to the shop to be used as a template, while the new windows of solid Alaskan yellow cedar were imported from British Columbia.

Western red cedar was used for the ceiling and walls of the wraparound deck, with Brazilian redwood laid down for the floor. A new fieldstone veneer perfectly matches the original exterior columns.



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The U-shaped kitchen was transformed into the focal point of the home, due to the client’s fondness for entertaining. Featuring a breakfast area with a custom-built mahogany bench, a new 4x4 granite island, and glass-shelved white cabinets to hold wine glasses, it faces the family room and allows easy access to the screened porch. “It was the perfect spot to tie everything together,” Gardner said.

In the front entry, custom wainscoting matches the original, while a mahogany door and fir flooring provide a stunning opening into the dining room. The home’s original design was a product of its times, with restrictive views to the outside and a claustrophobic atmosphere. By installing larger windows and a doorway with two side-lights, the water is in view throughout the dining room.

“It’s now open and airy. It’s a welcoming house,” Gardner said proudly of the completed project.

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Clockwise from upper left: The original fir handrail and white-painted balusters were restored and refinished on-site by Gardner Woodwrights. In this view, we are standing in the foyer looking into the dining room; the large mahogany door was custom fabricated in the Gardner Woodwrights shop. A reading nook has a wall of windows above and a lot of storage below. The family room, with a white-on-white coffered ceiling and decorative columns, is set up for conversation and casual dining.



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— RANDY GARDNER



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