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MAY 2019

THE DESCENDANTS

A family celebrates five generations in York



CAMDEN CONTEMPORARY

A 1970s Shingle style gets a stunning postmodern remake

plus

Great Diamond Island's **CROWN JEWEL**



A Container

for Art



A conflict-resolution worker trades Los Angeles noise for peace in Maine

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You might not expect a South African native whose work for NGOs and the United Nations has taken her most often to the Democratic Republic of Congo and Zambia to move into a late-1970s, mid-Maine passive solar house. But that is exactly what the owner of this Camden house did. The attraction? Her parents, who live in a property across the road. Prior to the 2012 purchase, she had been traveling from Los Angeles to Africa. “Los Angeles was overwhelming. It was always a culture shock going back and forth. I liked the peaceful feeling of Maine,” she says.

But the home she purchased had a ski chalet vibe, which was not to her taste. She inclined to an art gallery aesthetic, favoring white walls, loft spaces, and art, often from her home continent. In 2012 and 2013, Priestley + Associates Architecture in Rockport and Taylor-Made Builders in Northport helped

opposite page The renovation gave this home a new facade with a broad gable, recessed entry, square windows, and decorative shed roof at the peak of the gable. Behind the barn door, which can be closed off in bad weather, vertical boards highlight the entry.

BUILDER
Taylor-Made Builders, Inc.

ARCHITECT
Priestley + Associates Architecture

TILE
Distinctive Tile & Design

COUNTERTOP
Freshwater Stone

her transform her home. Keeping to the original footprint and basic structure, the new design gutted the interior and opened spaces. Now the ground floor has a living room and kitchen with gleaming dark-brown stained-pine floors, and the rooms rise to the second-floor ceiling. A minimalist floating steel staircase with cable railing leads to a master bedroom and guest room

right In the office, a photo by Jonathan Laurence shows a Congolese refugee involved in a microcredit loan program. The photo was taken with natural light outside a church. The desk is from West Elm, part of a partnership with South African artisans. The bowls on top of the bookcase were made in a refugee camp in Zambia as gifts for the homeowner.

below By removing partitions, architect John Priestley and builder Taylor Martens created an open kitchen, using lower cabinets and wide drawers in lieu of upper cabinetry. The range hood and backsplash were placed to create “a crisp simple line,” says Priestley.



located over the ground floor's other spaces—a cozy TV room and office.

The new owner was sympathetic to the previous owner's desire for eco-consciousness, so the entire house received an upgrade with high-efficiency glazing, improved insulation, a super-efficient boiler, and in-floor radiant heat.

John Priestley wanted to give the house a “strong new face.” Taking inspiration from the broad horizontal gable of McKim, Mead & White's William G. Low House in Bristol, Rhode Island,

The interior combines sleek furniture, much of it inherited, with African art. A Parisian aunt, the homeowner's grandmother, and eBay are responsible for the Danish-style furniture in the living room.

Parisian aunt, the homeowner's grandmother, and eBay are responsible for the Danish-style furniture in the living room. A zebra rug in the same room is a gift from the homeowner's mother, who had two zebra chairs that her daughter admired as a girl. The homeowner's mother developed a talent for design, as she set up house multiple times, given the frequent moves required by her husband's foreign correspondent job. The Camden home's African pieces include South African wooden animals in an open nook above the staircase, a living room red-and-orange painting from Cape Town, and bowls and a drum from a Zambian refugee camp. To this, the homeowner has added work by Maine artists, including, most often, Jonathan Laurence, a photographer and mixed-media artist. Some of his work also focuses on Africa, such as a colorful, open-air portrait of a refugee from Congo in the office and a photograph of the homeowner in Congo on a motorcycle, which is in the master bedroom.

Even when not buying *in* Africa, the homeowner is drawn to African goods, as with products that West Elm produced using South African craftspeople. The white-and-black diamond-patterned office desk, living room benches covered in Congolese fabric, and colorful kitchen plates are all from this limited-edition series.

The homeowner's mother helped with the interior design and suggested the bright red oven that distinguishes the otherwise largely black-and-white contemporary kitchen with flat-panel white cabinetry and two kinds of black granite for the counter and island. Although a dining table can be arranged for entertaining, the partially curved island functions as the main eating area, its shape determined by drawers, four hidden receptacles for sorting recycling, and the hope for comfortable seating. (No knees bumping!) The kitchen also includes a pantry hidden behind closet doors, a bar area, and high windows and a skylight that let in even more light.

Priestley replaced a former overhanging shed roof with a wide, spreading gable. The homeowner wanted square windows in keeping with the fenestration on other houses on her road. Robert Venturi's house for his mother, Vanna, also has a broad low gable and square windows. Priestley incorporated a recessed entry, also used in “Mother's House,” but added a sliding barn door for interest and further protection in winter. Priestley also incorporated a decorative shed roof with struts in the peak of the gable and on the west side of the house.

Because the homeowner wanted everything “really, really light,” windows abound, making daytime electric lighting unnecessary. A living room floor-to-ceiling picture window is so successful at blending interior and exterior, the owner's dog occasionally walks into the pane.

The interior combines sleek furniture, much of it inherited, with African art. A



opposite page When you walk through the front door and turn left, the view is of this open hallway with a minimalist floating staircase to the right and living room to left. The picture of a twisted boat shackle is from James Dodd and was acquired at Dowling Walsh Gallery. The benches are covered with Congolese fabric. Between the square windows, skylight, and large picture window, the house needs no artificial light during the day.



A room full of Danish-style antiques, many from the homeowner's family. The couch and sitting bench that serves as coffee table belonged to her aunt and the round table to her grandmother. The chairs were from eBay, acquired after a long search, and are the homeowner's favorite items that she bought for the house. The painting is from Cape Town. Instead of a traditional hearth, the fireplace "floats on the wall like a painting," says Priestley.





left A connector from the house to the garage, with a bench from T.J. Maxx and one of several antique ladders that the homeowner chose for high walls throughout the house. Her partner whitewashed the wall to the left.

above For the master bath, the boards above and below the tub were whitewashed. The rest of the paint is a Benjamin Moore color called "Quiet Moment."



A view into the master bedroom that shows an entryway and beams with whitewash. Here, an original low ceiling was removed to make the space light and airy. The rug is from West Elm. Even the European radiator on the far wall is in keeping with the home's white, clean, and contemporary theme.

A PARTNERSHIP WITH ARTISANS

The homeowner bought some of the items in her home from a special line of products from West Elm, which grew out of a collaboration with Source, a South African exporting company. Source was started by two South Africans who spent 22 years in design in London before returning to market handcrafted work, including furniture, housewares, and fashion, from their own country.

minimal, the same clean, white paint is used throughout the house, and the limited decorative vocabulary, once employed, recurs, as with the whitewashed accent walls with intentional gaps between boards. These are used in the connector between house and garage, as well as the entry into the master bedroom and for select master bath walls. In the end, Priestley describes the elegant home he designed and Taylor Martens built as “a container for artwork and furniture.” While it is that, the home is also a window onto the Maine woods and a work of art itself, a post-modernist Shingle style with farmhouse nods and contemporary flair. ■



As someone who can never make decisions about my own house—color or neutrals? modern or old? clean or celebratory of curious objects?—I admire the “both/and” quality of this house, how it unifies what might otherwise be contrary: farmhouse charm, modernist simplicity, postmodernist whimsy, and Shingle-style warmth.

Debra Spark's first novel, Coconuts for the Saint, will be reissued in 2020, along with her ninth book, a collection of essays on fiction writing called And Then Something Happened. The title is inspired by her son, Aidan Mitchell, who used the phrase when he was little to prevent bedtime stories from ending.

A view from the firepit up to a side of the house that shows the shape of the original roof and the square windows that are part of the purposefully limited vocabulary of the house.