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**A Coastal Remodel Triumphs Over Limits**

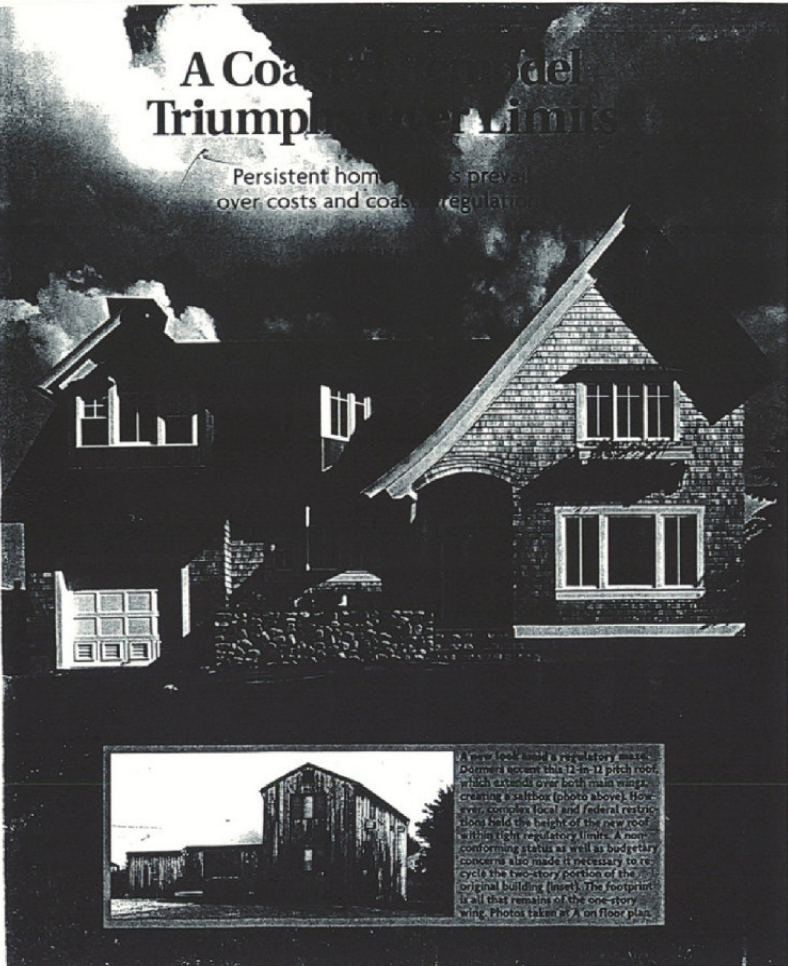
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# A Coastal Triumph Over Regulatory Limits

Persistent homeowners prevailed over costs and coastal regulations.



A new look limits a regulatory maze. Owner's dream: a 12-in-12 pitch roof, which extended over both main wings, creating a saltnut (photo above). However, complex local and federal restrictions held the height of the new roof within tight regulatory limits. A nonconforming status as well as budgetary concerns also made it necessary to recycle the two-story portion of the original building (inset). The footprint is all that remains of the one-story wing. Photos taken at A on floor plan.

Inset photo (left page): Duo Dickinson

**F**ive years ago, I got a call from Damien and Vlad Zeman of Westport, Connecticut. They had bought a starter home a few years earlier and needed design services for a simple renovation of that house. It was on a nice site in Saugatuck Shores, a coastal New England neighborhood of previously unheated vacation shacks slowly being rehabbed into year-round dwellings on postage-stamp-size lots facing saltwater.

**Renovation becomes reinvention**  
Initially, their needs were relatively modest. They wanted to raise their home to the code-compliant flood level of 13 ft. above mean high tide, to renovate the home's interior and to redecorate its exterior. The house's plan formed a modified "T" shape; the main section had bedrooms above and living space below with a simple one-story wing launching off the side containing the kitchen and garage.

During the design process, the Zemans ultimately decided to address their long-term housing needs, opting for a "forever" house vs. a simple renovation. This decision was due partly to their changing needs; they already had one child, and another was on the way by the time construction commenced. The change in plans meant the initial budget grew, and the impact of our expanded design services had to fall within strict local and federal regulations.

Because of our pre-existing, nonconforming status and budgetary concerns, we recycled the two-story portion of the building. The other wing was to be renovated into a more functional kitchen and garage with a new master suite above.

**Homeowners unwind the red tape**  
As with most waterfront homes in heavily developed areas, virtually every aspect of this home was barely within the building and zoning requirements that would have been imposed on a naked lot. We simply could not have built a new home of this design in this location (photo facing page).

Zoning regulations allowed a small expansion of the existing footprint. Similarly, the height of the building was limited to 26 ft.; the height restriction had to take into account that we were raising the house approximately 3 ft. above its current height to comply with the Coastal Area Management Code.

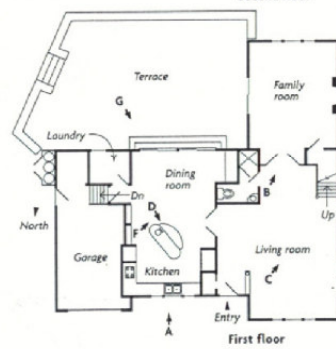
Custom construction becomes the obvious choice for anyone wanting to build in this context. How do you deal with such extraordinary budgetary and regulatory limits and still create something special? The answer is

## A NEW HOUSE MAKES THE BEST OF AN OLD FOOTPRINT

Regulations kept this project from expanding much beyond the original dimensions, so the new plan uses the T-shape of the existing house. The two-story north-south section of the house was recycled with a steeper roof adding a dramatic note to the bedrooms. A master bedroom with a cathedral ceiling tops off the rebuilt east-west section of the house with an upgraded kitchen and garage on the first floor.



Second floor



First floor

### SPECS

- Bedrooms: 3
- Bathrooms: 2 1/2
- Size: 2800 sq. ft.
- Cost: N/A
- Completed: 2000
- Location: Westport, Connecticut
- Architect: Duo Dickinson
- Builder: C & J Construction

Photos taken at lettered positions.

simple: the investment of time. By investing their own time into working out solutions, homeowners can often solve problems that could be more quickly dealt with by an infusion of raw manpower (and thus dollars). Because our firm was working on an hourly basis, our time was tightly monitored. Fortunately, the Zemans took the bull by the horns, tirelessly massaging zoning and

building department issues through a maze of hearings, meetings, correspondence and informal discussions among engineers, surveyors, town officials, the builder and me. Their aggressive attention to this part of the process allowed us to obtain building permits and approvals in a relatively short time. Similarly, they assuaged their resident budgetary limitations in a variety of ways. First,



**Durable and cost-effective materials** throughout. Painted drywall, hardwood floors and solid-wood trim combine successfully to create a modest yet elegant interior as in this family-room sitting area. Photo taken at B on floor plan.

**Round and oval windows are placed in key locations.** The oval window at the bottom of the stairs adds visual interest, allows natural light to enter and provides an outside view. Photo taken at C on floor plan.



they picked C & J Construction of Madison, Connecticut, an out-of-town builder that offered a better price because they were located outside of Fairfield County's aggressive pricing; second, they directly purchased all the custom millwork, many of the lighting fixtures and much of the hardware. The homeowners also threw themselves into the process of writing checks to suppliers, being

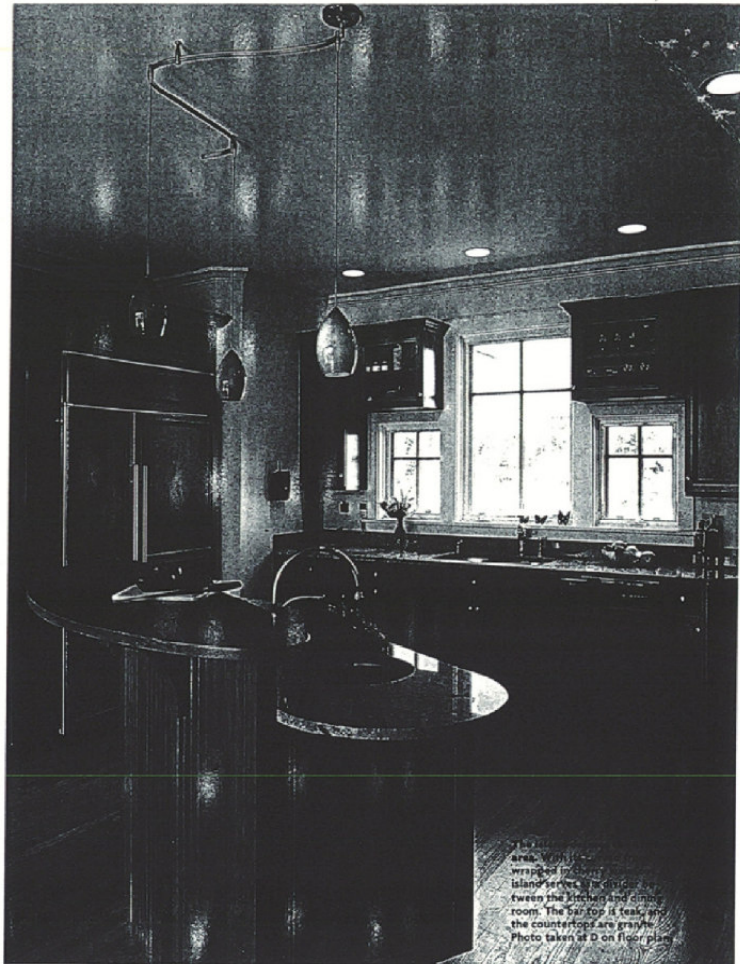
responsible for deliveries and following up on loose ends.

As many home-building veterans know, this approach can be a shortcut to errors and finger-pointing. Homeowners' inexperience in construction management often translates into disappointments and recriminations with architects and builders. In this case, though, the Zemans' unstinting attention to

detail and seemingly inexhaustible energy ensured that this project would deliver an excellent bang for the buck.

#### Recycling the original plan pays off

The homeowners' enthusiasm alone didn't make this project a success. It also required a design that would take advantage of the building's existing plan. Mindful of building



The area wrapped in dark wood island serves as a divider between the kitchen and dining room. The bar top is teak, and the countertops are granite. Photo taken at D on floor plan.



Curved-top armoire complements the angled ceiling. This stylish built-in closet neatly tucks into the voids alongside the fireplace in the master bedroom. Photo taken at E on floor plan.



Patio doors frame a lovely view. A built-in cabinet serves the dining area. Patio doors provide access to a large terrace overlooking the salt marsh. Photo taken at F on floor plan.



A cantilevered porch overlooks the marsh. Two large brackets and a large beam support a cantilevered porch off the master bedroom. Trellises with contoured tails flank the porch. Photo taken at G on floor plan.

and zoning requirements, we had to work almost exclusively within the house's original "T" formation, which conveniently separated the formal front of the house from the informal back, with the service areas to one side on the first floor (floor plans, p. 87). The structure is now a 2800-sq. ft., three-bedroom, 2 1/4-bath house. The upstairs bedrooms stake out the ends of each wing with baths nestled between them.

On the rear exterior of the house, the intersecting wings were a natural location for a large-scale terrace off the dining room, which looks over the salt marsh (photo top left). At the front of the house, the intersection of the wings became the main entry.

#### New roof animates the exterior

The most obvious change in the house is the roof. The roofline swoops just above the entry, which has a curved ceiling. And the 6-in-12 pitch roof gave way to a new 12-in-12-pitch, which extends over the entry and the garage bay, creating a saltbox for the two intersecting wings.

Not so obvious are the laminated beams used to pick up some of the point loads generated at the intersections of roofs. The new 12-in-12 pitch roofs needed only engineered collar ties along with prefabricated steel hurricane ties installed at all rafter/plate connections to provide stiffness.

The gable dormer over the garage provides visual interest as well as additional headroom in the master bedroom; another smaller

dormer projects at a 45° angle with a multifaceted roof just above the entrance. To distinguish these dormers further, the head casings of the individual windows in the gabled dormers rise as the gable roof ascends; the sills on the angled dormer windows fall as they progress down the main roof. To make the dormers more a part of the roof, they were sided with tongue-and-groove red-cedar siding, in contrast with the surrounding house, which is finished in white-cedar shingles.

The same head/sill interplay evident in the dormers is echoed in the heads of the kitchen windows below. In addition, a curved transom window with splayed sides above the entry door complements the swoop in the roof. Round and oval windows are set at key points on the exterior: at gable peaks, at the bottom of the stairs (photo right, p. 88) and in bathrooms.

Additionally, the muntin patterns on many windows follow a cruciform motif with the vertical and horizontal bars creating square panes at the top and elongated panes below. The round and oval windows are similar, but rather than the cruciform, they have a simple cross-hairs pattern.

We added several other elements on the exterior to enrich the overall form. At the entry roof overhang, a large knee brace was added. In the rear, the tails of the cantilevered framing that support the trellis/porch off the master bedroom were carefully sculpted (photo top right) and supported by an octagonal beam and a pair of knee braces.

The tapered chimney uses both trim and a flared, lead-coated copper cap to add distinction to this focal point. The eaves of the house are rendered to complement and unify the rest of the exterior trim details as well as the roof forms.

#### Modest choices elsewhere permit an elegant kitchen

The kitchen, whose details the owners took on with gusto, became the heart of an open floor plan (photo p. 89). Cherry frame-and-panel cabinetry was used throughout, including the front panels of the refrigerator and dishwasher, making them less conspicuous.

The island is set at an angle for easier access. The curved front is wrapped in cherry wainscot, the bar top is oiled teak, and the countertops are granite.

We integrated the kitchen cabinets into the window trim over the kitchen sink. Two cabinets with glass-panel doors fill the niche created by the smaller windows, which flank the larger window over the kitchen sink.

In addition to the kitchen, the interior finishes of hardwood flooring and solid-wood trim used in the den and throughout the house are durable and simple (photo left, p. 88). Painted drywall became dramatic in the master-bedroom suite after we fleshed out the shapes resulting from the intersecting rooflines (photo facing page). □

Duo Dickinson is an architect in Madison, CT. Photos by Chris Green, except where noted.