



BUILDING & CRAFTSMANSHIP

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PHOTOGRAPHY: RICH FRUTCHEY

A Home for Generations

*Using centuries-old building techniques,
Timberpeg crafts a family home designed for all ages.*

No question the new home and nearby guest house are magnificent, but people still ask Ken Higgins and Mary Ellen “Mel” Cooney why they would give up their old place, located just a few miles away on a beautiful parcel overlooking Town Cover in Orleans.

The simple answer—Mel points to a painting by her friend and artist Debbie Hearle of Chatham. Hanging above the living room couch, the picture shows fifteen small children scattered across a beach, some building sand castles, some wading, others swimming or simply playing beneath a summer blue sky. “Those are the grandchildren,” she says. “Well, that was then. There were fifteen then, there are eighteen now, and we’ve got two more expecting. We just couldn’t grow any more at the other house.”

That the painting hangs in the center of the house and everything seems to center around it is an apt symbol. Having room for the whole family, should everyone arrive at once, shaped every aspect of the construction, design, and decoration of the 7,000-square-foot main house and 2,500-square-foot guest cottage next door.





ABOVE: Crossroads created a landscape design that feels as though it has been in place for years, building a New England-style stone wall, incorporating existing and adding mature trees and shrubs, and grouping multiples of plants.

RIGHT: Varying ceiling heights satisfies both the modern zeal for openness and the familie's desire for intimacy.

BELOW: A french wine tasting table is pressed into a welcoming role in the front foyer. The antique poster on the stairway wall is also French.



It took three years, but Mel and Ken have achieved what they wanted — warm, welcoming spaces that embrace the energy and exuberance of their large family when they gather to celebrate good times on the Cape. From furniture to layout to recreational diversions, everything in each house is meant to foster a sense of fun and togetherness, even if togetherness means having enough space to get away from one another for a bit.

Before they could accommodate their growing family, however, they had to find the right lot in Orleans. The couple came close to buying a piece of land they had fallen in love with off Skaket Beach, located on the bay side. With vast exposed sand flats at low tide—a place where children might play in sun-warmed pools for hours—the property seemed perfect.



LEFT: Reds, oranges, and golds circulate warmth through the living areas. The H. Randle painting over the living room fireplace depicts Nauset Beach, where Ken proposed to Mel.

BELOW: Crossroads Landscape Design created multi-layered and multi-leveled experiences throughout the property, including around the guest house.

They put in an offer but soon discovered the lot would have to meet daunting septic specifications. Mel called their realtor again and asked, "What else have you got in Orleans?"

In a voice still tinged with the disbelief she felt then, Mel says that after being told there was nothing available, her realtor called up a listing of nearly six



BELOW: Cherry flooring balances the weight of the Douglas fir beams, while the buttery yellow cabinetry lightens the middle visual layer. Child-friendly counter chairs and room for several cooks make the kitchen a magnet for activity and socializing, just what Mel and Ken ordered.



ABOVE: Peter Kramer crafted key pieces in the dining area, including the replica of a Peter Hunt hutch and the round table and chairs, each carved with a different shorebird. The bird-house atop the hutch and the duck on the mantel were both wedding presents.

BELOW: The second floor "dorm room" gives the grandchildren their own space, along with a stunning view of Little Cove and Mill Pond. Beds are by Crate & Barrel.



acres on Little Cove in East Orleans that had been put on the market just that day. The land, with a home and several cottages, was being sold as a five parcel subdivision. Ken says their first inclination was to build homes, sell them off, and keep the front land for their new, larger home, but he later balked at the idea. "I just didn't want to get into all that," he remembers, exchanging a knowing look with Mel, before adding: "Then we went out to dinner..."

"While we were eating," Mel continues, "I asked him who's to say we couldn't just build a couple of houses there for ourselves and not get into selling anything." She quickly adds that saving the property from development is just one of the many things that makes them happy they bought the land.

For years, Mel had admired post and beam construction in magazines and books she read. When it came time to design this home, she knew that post and beam construction offered the informal, open plan she wanted. She didn't have to look far for a reputable building company. Choosing Timberpeg® was a quick and easy decision.

Timberpeg®, the largest post and beam company in the United States, uses traditional mortise and tenon construction, a technique employed for centuries in Europe. "Actually, the construction Style dates way back. It was used thousands of years ago in China and Japan," says Bob Britton, president



Blue is repeated in the cottages master bedroom, the perfect accent for the white wicker, headboard, and side table. The tennis print above the bed is an antique.



ABOVE: The guest house is oriented toward the pool and within waving distance of the main house. Ample porches encourage outdoor leisure.

of Timberpeg East, Inc. of Claremont, New Hampshire. "The Pilgrims brought this kind of construction with them from England. Plimoth Plantation was built this way. Any house more than 150 years old was built using post and beam construction."

Historically, post and beam structures were built with timbers hand cut from trees and then squared with a hand ax. Completing a handcrafted house or barn was labor intensive. Raising the structures was often a community affair. The Industrial Revolution signaled the demise of post and beam built homes. As sawn lumber became readily available and easier to ship, "stick" construction became a less expensive, faster method. "Timber framing was almost completely forgotten for a century," Britton remarks. "Even in Vermont and New Hampshire, when you look at barns built after 1900, almost none are timber frame."



Post and beam takes on a whole new look inside the cottage where eastern white pine timbers have been pickled, evoking sandy beaches. The coffee table is from Countryside Antiques, while the giclee art work above the fireplace hails from Seaweeds in Brewster.

With the 1960s "back-to-the-land" movement, timber frame constructions experienced a revival. Britton says aesthetics is the number one reason people choose a Timberpeg® home. "I think in our modern world, we tend to live in very sterile homes," he notes, adding that post and beam construction—with its exposed beams and trusses cradling broad open spaces—allows people to see the character of a structure. "Out homes can be informal without being too rustic," he adds.

Jeff Harris, Timberpeg®'s local representative and an Orleans-based builder, was called in to be part of the plan. So was Jim Driesch, who has been with Timberpeg® for twenty-nine years and is now the company's lead designer. Britton, Harris, and Driesch met with the couple, walked the property, and developed the concept for the homes. "The whole idea behind everything was the sense that this is for their kids and grandchildren," Britton remembers.

Driesch agrees, "In general, they wanted a house in which a number people could gather and feel comfortable, both inside and out, without feeling cramped."



ABOVE: Mel wanted the guest house to be bright, casual, and cottagey, achieved through a blue, golden yellow, and white color scheme. The table and chairs are from Countryside Antiques.

It was also important to the couple that the home blend appropriately with the area. "Mel and Ken wanted an established look, both in the houses and in the landscape surrounding them," points out Driesch. "What they didn't want was a highly contemporary 'McMansion,' and that is a real credit to them. The buildings had to relate strongly to the area and to each other.

"They wanted the exterior to look like a classic Cape Cod house," continues Driesch. "If they'd wanted something with funny angles and odd shapes outside, it would have been a little more difficult inside," he says. "But the open and informal interior look they wanted was very appropriate for timber framing.

Instead of a typical floor plan with many small rooms, I was able to design a wide open, comfortable floor plan suitable for a lot of people."

The guest cottage, the first of the two homes to be completed, is the more casual of the two structures. The eastern white pine timbers were fashioned in Claremont, New Hampshire. The exposed walls, beams, and trusses were pickled to give the home a bright, airy ambiance, despite the heft of the frame. White wicker, painted furniture, and brightly colored hooked rugs scattered across the wood floors create a cottage-by-the-shore feeling.

Across the driveway, the main house offers a more settled air. This home's frame was manufactured in Timberpeg®'s West Coast plant using Douglas fir. Exposed fir beams and trusses, together with a cherry floors and a blend of painted and stained woodwork, warm up the sturdy interior.



ABOVE: Build the houses and they will come, believe Mel Cooney and Ken Higgins.

"There's a lot to see: some of it is the frame that was exposed in places, some of it is the openness, some of it is the detail of the finish and the decorations," Driesch notes. He adds that the use of high and low spaces keeps the home's openness on a more intimate scale. "It wasn't all cathedral," he says, pointing out the high spaces in the great room and entry way are counterbalanced by low spaces in the dining area and kitchen of the main house. While the rooms are connected, each has the sense of being its own space.

Driesch also created some very long sight lines in the house, a technique used to bring a person past, through, and beyond one space into another. "It can make small spaces or houses seem enormous," he says.

The décor was born of Mel's personal tastes and ideas, with a bit of advice from friends and input from the various people working on the project. "I've been reading home decorating magazines for years," she says, grinning at Ken. "This is just something I always wanted to do, and now I got to do it." She selected furnishings of size and weight, in keeping with the

scale and mass of the beams and posts. Her palette, too, stands up to and complements the framing, drawn from a warm color range of deep reds, oranges, and golds. Overall, Mel adds, "We were very pleased with how this all worked," pointing to the many fun faux touches in the paint work, including a mural in the wine room that shows Ken seated on a bench on a hill overlooking California wine country.

A round pedestal table with all the girth and presence of an old oak tree is the centerpiece of the dining room. The table and chairs, each decorated with a hand-carved shore bird, were made by Peter Kramer. Kramer also built a replica of a Peter Hunt hutch Mel had seen at Pleasant Bay Antiques. She needed something larger than the original she'd fallen in love with, she explains.

In the kitchen, vast stretches of counter space and three well-spaced sinks provide ample room for several cooks. "Everyone in this family loves to cook and we love to cook together," Mel says.

When it is time for the group to return for the day, the main house is poised to accommodate its share. In addition to the master bedroom, it has two spacious bedrooms on the second floor, each with its own bathroom. A large bunkroom over the garage is one of Mel's favorite features. Single beds covered with brightly colored quilts, child-sized furniture, and plenty of room



ABOVE: Poolside view of the guest house.

for romping and rolling make it a special space for the "older grandchildren."

The lower level has everything needed for rainy day amusement: a billiards table, a bar, a TV viewing area, ping pong and arcade games, as well as a wine cellar. These recreational spaces flow naturally out onto the patio surrounding the swimming pool. Since Ken and Mel are very active, there is also a tennis court, bocce court, and a stretch of lawn to entice everyone outside.

The two houses are located on a slight rise overlooking Little Cove, a small, shallow tidal pond off the larger Mill Pond. Both bodies of water are links in a marsh system that ultimately gives way to a barrier beach and the Atlantic. Scents of sun dried marsh grasses and the icy ocean fill the air with a tangy freshness.

Little Cove is alive with birds: heron prowl its edges, kingfishers skim the water's surface, disturbing the peace with their machine-gun fire

calls. The ponds offer some of the best fishing around when the stripers trap schoolies there: raccoons, coyote, and fox know this, and are frequent visitors to the cove, Mel says.

The homes and their generous porches are designed to view this natural beauty. "I told them I wanted a combination of Cape Cod and the Jersey Shore," Mel says, explaining that she grew up summering on the Garden State's beaches. "We wanted this to be a fun family vacation house. We didn't want anything too austere."

Craig Panaccione, co-owner of Crossroads Landscape Designs Inc., says twenty years in the business and growing up on Cape Cod have given him and his wife, Leslie Moreland, a firm sense of what works on a particular piece of land. "The real challenge on this parcel was the terrain," Panaccione explains. "We were trying to accomplish a subtle elegance, gentleness."

The landscape was successfully manipulated, coaxed, or simply enhanced to separate uses, points out Andrew Garulay, a landscape architect for Crossroads. The front of the property serves as a buffer. The new dry-stacked fieldstone wall, which meanders from the road into the woods, suggests a solid, old New England presence. Native shrubbery and the preservation of existing large trees helped the new landscaping blend with surrounding parcels.

Ladders of shelving line a large library in a three-story home. The books' bindings create a multi-colored tapestry that surrounds large windows, all offering water views. It is an elegant, studied room, part of a lovely home that evokes an estate somewhere on the blustery coast of England.

Another home calls to mind those grand old architectural dames in the Adirondacks, the Great Camps, summer retreats for industrialists and financiers of the country's post-Civil War years. This weathered home is all broad peaks and wrap-around porches.

And still another house has all the character of a turn-of-the-century Cape estate decorated in the Arts and Crafts style. French doors separate rooms, clear bottom windows sport mullions on the top panes only, and a broad veranda sweeps around the front and sides.

Not one of these homes, or the many others Timberpeg® builders point to, looks like a barn. Yet the barn, a mainstay of America's cultural and historical landscape, is perhaps the most readily recognizable example used to explain the difference between post and beam construction and the more commonly used stick frame technique of building a home. "This is a very, very old construction style," says Bob Britton, president of Timberpeg East, Inc. The mortise is a hole or cavity created in a timber; the tenon is the piece of wood that fits into the cavity.

Some of the earliest examples of mortise and tenon assembly can be found in ancient Egyptian furniture. Over time, craftsman applied the technique to buildings. Across Europe and Asia, examples of mortise and tenon construction are found in churches, cathedrals, small homes, and elaborate castles. Some of China's and Japan's oldest standing temples were built using this method.

The practice crossed the Atlantic with Europeans. Many examples of their primitive techniques exist today. Locally they include Plimoth Plantation and Sturbridge Village, where visitors are treated to a first-hand look at traditional construction.

The use of post and beam construction was a fact of life well into the nineteenth century. The Industrial Revolution brought it to an end. With milled planks easier to produce and transport and the manufacture of steel nails booming stick frame construction came to the fore.

However, in the mid-1960s, timber frame construction enjoyed a rebirth. "I think it was the whole desire to get back in touch with the land, with communal living, that people started to use the technique again," Britton says, pointing out that barn raisings regained a popularity born of nostalgia.

The old timber frame barns, behemoths crawling with workers hammering together the enormous single span structures, have long been alive and well in Pennsylvania's Amish country, Britton notes. Today more and more people are turning to timber-framed homes as an alternative to stick construction, he adds.

One of the most striking differences between stick and timber framing is the configurations of interior spaces. In many cases, stick frame buildings need load-bearing walls—multiple interior walls constructed to support the weight of the floors and roof above them. These walls in turn, by design, divide interior spaces into smaller rooms. The timber frame, on the other hand, is free standing. With the exception of the posts and beams, no interior partitions are needed to support the structure of the home.

You don't have to have a lot of supporting walls," Jim Driesch, lead designer of Timberpeg East, says. "You can fashion wide open spaces that you don't always have the ability to create with other kinds of construction."

Post and beam homes are typically built with large, vertical timbers (posts) and horizontal timbers (beams). The posts and beams are fit together using the mortise and tenon method. The sturdy construction and the sheer size of the posts and beams carry the weight of the structure.

Another difference is seen in the placement of insulation. Rather than the more familiar cotton- candy-looking material that is rolled between the outer and interior walls, Timberpeg® homes are insulated on the outside using a rigid, foil-faced polyisocyanurate foam. The outer walls and finish, such as clapboards or shingles, are then applied to this foam. "By doing the insulation on the exterior, you are able to show the beams on the interior," Britton says. "That ability to see the structure of the building inside the home is something that appeals to people."

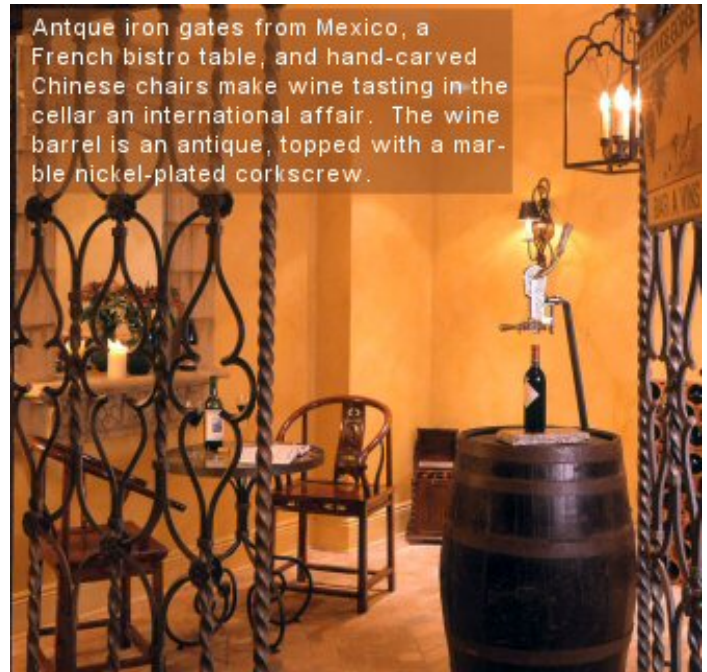
While masses of sheetrock require artwork for adornment, post and beam homes provide instant visual interest. They at once recall the rural past and provide solid comfort in the present.

The stonework throughout the property was functional as well as aesthetic, Garulay explains. Some walls serve as retainers, others separate uses, demarking the tennis court, for example.

Panaccione and Moreland note with satisfaction that the landscaping, in many ways, returned the property to a more natural state. Invasive species, such as bittersweet and English ivy that were killing native plants, were removed. Trees were trimmed to enhance the outward view, but the tree canopies were left intact to obscure the home from the water.

The idea was to be able to see the water from the house, but to protect the natural beauty of the area when looking back from the water," Garulay says.

Today the property rolls gently through old, typical



Antique iron gates from Mexico, a French bistro table, and hand-carved Chinese chairs make wine tasting in the cellar an international affair. The wine barrel is an antique, topped with a marble nickel-plated corkscrew.



ABOVE: The lower level is designed for fun and entertainment. The media room, pool and ping pong tables are conveniently close to a full-sized bar. The brick floors, rough walls, and limestone-look fireplace conspire to give the area a feeling of age.

Cape Cod growth: scrubby pines, black and white oak, and locusts. The trees and native undergrowth provide a lush tangled backdrop to the newer landscaping, preserving a sense of established belonging. Landscaping, architecture, and interior decorations weave together to create a sense of permanence, which after all Mel points out, is what family's all about

"This is something we want here for a long time. This is for us, for our children, and grandchildren," she says. "We didn't want big empty rooms, or lots of little useless ones. We wanted rooms we'd use. And boy, do we, every inch of it."