



Panels of exotic multicolored slate and a band of clerestory windows make up the front facade of the waterfront house. RIGHT: The front door personifies clean, warm and functional design.



CLEAN SLATE

Sleek and subtle on the outside, this new, contemporary Swampscott house opens to a warm, expansive interior that makes a perfect backdrop for the owners' collection of fine art.

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INTERIOR DESIGN: ERLING FALCK

Marblehead-based architect Erling Falck has never advertised his services. There's no sign on his office door in the Massachusetts town, nor does he have a Web site. His commissions for residential buildings, most of them on the ocean, have all been generated by word



of mouth. "I've done restorations, but my own designs are in a contemporary style," he says. "People who like my buildings find me."

His practice thrives despite his low-key approach to publicity because of houses like this one in Swampscott. Its owners, who had raised children in a western suburb of Boston, wanted to downsize. The search for the right house in Boston and on the North Shore had proved discouraging. "We are both drawn to a clean aesthetic and knew we wanted a house in a contemporary style," the wife explains. "That's not so easy to find in New England. Then our real estate agent asked us whether we'd consider building. It wasn't what we had in mind at all. But when we saw a beautiful piece of land with sunset views, we changed course and did something we'd never done before."

She and her husband interviewed three architects, but when they saw one of Falck's projects, they knew they'd found their man. "It was contemporary but not stark," she says. "We wanted our house to look like that."

So began their partnership, and last October the couple moved into their 4,000-square-foot house. To the street it presents a low, horizontal facade sheathed in twelve-inch

squares of beautifully colored slate tiles; the front door and a band of windows at the roofline are the only interruptions in the polychrome exterior.

Inside, however, a very different house reveals itself. From the front wall's ribbon windows, a skylight in the peak of the asymmetrical roof and an ocean-facing wall of glass, light floods the interior at all times of day, rain or shine. A series of pale-gray painted steel trusses, also asymmetric, support a large open space where the kitchen, dining room and living rooms flow into each other. Beyond the kitchen are the homeowners' offices and a guest room, suitably behind walls. Far away, the master bedroom suite occupies the opposite end of the house. A workshop for the man of the house and a gym are located downstairs, below grade but with water views through ribbon windows at ceiling height.

Falck is responsible for the interior design as well as the architecture. "It's a one-way house, with a solid street facade and windows on the ocean," he explains. "We've never done that exterior stone cladding before. We've used the Indian

Under the sky-lit, asymmetrical ceiling, a great open space encompasses cooking, dining and living areas. Colorful slate clads the central chimney and kitchen peninsula. LEFT: Red stone and black lacquer punctuate the kitchen's pale tones.







Cherry cabinetry infuses a sleek, minimalist decor with warmth. Straps of the same wood fasten acoustic material to the ceiling—material which, in the absence of draperies, helps absorb sound.



The owners' contemporary art collection fits right in, including pieces acquired long before they planned their new home. TOP RIGHT: Red spiral stairs lead down to a gym and a woodworking shop. BOTTOM RIGHT: Boston's towers rise on the horizon.

slate in all sorts of instances, but never on the outside. It's a soft, textural, land-like color and makes the front of the house disappear. We also used it on the chimney at the center of the interior space, on the kitchen peninsula and on the face of the terrace that lines the water side of the house."

A geothermal heating and cooling system pipes radiant heat under the maple floor. The central open area's peaked ceiling is finished with acoustic material strapped with narrow bands of cherry. "The homeowners didn't want cur-

tains, so I knew there wouldn't be many soft surfaces to absorb sound," Falck says. "The cherry straps cover the joints and give the ceiling texture."

The neutral interior established by white walls, pale floors and cherry cabinetry speaks in a modern idiom and creates a foil for the owners' collection of contemporary art. "My husband and I have accumulated art separately over the years; now we buy together," she says. "Most of our art is local to New England. The first piece I ever bought was



as a post-doc in Boston, when I fell in love with a painting that cost \$130. I arranged to pay for it over a year!" she recalls with a laugh.

As soon as the house was finished, Newton art consultant Jacqui Becker helped the couple place their pieces of painting and sculpture. "The house is already a work of art," she says. "When you put art that you love into a space you love, there's a wonderful synergy. Every one of their pieces found the perfect location.

An earth-toned palette is enlivened with occasional jolts of color, like the witty red leather armchair and ottoman in the bedroom. RIGHT: The luxurious master bath gets its splendor from superb materials and an ocean view.



“They buy art that pleases them,” she continues. “The house is an ultimate example of their aesthetic, so it’s no surprise that the results are seamless. Their art helps to create flow from one space to another.”

The kitchen, divided into a cooking zone, a cleanup zone and an informal eating area, was designed by Rosemary Porto of Luxury Kitchen, who also designed the bath and laundry rooms. “When they came to me, they didn’t want wood in the kitchen. They felt there was enough in the house,” Porto says. “The light gray of the Poggenpohl cabinets we chose works with the other colors and materials—terra cotta red granite and black lacquer in the island, stainless steel appliances and stove counter, and light gray stone flooring.”

The final element that pulls it all together, she says, is a stainless steel stove backsplash in which polished and honed metal squares create texture and pattern. “It neutralizes the warm tones,” Porto says.

The homeowner likes the fact that the house’s interior is a mystery. She sometimes finds passersby gazing and wondering what’s behind the unique facade. “When you walk in, there’s a surprise,” she says. “The house is much bigger than it looks on the outside, and every major room has a wonderful view. I love that it doesn’t have a country home look, but isn’t faddish, either.

“We haven’t been there for a summer yet,” she continues, “but the time we’ve spent here so far has been wonderful. Before we started and during the construction, we gave it a lot of thought and attention. Now we have a house that feels serene, like home.” **NEH**

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