

A PROMISE



TO THE PAST

A historic oceanfront property is redefined, infusing new life into a space etched by the passage of time and coastal living.

*Design/Build Sweenor Builders | Interior Designer Taste Design Inc. Landscape Architect Mathers & Page Landscape Architects |
Landscape Contractor Landscape Creations | Photographer Nat Rea | Writer Callie Vuona*



In coastal Rhode Island, where salt air drifts through open windows and watercolor skies melt into the horizon, this historic waterfront home was poised for its next chapter. After roughly two decades in the family's care, it was time to gently reimagine the home for its next season by the sea.

The goal was to honor everything they cherished while reshaping the home for year-round living, ensuring it would continue serving as a welcoming hub for generations of family and friends for decades to come.

The project began modestly enough with plans to renovate the lower level. As Sweenor Builders and Taste Design Inc. peeled back layers of the home and conversations deepened with the homeowners, one realization became unavoidable: isolated improvements would only expose larger possibilities. Soon, one renovation became a whole-house transformation.

From day one, Patti Watson, Owner and Principal of Taste Design Inc., and Jeff Sweenor, Owner and CEO of Sweenor Builders, approached the project as true collaborators. Every decision was filtered through the same lens: understand the home's history first, then determine how to thoughtfully move it forward.

"I love to ask clients, 'What do you love?'" Watson says. "That question prompts so many dreams about the house. It opens up the narrative and the emotion behind why they love this home, and then we can start to make some of those dreams come true."

For Sweenor, this concept naturally extends to the construction process. Every historic home, he believes, deserves a builder willing to study the craftsmanship that came before. "It's about paying homage to the craft that was there before us and making decisions on materials and installation methods that the original installer would approve of," he says. "Then we consider how we can expand on it and make it better."

Unlike many waterfront homes that sit quietly through the winter, this residence has become a lively year-round gathering place, regularly filled with children, grandchildren, extended family, and lifelong friends. "It's not just a beach house," Watson explains. "It's a year-round home. It's where people are making memories, and we believe it will stay in the family for generations."



The home's unique charm reveals itself almost immediately upon entering. An original compass rose remains inlaid within the foyer floor, orienting visitors toward the water while anchoring the home to its coastal surroundings. Above, the gracious staircase continues its ascent much as it always has. While the original stair carriage and trim were carefully preserved, the balustrade and handrail were meticulously rebuilt to meet modern safety standards without sacrificing their historic character.

Elegance defines the formal living room, where an exquisitely restored plaster ceiling and walls command attention, surrounded by illuminated stained glass panels. Years of water damage had threatened the intricate ornamentation, requiring specialized artisans to painstakingly restore every detail.

Long before that work could begin, however, Sweenor's team devised an extraordinary solution. They designed and built a custom temporary weather enclosure around the home, creating a climate-controlled environment that protected the interiors while allowing restoration to continue uninterrupted.



Illuminated stained glass panels surround the formal living room, which was renovated to preserve the intricate plaster work above. At the center, a custom curved sofa from PJ Bergeron Inc. is draped in Stout Textiles fabric and Samuel & Sons trim, framed by matching Hickory Chair side tables on either end.



Rather than echoing the ornate craftsmanship throughout the house, Watson intentionally let the room remain unique. "It was a very conscious choice to complement rather than compete," says Watson.

The home's most dramatic transformation unfolds just beyond. The homeowners had one simple request: they wanted to cook while enjoying the views of the water. Yet, like many late-1800s homes, the kitchen had been tucked deep into the back of the house, disconnected from both the views and the surrounding living spaces.

Instead of expanding the existing kitchen, Watson and Sweenor completely rethought how the rooms functioned while preserving the home's original proportions. The former dining room became the primary kitchen—now offering panoramic water views, while the original kitchen was reinvented as a sophisticated serving space that supports effortless entertaining behind the scenes.

"The idea was to respect the current configuration of the rooms," Watson explains. Relocating the kitchen sounds straightforward today, but achieving that effortless result required constant collaboration between designer and builder. Interior planning influenced exterior elevations, while window proportions, trim profiles, and millwork were carefully refined so every intervention felt as though it had always belonged.



Richly detailed plasterwork and glowing stained glass celebrate the home's historic character, while the adjoining kitchen's restrained palette and clean-lined design create a thoughtful dialogue between tradition and contemporary living.



Rather than leaning into predictable coastal blues, Watson found inspiration in the home's original stained-glass windows, pulling soft teal tones directly from the historic glass.

The resulting palette feels layered instead of thematic. Tailored millwork, reclaimed wood, richly textured fabrics, playful wallpapers, and collected furnishings create rooms that feel assembled over generations rather than newly installed. "It becomes collage work," Watson says. "We are

selecting things that have timeless qualities but have been reintroduced in a way that still feels fresh."

Even the ceilings become part of the story. In the study, wallpaper stretches overhead, creating one of the home's boldest moments while remaining perfectly in conversation with the architecture surrounding it.

Downstairs, the mood shifts from refined to relaxed. A wine cellar designed for equal parts entertaining and everyday



Formerly situated in the back of the house, the functional kitchen now offers highly coveted water views, while its prior location has since been transformed into a serving kitchen.



*"It is special to know that it
will be there for a long time.
It's like a time capsule."*

**- Jeff Sweenor, President and CEO
of Sweenor Builders**



enjoyment reflects the family's love of gathering. Watson often asks clients to imagine the life they'll live inside a space. "I always ask our clients to play me a movie," she says. "What's going to happen here?"

The answer included wine tastings, holidays, game nights, and countless celebrations. The finished room balances wine storage with generous circulation, exposed original brick, and durable finishes designed to stand up to lively gatherings. A stained checkerboard floor anchors the space before subtly reappearing on the four-season porch as a painted interpretation.

While these carefully considered moments define the finished home, some of the project's most impressive work is almost entirely invisible.

Early in construction, Sweenor's team replaced a failing roof without jeopardizing the newly restored plaster ceiling below, relying on a custom weather enclosure to protect the interiors. At the porte cochère, a severely deteriorated curved beam was painstakingly recreated from fifteen laminated layers of plywood and encapsulated in epoxy to ensure decades of structural performance.

A spirit of stewardship guided the construction process. Rather than discarding the temporary framing lumber used for the weather enclosure, Sweenor designed the system so its materials could be reused on future projects. Hidden behind restored AZEK trim, the builders also installed a CNC-carved plaque bearing the names of everyone who helped bring the home back to life. "It is special to know that it will be there for a long time," Sweenor says. "It's like a time capsule."

A similarly thoughtful approach continued below grade, where existing mechanical systems were preserved and custom cabinetry was designed around the home's original heating infrastructure, avoiding unnecessary demolition while seamlessly integrating old and new.

For Sweenor, however, the project's greatest accomplishment isn't hidden behind the walls or found in its restored architectural details. It's watching the family embrace the house in an entirely new way. "It really went from being a second home to a primary home," he reflects.

In the end, nearly every decision can be traced back to Watson's opening question: What do you love? The answers are woven throughout the home—in preserved



childhood murals, restored plaster ceilings, a kitchen that finally embraces the water views, and gathering spaces where more than twenty people can comfortably share a meal. Most importantly, they live in a home that feels as rich in history as it does in possibility.

"It is a fresh take on history," Watson reflects, "in a thoughtful and meaningful manner."

Here, honoring the past doesn't mean preserving every detail, but celebrating the defining elements that tell its story—ensuring this coastal home carries its legacy forward while creating memories for generations to come. And for a family whose greatest joy comes from welcoming others through their front door, there may be no greater success. 🏠



"It is a fresh take on history, in a thoughtful and meaningful manner."

- Patti Watson, Owner and Principal, Taste Design Inc.