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# Chesapeake home+living

FALL 2011

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“THE BETHESDA HOUSE WAS QUAIN, BUT HAD A TIGHT FEELING... THE OWNERS’ THOUGHT WAS FOR THIS HOUSE TO BE VERY OPEN, WARM, INVITING, AND UNCLUTTERED.” - designer, Penelope “Penny” Mickum



**A**s with many waterfront home stories, this one begins with a cottage. When the homeowners purchased acreage on a quiet stretch of the Chesapeake Bay near St. Michaels, Maryland, there was only a modest house and a barn. The hope was to revitalize the little home into a place where the new owners could live in retirement, but it became apparent that new construction would be a better use of space and resources. The demolition of the existing structure was perhaps fortuitous as it allowed the house to be set back farther from the waterline, giving the new home a vista of lawn sweeping down to meet the bay, a view that inspired all the choices that followed.

The new home is very much of a time and place. Under the guidance of Brad Anderson of Anderson Residential Design and designer Penelope “Penny” Mickum, the owners built a new home utilizing universal design principles, reflecting the need for the house to be flexible and livable well into their retirement years. It evokes its location by employing architectural forms and materials that fit comfortably in the shore landscape, like cedar plank siding and a green metal seamed roof.

Mickum worked with the owners previously on their home in Bethesda, but the shore house would be a departure from that space. While one of the owners ascribed to the less-is-more aesthetic, the other preferred a little more decoration. The resulting house is where these two philosophies meet. “The Bethesda house was quaint, but had a tight feeling,” says Mickum. “The owners’ thought was for this house to be very open, warm, inviting, and uncluttered.”

Upon entering the house, it is impossible to ignore the striking view. From the front door, through the foyer and into the living room, one’s gaze is drawn to—and through—a wall of glass doors that embrace the expanse of yard that rolls seamlessly to the water’s edge. It’s a floor plan that compels visitors inside while also keeping them engaged in the landscape. It was this panorama that informed Mickum’s interior color palette.

**Top left:** Designer, Penelope “Penny” Mickum.

**Top right:** Cedar shake siding and a standing seam roof echo the classic coastal homes of a bygone era.

**Opposite:** From the front door, a view through the house to a wall of windows and the water beyond captivates anyone who enters.





“MY IDEA OVERALL, BEFORE IT WAS EVEN BUILT, WAS THAT YOU WOULD WALK IN AND INSTEAD OF THERE BEING CERTAIN FOCAL POINTS, I WANTED A SEAMLESS VIEW TO THE OUTSIDE.”

- Penelope “Penny” Mickum



**Above:** The living room is the heart of this house with a commanding view of the water, comfortable furnishings, and a TV hidden behind cabinetry above the fireplace.

**Opposite:** The look of this fun powder room is achieved with a hammered nickel raised vessel sink, bold fixtures, and a stylized floral wallcovering by Zoffany.

“My idea overall, before it was even built, was that you would walk in and instead of there being certain focal points, I wanted a seamless view to the outside,” says Mickum. “We used a creamy yellow, soft greens, and blues—the colors of the outside. Burgundy, for example, would have been the antithesis of this house.”

The tone is set in the foyer by a custom Elizabeth Eakins rug that pulls all those shades into one place. The star fixture in the ceiling is a shape that recurs elsewhere in the house, most immediately in the powder room adjacent to the foyer where etched stars dance playfully around the edge of a mirror. Powder rooms are small spaces that often lend themselves to dramatic statements and this was no exception.

“The homeowner wanted a fun powder room,” Mickum explains. The look is achieved with a deep vessel sink of hammered nickel and large fixtures that are a complementary focal point to a bold, yet delicate floral wallpaper by Zoffany.

The living room is the heart of the house as it is the main communal space. It was therefore designed for comfort and flexibility. “Everything beckons you to come and sit,” says Mickum. “The fabrics are soft—nothing is overly shiny or brocade. This is their everything room.”

Mickum and the homeowner took particular care in the selection of the Brunschwig & Fils sofa. The back is just the right height and the cushions are the perfect softness to make it



**Above:** The homeowners are avid cooks, and there is always something baking in the oven of this large eat-in kitchen.

comfortable for reclining and watching the television that is hidden behind white panel doors over the fireplace. Most furniture is on casters so seating arrangements can be easily changed.

The living room navigates by yet another star, the Pearson "Star of India" ottoman. "The ottoman is a strong presence in the room," says Mickum. "It holds the room and the color scheme together."

At every possible turn, Mickum supported her clients in their decision to keep the design minimal and free of extraneous clutter. This is strikingly apparent in the master bedroom where a few choice textiles and pieces of furniture shine without relying on embellishment. To successfully achieve this minimalist look, quality is paramount. The dreamy blue walls and custom carpet cradle a traditional bed that takes on a sculptural quality in the simple space. "The bed is an old style," Mickum adds, "but has a modern touch in the upholstered headboard." Simple mateless curtains withdraw to again let the water view take pride of place.



As avid cooks, the homeowners wanted a large eat-in kitchen. "This house is always full of life and something is always baking," Mickum recalls. While the house features all the amenities one would look for, such as new stainless steel appliances, there are touches of the unexpected, like the soapstone counters that look akin to a mottled blackboard, or the bright and campy "Olida" vintage poster found at a local shop. "We needed something to carry that wall, especially with the [water] view opposite," Mickum explains. "It gives a blast of the unexpected and is a little tongue-in-cheek."

If there is a space that could have felt under loved, it was the dining room as it is at the back of the house away from the view. Like the master bedroom, the room's salvation is a bold piece of furniture and the expert execution of the color scheme. The massive round table, handplaned and buffed to an enticing glow by the North Carolina-based Robert Bergelin Company, is offset by upholstered chairs to accomplish something both inviting and striking.

**Top:** Mottled soapstone countertops provide a softer, earthier look than something like a polished granite.

**Bottom:** Minimalism and tradition are well-choreographed in the dining room, which is furnished simply, yet elegantly with a striking table and six upholstered chairs.

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DETAILS IN THE BATHROOMS INCLUDE A RIVER STONE TILE WITH PEWTER INSETS OF SHELLS AND LIGHTHOUSES.



A river stone shower basin is complemented by white subway tile, and pewter inset tiles depicting shells and lighthouses.

Being a house that is, in part, about place, little details act as fun reminders that this is a shore home, a home for visiting family, wet feet, and muddy boots. Mickum's success with details is best evidenced in the bathrooms where she capped white subway tile with a molding of white on white waves, or complemented a river stone tile with pewter insets of shells and lighthouses. In the guest bedrooms, deep window seats entice visitors to curl up and read under light fixtures reminiscent of a ship's lights.

The barn—completely gutted and converted into guest suites—takes the home's simplicity and gives it a rustic, casual spin. The color palette is inspired by the owner's love of Gabbeh rugs. "The barn is fresh but earthy, using dove white with fun blasts of color," Mickum explains.

The home's triumph is in its being of a place and time and yet timeless, with a style that will grow well into the future. It wears no masks; the architecture and interiors rely on perfect execution of true forms without guise or embellishment. When Mickum reflects on the success of this house, she thinks of the owners: "They're feel-good people and this is a feel-good house."

Christianna McCausland is a contributing editor for Chesapeake Home + Living.

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