

A TEAM OF CRAFTSMEN TRANSFORM THEIR
CLIENTS' VISIONS INTO REALITY

Building *Dreams*



Raised in a family of entrepreneurs who have operated a Rhode Island confectionery business for four generations, Jeff Sweenor began his career as a builder in 1989. Taking a summer off after college to build his own house, he enlisted a couple of helpers who knew something about construction, and set to work.

"I learned at my own expense," he remembers, "and I enjoyed it." From that first experience, he decided that he had found his calling. Starting small, he took on projects that increased in size and scope along with his reputation for quality work. At the helm of his company, Sweenor Builders, Jeff Sweenor developed a strategy that has grown his team and business, with an expanding portfolio of custom homes along the Rhode Island coast.



Grand Design

Teamwork was essential for Eric Thorkilsen's project. The CEO of *THIS OLD HOUSE*® (TOH) was looking for a builder who would not only coordinate seamlessly with the architect and interior designer, but would also interact smoothly with representatives of the many participating manufacturers whose products and systems would be featured in his company's 2017 Idea House in East Matunuck. Add to this large cast the photo and video teams who needed to record the process for TOH magazine, television and online features as crews of subcontractors performed their various jobs.

This was quite a complicated symphony of materials and labor to conduct. Thorkilsen, who knows South County as a longtime summer resident, was introduced to Sweenor by a mutual acquaintance who knew of the builder's local work. "My friend and I were having dinner, and within ten minutes of his text to Jeff, he appeared in the restaurant to introduce himself," says Thorkilsen. "After an hour of conversation, I sensed that he had the 'can do' quality we were looking for."

Sweenor brought a lot to the building program. "We admired the fact that he was already on top of some of the best and most up-to-date techniques in the industry," says Thorkilsen. "Our TOH team members have been the icons of the brand, and Jeff made a great first impression. His own skills and work as a craftsman have been featured in the magazine." In the last weeks of painting and



Above: Project partners Union Studio Architecture & Community Design, and Denise Enright Design helped adapt classic New England styles for modern living, with features like an open kitchen.

Left: Jeff Sweenor on location during filming of a *This Old House*® TV episode.

Below: The home's custom bunk room was nationally recognized with an NAHB award.

furnishing the interiors, Sweenor choreographed his team and subcontractors in a demanding schedule that included plenty of late nights.

With the successful completion of this multifaceted project, TOH has again contracted Sweenor for the next Idea House. The 2017 model has recently sold, and its new owners, Fran and Steve McKendall, do not spare the superlatives about their new Sweenor-built home.

Just one day after she and her husband closed on their purchase, Fran sat in her new family room on a cold, overcast afternoon, remarking on the bright and comfortable interiors. "I love all of the built-in features and the fact that it's a 'smart house'—so smart that





we're still learning how to operate everything. Bottom line: This home is beautiful. It has everything we could want."

Seaside Style

Jeff Sweenor and his team believe that the process of building a dream house should be straightforward and enjoyable for their clients. When one couple finally secured a piece of land in the desirable coastal location they had been seeking, the wife started researching all the elements that she had in mind for the place that she and her husband would build. At the same time, she began to inquire among friends for their thoughts about the talents and reputations of local builders.

"Jeff actually owned the parcel that we were buying, and after we interviewed him, we felt that he was the right person for the job," she says. "It turned out that the architect who built a house for us years ago works with Jeff; that also gave us confidence."

Sweenor Builders was hired to provide Design/Build services, harnessing the integrated talents of the firm's architectural, construction

Above: This property's charming beach cottage, a complement to the main house, ensures plenty of space to host family and friends.

Left and opposite: The mahogany stair rail, kitchen island and cabinetry, and many of the home's unique details were crafted in Sweenor's 4000-square-foot millwork shop.

and interior design teams from start to finish. She was quickly reassured by the way Sweenor and his team worked with her and her husband to achieve the house they had always wanted.

"Jeff has amazing people working for him; we love the quality and expertise that they brought to the project. We had the time to put into the process and they would always respond to us with a range of options. At one point, we decided that there was just something missing in the original design that we had approved for the living space over the garage. Jeff's team worked to give us a solution: They installed exposed beams and raised the ceiling and that room has become a favorite of ours."

Now, two years since the couple found their land, the finishing touches of landscape and hardscape are being added to the completed home. "It was worth the time it took," says the client. "My husband and I had a phenomenal experience. The level of craftsmanship that everyone brought to this house—everything custom made—delights us. We had so many decisions to make through the process; and Jeff and his people kept us on track, and kept things moving."

The Great Escape

My wife, Michele, and I have been building this house in our heads for years," says Scott Blair. Nearly every time they made the drive to their second home in Charlestown, they would pass and admire a gambrel-roofed, Shingle style home, keeping its handsome profile in mind for some unspecified day in the future. Two years ago, the right property, the architect, and a builder who understood the big picture that the Blairs envisioned all came together.

To design for the choice piece of coastal Narragansett property that the Blairs had purchased, they met with the Arnold Design Group—a much sought-after architectural firm for fine custom homes—and knew they'd found someone to put their dream on paper. On page one of Arnold's portfolio was an image of the home that the firm had designed and that they had admired for nearly two decades on their way to Charlestown—a nice piece of synchronicity. To build it, Jeff Sweenor—whom Scott Blair knew through mutual friends—had met the Blairs in a snowstorm on the day they'd first seen their property, despite the weather.

"The Arnolds were able to design the picture of what we wanted on the first go-round with them," recalls Blair. "And Jeff is passionate about his work and product, and he's been doing this kind of custom work for a long time. He is a great team player and has a soothing, calm personality, which is what you need from a contractor when you're building a house remotely." Blair also noted that both builder and architect have managed the project with an attitude of mutual respect for each team's professionalism and dedication to quality.

The Blair family compound—a completed carriage house and nearly completed main house—is a distinctive combination of traditional building form and a modern heart.

"We were trying to save the original house that stood on the property, but when it proved too difficult, we salvaged some of its beautiful old parts, which Jeff has incorporated in the new structures. He honors those aspects of heritage and preservation, and understands modern needs, like our absolute requirement for an eternally bone-dry basement and desire for as many maintenance-free materials as possible." Adds Blair: "We love that his favorite response seems to be 'no problem.'"

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Above and right: In-house interior designer Kristen Martone combined comfort, function and style to capture the homeowner's idea of life by the beach.

Below: A floating staircase is neatly tucked behind the fireplace in the home's expansive living room.

