

# MAINE'S BEST NEW VACATION HOMES

**M**EET four members of the Class of 2001. Of the hundreds of new homes built in Maine last year, the quartet pictured on the following pages is, by any standard, among the finest. Each one is architect-designed and each posed one or more unique challenges: fitting into a historic community such as Head Tide or Grindstone Neck, blending into the fog-soaked forests of Deer Isle, or integrating classic cottage conventions into an up-to-the-minute home on Sebago Lake. All are owned by people who knew what they wanted, and each in its own way demonstrates the beautiful results that can happen with the right combination of talent, personalities, taste, and resources. And these are just a few of the reasons why these four rise to the head of the class.





# Grindstone Neck Cottage

*A spacious new residence reinterprets the traditional summerhouse for which this Down East enclave is known. By John Hadley.*

Photographs by Brian Vanden Brink

**D**UE east of Mount Desert Island across Frenchman's Bay there is a community of rambling summer cottages clustered along a point of land that extends from the Schoodic Peninsula like the thumb of a mitten. The community is called Grindstone Neck, and though it's officially a part of the fishing town of Winter Harbor, it is, and always has been, an outpost of gentility unto itself. Ever since wealthy Pennsylvanians first began summering here in the 1890s — dubbing their little enclave “Philadelphia-on-the-Rocks” — the Neck has been a place that values quiet and good taste and tradition, where friends look forward to seeing each other in June and newcomers of like mind are gladly welcomed.

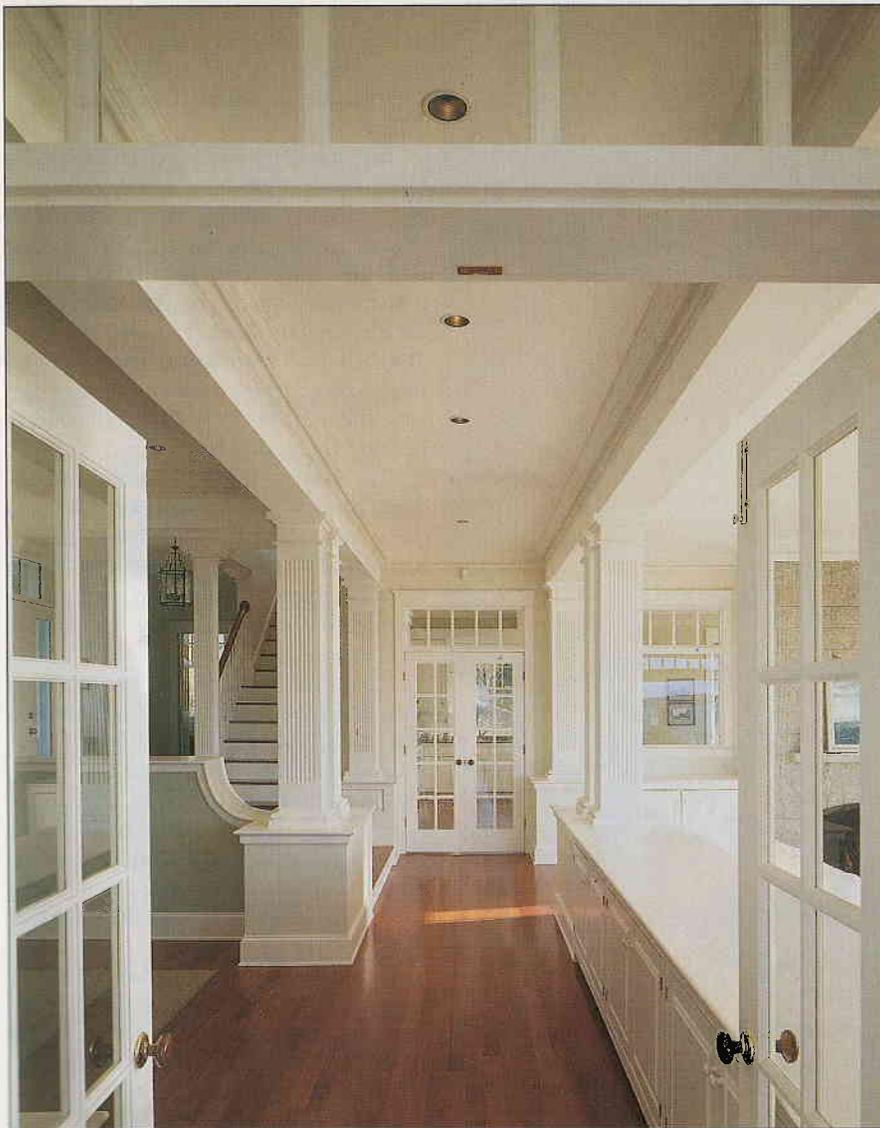
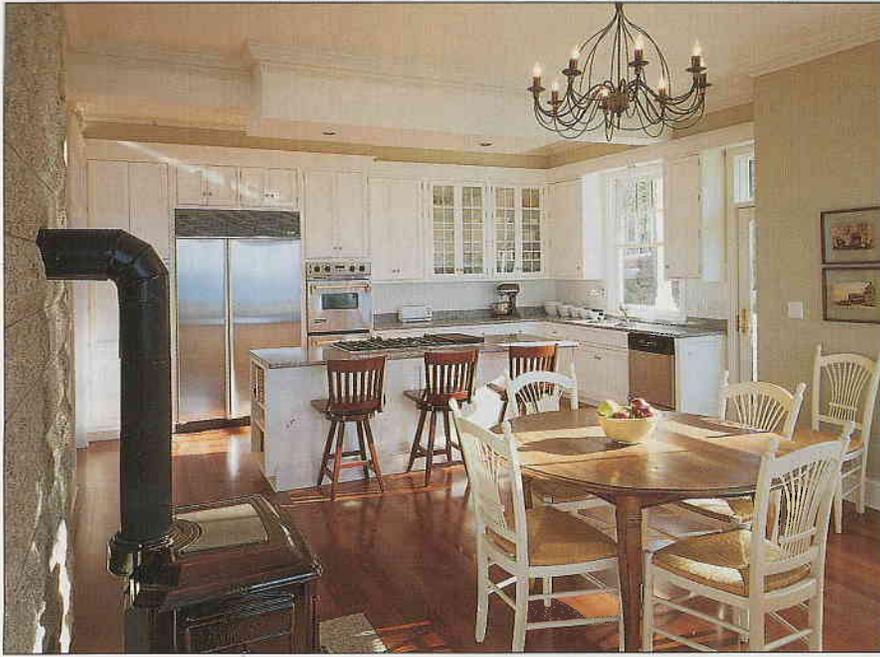
Building a new house in an old summer colony, especially one as close-knit and tradition-tied as Grindstone Neck, requires two things: discretion and a sense of history. Both qualities are abundantly on display in a gracious new cottage designed by architect Dominic Paul Mercadante, of Belfast, for a family from Atlanta.

The owners discovered Grindstone Neck like people have always done — by sea. Avid sailors, they anchored in Winter Harbor one summer, fell in love with the community, and began renting houses along the point. Eventually they decided to buy land. The site they purchased was a sloping hillside with 600 feet of shore frontage overlooking a narrow channel. Deed in hand, they went looking for an architect.

The couple found Dominic Mercadante after seeing a house he'd worked on as an associate of architect Robert Knight, of Blue Hill. The detailed finish work Mercadante had done particularly impressed them, and they arranged a meeting.

“Dominic was the first architect my wife and I were both able to communicate with,” recalls the husband. “We wanted our house to reflect the 1890s Maine cottages on the point, and so we actually visited a number of houses with Dominic, and he took elements — such as window seats, columns, and wrap-around windows — and put them into his plan.”

Mercadante says the local history interested him from the start. “Grindstone Neck was one of the first real-estate developments in the state of Maine,” says the architect. “A lot of the old houses on that point were actually built as



'spec' houses by a developer. My clients were concerned about creating something that would begin to feel like those older houses after it had time to settle into the landscape."

"We wanted the house to appear, particularly from the water, as if it had always been there," says the wife.

The plan Mercadante developed — and builder Larry King of Associated Builders in Ellsworth built — incorporates the low-slung, hip-roofed design of a neighboring turn-of-the-century cottage. But the hillside setting called for a more modern approach to siting the nearly 4,000-square-foot house. Explains the architect: "When you have a long, linear site with a lot of shore frontage, the impulse is to turn the building square to face the water. In this case they'd be looking out across a relatively narrow channel."

**M**ERCADANTE decided to push the building farther up the hill and tilt its orientation so that the rooms were given views up and down the channel. Now every room has a view of the water. "The angle of the house was set so that the owners could stand in the kitchen and look out across the family room and see the little lighthouse in the bay," explains the architect.

While the owners were concerned about the exterior of the house harkening back to the turn-of-the-century, they wanted the interior to be simple and easy to maintain. It needed to serve their modern lives. "As clients they were very intelligent and realistic," says Mercadante. "So often you work with people, and they give you the individual rooms they want, and by the time you work that up into a program, the house is much bigger than anyone needs."

Which isn't to say that the owners minded the interior having a touch of Grindstone grandeur about it. Interior columns are modeled after Winter Harbor's Hammond Hall meetinghouse. The floors, both downstairs and upstairs in the three bedroom suites, are imported mahogany (the dark wood, along with the white walls and furnishings, is intended to suggest a classic Nat Herreshoff racing yacht). The chimney, by Jeff Gammelin of Freshwater Stone and Brick Work of Orland, is rough-hewn Deer Isle granite.

But not every detail is so lavish. The  
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Oversized windows, French doors, and transoms allow sunshine to flood the cottage. At night or on foggy days the woodstove in the kitchen (opposite) and fireplaces in the living room and master bedroom (below) help take the chill from the salt air.

