

**who** CATHY KERT

The interior designer began her career more than 20 years ago in Nashua, New Hampshire. She relocated to Cape Cod where she runs Cathy Kert Interiors out of the converted barn next to her renovated house.

**design philosophy**

Kert believes that lifestyle should dictate aesthetics. "I design spaces that function well for the way the family lives, first and foremost," she says. "They are always pretty and never cookie-cutter. I try to make them special by integrating objects and materials that have meaning to the family."

# Farmhouse Rescue

A chance discovery of an 1893 Cape Cod house and barn inspires a designer to renovate and relocate

WRITTEN BY JACI CONRY • PHOTOGRAPHED BY DAN CUTRONA

AN ORIGINAL DOOR and mouldings in the living room reflect the late-19th-century craftsmanship that went into building the house. The sea-star motif on the screen door adds a contemporary note. The coffee table from FDO Group at the Boston Design Center has a woven base, glass top, and casters so it can be easily moved around the room. An acrylic painting by New Hampshire artist Dorothy Ogden hangs above the sofa.



THE FAMILY OFTEN relaxes together in the newly created sunroom (LEFT). Curtains in a lively blue-and-white print by Duralee frame the windows. The mantelshelf was crafted by Kert (INSET BELOW LEFT), who rescued it from the barn. The front door's original stained glass (BELOW) is visible in the mirror of the antique hall tree (BOTTOM) is the renovated barn, which Kert now uses as her studio and office.



**The 1893 farmhouse** and barn were on the verge of dilapidation, but Cathy Kert saw nothing but potential. Kert, who was in the pretty Cape Cod village of Pocasset visiting a friend that day in 2012, saw past the grime and the overgrown bushes. She envisioned gardening on the verdant grounds and renovating the expansive barn. “It was so precious,” she says, “and it seemed like such a neat opportunity. The property has a lot of privacy and is only two blocks from the beach.”



The house had been abandoned for three years. Inside, it reeked of cigarette smoke, but Kert’s designer instincts told her it had good bones.

At the time, Kert, her husband, Charles, and their four children (now all living on their own) made their home in a rambling 4,000-square-foot house they had built in Nashua, New Hampshire. She ran an interior design firm and a home furnishings shop, while Charles worked as a physician.

“I grew up on a farm, and my husband is from Los Angeles, near the beach,” she says. “This house seemed like the culmination of both of our dreams: a farmhouse by the ocean.”

The couple purchased the house shortly after Kert’s first visit, but it would be years before they could relocate full time. “My kids couldn’t believe we were going to buy the house and live in it, it was such a mess,” says Kert.

Making the house habitable took quite a bit of sweat equity. “For two years, I would come down to the Cape and work on the house for three days a week,” says Kert. “I scrubbed and washed walls, and painted every room myself with a friend.”

Eventually, Kert hired architectural designer Deborah Dinco-Kendall, whose firm is in nearby Falmouth, Massachusetts, to draft plans for a new sunroom and the renovation of the barn. The Valle Group, also in Falmouth, came on board to do the new construction and renovate other aspects of the house, including the kitchen.

Aside from the addition of the sunroom, the house retains its original footprint. It was important to Kert that the structure’s antique elements be honored. The house was built by Jesse Barlow, a shipbuilder. “He used leftover shipping materials from the boats he built,” says Kert. “The floors in the house are a mishmash of different woods. I love that.” To give

### **Family-Friendly**

The Kert children were wary of the decision to buy the house. “It was so outdated, dirty, and filled with strange old things,” says daughter Sarah. With her four kids in mind, Kert designed each guest room with an extra bed so a friend could be part of a weekend visit.

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them modern flair, Kert had them stained in a dark finish. Throughout the house, vibrant stained-glass windows — some of which had been covered with plaster — pay homage to the late 19th century.

Kert has an affinity for repurposing. The sunroom fireplace has a mantel crafted out of a beam from the barn. “I pressure-washed it and let it bleach in the sun,” she says. The sofa is a rescued relic, too. Discovered in a dusty corner of the barn, the piece had a broken frame and a rodent’s nest. Kert fixed the wood frame, which she then refinished, and had it upholstered with a bleached dropcloth. “The fabric has a very cool, linen-y, casual look,” she says, “but it’s basically indestructible.”

Other furnishings are modern, presenting a pleasant balance with the older elements. “I love to mix vintage pieces in with new things,” says Kert. “My husband grew up in a glass-and-stone Midcentury Modern house. I was raised in a little Cape Cod-style farmhouse.” The design scheme nods to both of those sensibilities, with subtle references to the coastal locale. “We used blue and white throughout the house to bring in the Cape story,” says Kert, “but I didn’t want to do it in an overly obvious way with starfish all over the place.”



NEW WINDOWS ALLOW natural light to brighten the renovated kitchen (LEFT). The blue-and-white rug is a subtle reference to the property’s beachy location. In the master bedroom (ABOVE), Modern night tables flank a vintage headboard.

**Everything Has a Story**

There are few off-the-shelf items in Kert’s home. If something is new, it was carefully selected to complement another piece that was authentic or one-of-a-kind. “I like spaces that have a story,” says Kert. The living room, for example, has Midcentury Modern elements from her in-laws’ former home, her grandmother’s piano, and an antique chandelier rescued from a New York City penthouse.

The barn presented its own set of challenges. “It was pretty much falling down,” says Joseph Valle, chief executive officer of The Valle Group. “The floor on the second story was completely beat up and ready to go through the ceiling beams on the lower level.” The goal was to create an open area on the main level where Kert could do woodworking and painting projects, with a storage area for large items. Upstairs was to be her office.

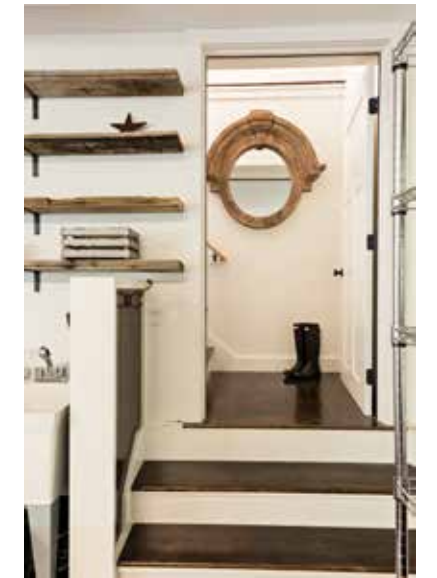
Valle’s team insulated the building, adding heat and air conditioning. A dormer was installed with seven historically correct windows. The cupola was carefully removed, restored to its original condition, and placed back on top of the barn.

Behind the sliding barn doors, now painted a striking red, is an innovative NanaWall glass door system that brings in sunlight and enables easy passage.

Now that she and Charles have lived on the property for more than a year, they can say their house and barn rescue was worth the effort.

“It’s such a special space,” says Kert. “It’s hard to believe now how bare bones and falling apart it was before.”

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THE BARN DOORS, painted a cheery red, roll open to reveal a NanaWall glass door system (LEFT). The new shed dormer has a series of divided awning windows that seem architecturally appropriate for the old building and allow lots of natural light into the second-floor office space (ABOVE LEFT). On the lower level, simple wood shelves by the stairway (ABOVE RIGHT) pick up on the rustic vibe.