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MEREDITH SPECIALS



PAST FORWARD

In a gentle update to this treasured family cottage in Maine, a new generation carries traditions and artifacts of the past into a bright, lovingly curated future.

WRITTEN BY SARAH EGGE PHOTOGRAPHED BY JOHN GRUEN PRODUCED BY KARIN LIDBECK-BRENT



IN 1921
SARAH HEBB
CARPENTER'S
GREAT-
GRANDMOTHER
SENT HER
HUSBAND ON
AN ERRAND.

HE ROWED HIS BOAT
ACROSS THE RIVER
TO GET CORN, AND
he came back with the
deed to their campsite.
"That's our story," Sarah
says. And so began the
family's relationship to
an idyllic piece of land
outside Damariscotta,
Maine. "This will be

my 59th summer," Sarah says. "And our kids are the fifth generation to spend their summers here."

After acquiring the land, Ulysses Grant Barter built a simple cottage he named Pine Ledge from pine trees felled nearby. "It has pretty much stayed the same shape and size since," Sarah says. Used only in the summers, the two-story, shingle-clad structure has charm in spades. Shutters frame

a string of original windows that capture the view. A house-wide porch and upper-level mezzanine are meant to gather people. "We just move all day long from chair to chair, from coffee to cocktails," Sarah says. "This place begs for people. We have friends with us all summer long. It's very much an open-door policy."

After a stop in Portland for dinner, Sarah and her husband, Mike—and their grown children, Liam and Janae, when they're available—finish the drive from the Boston area, eager to start Saturday with a cup of coffee at the tip of their little peninsula. "On the point are two Adirondack chairs; it's the best place for a cup of coffee in Damariscotta Pottery cups, watching the town wake up, and observing nature," she says.

When Sarah inherited the house a few years ago, she didn't want to change a single thing about the setting. The house's interior, however, was another story. "My husband likes to say, 'This is where furniture came to die,'" she says with a laugh. "And they were not all beautiful pieces. It was

ABOVE LEFT Family photos and books that have been read and enjoyed over the years line bookshelves built into the wall studs. The portrait is of Sarah's grandfather George. **ABOVE RIGHT** Popping against the painted paneling, the golden tones of native pine shine in the door trim, floors, and furnishings. A palette based largely on water hues extends from collectibles, artwork, and pottery to area rugs, the slipcovered sofa, and the stripe in a reupholstered armchair. **OPPOSITE** The living room tells a family story, as portraits of family members line the walls around the moose head, an auction purchase made untold years ago. Sarah's father spent every summer in the cottage except for the years he served in World War II, and the signal flag is from his landing craft. Now Sarah's family is adding their stories to the house: The kids have hung their college pennants, and her husband, Mike, made the light fixture and cut the lobster shape into the screen door.





"I LOVE THE CHARM OF AN OLD PLACE. IT HAS SUCH CHARACTER. I DIDN'T WANT TO CHANGE TOO MUCH, JUST UPDATE IT SO IT'S A HAPPY PLACE FOR THIS NEW GENERATION."

—INTERIOR DESIGNER KRISTEN RIVOLI

as mishmash a mishmash as you can get." Sarah counted 54 straight-backed chairs in various stages of disrepair. The kitchen was practically nonfunctional. ("We had to roll the dishwasher in and hook it up to use it," Sarah says.) And it was very dark. "The first thing I did was rip down the drapes. It was time to lighten and brighten," she says. "I always wanted to move the house into the future."

To help with the light-handed transformation, Sarah called on a friend and neighbor of her parents, designer Kristen Rivoli. "She was at a turning point as the new owner," Rivoli says, "and was looking at the house from the point of view of, 'How is this going to work for my family? What are the

things we want?'" She and Sarah edited the furniture and belongings and discussed Sarah's vision. "She had a picture of whitewashed wood, and that became the inspiration for the whole project," the designer says. Rivoli brought in a decorative painter to work with the sun-darkened paneling. It was painstaking working in 3-foot square sections because the old wood soaked up the liquid so fast. But after refinishing the floors and whitewashing the brick chimney, too, the light, bright interior was realized.

Rivoli says the project stitched together time and eras: "We updated furniture, reupholstered some pieces, and integrated some new pieces," she says. "But even new things we brought

OPPOSITE Mike's handiwork is shown in the dining area, where he fashioned the light fixture and the dining table. Whenever possible, he reused materials from the cottage itself, such as boards salvaged when they rebuilt the front steps. The walls showcase pieces of Blue Willow china that feature pine trees and nature scenes. **THIS PHOTO** The Blue Willow is used daily and also adds pretty pattern and color when on display atop an old pine chest. A white ironstone pitcher holds a bouquet of ferns gathered from beneath the trees outdoors.





in had classic lines, so the cottage continues to feel like a family camp that has evolved over time." The largest challenge was culling furnishings and collections gathered by generations. Sarah gave away a lot and kept things that were the most sentimental, such as her great-great-grandfather's Stickley reading chair, and the most useful, such as a set of Blue Willow dishware. "I wanted to make more than a nod to the traditions of this place, where the cottage came from, and to the river it sits on," Sarah says. Paintings of the ocean, model boats, and pennants from schools her family attended have prominence against less cluttered backdrops.

Knowing the house would be used only from May until October offered a freeing set of parameters, Rivoli says. "It makes it a little easier in a way because designing for a

summer house eliminates a lot and narrows the focus: It will be hot, and we'll be in wet bathing suits and have sandy feet," Rivoli says. She addressed these needs by choosing hard-wearing cotton duck fabric for upholstery and cushions and a slipcover for the sofa, and she kept the glossy floors largely bare, except for a few low-pile woven rugs that won't harbor sand grains.

Enjoying the home seasonally makes it special, Sarah says. "There's the routine of opening it, which is long and arduous and dusty and dirty, but it's a labor of love. There's something about doing exactly what my great-grandparents, my grandparents, and my parents did. I'm not a sentimental person, but I get sentimental about this place." □

RESOURCES. SEE PAGE 94.

THIS PHOTO A map of the tidal rivers around Damariscotta hangs on a freshly whitewashed wall in the upper-level mezzanine. Sarah's main goal in updating the house was to lighten and brighten it. Rivoli and Sarah considered several samples of whitewash in varying levels of sheerness before choosing this one. Decorative painter Lynda Stephens developed a custom blend of paint and glaze to achieve the finish.

OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM

TOP Painted cottage furniture brightens the bedrooms: "You can find these sets in every cottage all over Maine," Sarah says. Prints of sailing vessels and iconic brass towel bars line the bathroom walls; the bathroom features all of its original fixtures, including the wall sink and the cast-iron claw-foot tub. The mirror has the look of a ship's wheel. Sarah's father personalized the colorful pieces with stencils.





OPPOSITE Sunset on the porch was Sarah's father's favorite time of day. A pair of vintage rockers and new dining chairs mingle easily thanks to their shared woven textures. If the afternoon glare gets too bright, they lower the striped shades. Hanging on simple hooks, the shades are among the furnishings stored when they close the house for winter. **LEFT** An apron-front sink and industrial light fixture are in keeping with the charming but unfussy flavor of the cottage decor. When they redid the kitchen, Sarah chose solid-surface countertops because they won't crack as the unheated cottage freezes and thaws throughout the winter. They shut off the water in October and turn it back on in May. **BELOW LEFT** The kitchen is a sunny place to gather throughout the day thanks to a Dutch door and a window-lined alcove for the banquette. Sarah and Mike turned a pair of water skis—the ones she learned on—into a shelf above. **BELOW** Designer Kristen Rivoli helped Sarah sort items in the house into attractive groupings for display, such as the wicker-wrapped bottles and baskets on this antique highboy.



"I'M SO GRATEFUL FOR THIS PLACE EVERY TIME I SIT OUT BY THE WATER. I'M FILLED WITH GRATITUDE."

—HOMEOWNER SARAH HEBB CARPENTER

Editing Heirlooms

Choosing what to keep and what to pass along is a challenging time in any family's history. Sarah Hebb Carpenter and her friend and interior designer Kristen Rivoli share tips from their process.

TAKE A MOMENT. Give yourself time to go through things when you're grieving a loss. "Once you can have some thoughtfulness, you can edit in a way that takes into consideration your emotional connection," Rivoli says.

BUILD COLLECTIONS. By gathering like items together, you can choose the best of the bunch and sell or donate the rest. A smaller grouping allows the pieces to be appreciated, and they gain decorative impact even if they don't match, Rivoli says: "By virtue of being vintage pieces or antique heirlooms, they're all going to have a consistent look and feel."

LISTEN TO YOUR HEART. Does the item or collection tap into a feel-good memory? If so, find a place for it. "That's really what it came down to for me," Sarah says.

THE STORY CONTINUES. View the process not as an ending but as a continuation. "You're making room to add your family history to the timeline," Rivoli says. "A lot of design is saying, 'Here's where we've been and here's where we're going.'"

