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ARCHITECTURE

THE KITCHEN'S OPEN layout gives Darcy (FOREGROUND) and Ainsley Weber plenty of room to play. Granite countertops add muted color to the neutral palette of tan walls, white trim, and white-oak floors. A wall of windows make the most of the southern exposure.



A FOREVER HOME

After nine years in Boston, architect Paul Weber and his wife, Bonnie, moved to Newport, Rhode Island, where they bought a storied property and built a life around family

THEY WERE A CITY COUPLE WITH CITY PLANS,

but they walked away from their Boston life one fall day in 2001 and haven't looked back. A soulful streak runs strong in both Paul and Bonnie Weber, so when Paul by chance drove past a stunning piece of land off Bellevue Avenue in Newport, Rhode Island, shortly after the September 11 terrorist attacks, he knew it was the place for them. At the time, Paul was an architectural designer with CBT Architects, one of Boston's leading design firms, and he and Bonnie had just put a deposit on a unit in a Boston high-rise. But when they searched their souls in the aftermath of 9/11, they realized "home" meant something very different.

"Light is so important to me," says Bonnie, who grew up in Philadelphia and spent summers on Martha's Vineyard, where her family owns property. Paul, a Michigan native and descendant of two notable Detroit architects, was no stranger to coastal New England. He studied at Rhode Island School of Design in Providence and summered in Newport for many years.

The piece of property they fell for was indeed stunning. A 1½-acre lot, it sits just a few blocks from the ocean in the shadow of Newport's Gilded Age mansions. While the large house that once stood on the land was razed in the 1960s, the 19th-century barn was still intact. Most compelling, however, were the glorious trees that seemed to be everywhere.

"This site is all about the trees," says Paul Weber,

noting such specimens as fern-leaf beech, hawthorn, oak, chestnut, and tulip trees, many of them more than 100 years old. After buying the land in 2002, the couple walked the property numerous times — with their daughters, an infant in arms and a toddler running through piles of leaves — to work out the exact location of the house.

"For the arrival sequence and the entry to the house," says Paul, "we wanted to incorporate the existing barn, which stands at the eastern edge of the property." During a yearlong planning phase, he worked for a local architectural firm by day and drafted plans for their house by night. His design draws from the free-form spirit of famous Shingle Style houses in the neighborhood and includes a series of cedar-shingled gables contributing to a steeply pitched, irregular roofline and deep overhangs that create sheltered porches. In addition, he included a porte-cochere, a signature element from Newport's Shingle Style houses; this one joins the main house to the garage and also creates a second-floor work space for him. The barn stands a few hundred feet beyond the garage.

For the interior plan, Weber played up the light, placing living spaces on the south and west sides of the house. "We had a lot of debate about how open the layout should be and whether to include a formal dining room," he says. In the end, he created a 1,600-square-foot first floor that consists of two main pieces: an open kitchen-breakfast-family area, and an open living-dining area. Ten-foot-high ceilings emphasize the sense of spaciousness, and large divided windows let in natural light. Millwork throughout



NEWPORT SUMMERS OFFER refreshing breezes, which Bonnie Weber and the girls (ABOVE) enjoy in the living room. French doors in the living room, hallway (RIGHT), and kitchen all lead to a south- and west-facing bluestone patio, giving the main floor an indoor-outdoor feeling when the doors are open. The east-facing front door (LEFT) is set off by a columned porch formed by a deep overhang. The driveway winds through a porte-cochere, past the garage, and alongside the 19th-century barn before rejoining the street.



"ALL ALONG, MY GOAL WAS TO CREATE A HOUSE BIG ENOUGH TO BE A FAMILY HOUSE, BUT THAT WOULD ALSO TAKE FULL ADVANTAGE OF THE SITE" — PAUL WEBER



the first floor, such as paneled kitchen cabinetry, a coffered ceiling in the living room, deep base and crown moldings, and ample window trim, infuses the open layout with a sense of tradition. A winding stairway with a handsome mahogany handrail leads to the second floor, where four bedrooms are positioned for southern and western exposures. The stairway continues to the third floor, where, in the five years since the family moved into the house, a partially finished attic has become a project space for Darcy, now 8, and Ainsley, now 11.

FOR MORE DETAILS, SEE RESOURCES

"All along, my goal was to create a house big enough to be a family house, but that would also take full advantage of the site and the orientation relative to the trees and the light," says Weber, who a few years ago started his own architecture practice in a restored mill building along Newport's harbor. Now, with plenty of light for Bonnie and an inviting lawn for two girls to romp, by all accounts, the family is home. ▲

DESIGN DECISION

Vintage Tiles Find a Home at Last

Architect Paul Weber brought his architectural and geographic roots home to Newport when he designed a living room hearth made of vintage tiles (INSERT) from Pewabic Pottery in Detroit. "When I was about 10, my mother picked up my brother and me from school and took us to a house that was being demolished in Ann Arbor," recalls Weber, who salvaged armloads of Pewabic tiles from the house — and hung on to them. Pewabic Pottery, an art pottery still in existence, was founded in Detroit in 1903, and was a favorite source of tile work for Weber's great-grandfather, John M. Donaldson, and grandfather, Alex G. Donaldson, both architects whose firm, Donaldson & Meier, designed many notable civic buildings, including the University of Michigan Art



Museum. "When I started designing this house, I knew I had only a certain number of the old tiles," says Weber, who used most of them for the living room fireplace. He also used them sparingly as accent tiles in the kitchen backsplash. "I didn't know my great-grandfather or grandfather, but I feel a connection in using Pewabic tiles in our house," says Weber, who makes it a point to visit pottery every time he returns to Michigan.



GATHERING PLACES IN the house include the sofa in the kitchen-family area (FACING PAGE, BOTTOM), where Paul and Bonnie Weber relax with their daughters. The stairway, with white balusters and mahogany handrail, adds a distinctive backdrop to the dining area (FACING PAGE, TOP) and offers a number of landing spots for the girls (RIGHT) as it winds up to the third floor.

