

WHOLE HOUSE REMODEL

# SECOND CHANCES

A turn-of-the-century lake house is restored to rustic perfection.

By Mattheau LeDuc  
Photography by Christian Scully

**ARCHITECT:** Dennis Swart  
**BUILDER:** Tom Burke





Every once in a while an opportunity comes along when you are the only one that sees the potential for a positive outcome. It might be investing in a new company or restoring an antique car, or even quitting your job to reinvent yourself. Whatever the challenge, no matter how impossible the project may seem, you can't get it out of your mind, and you're

determined to see it through.

For one Rochester, Mass., homeowner, it was a lakefront home that presented such an opportunity. "Are you crazy?" asked the homeowner's husband after seeing a picture of it. They had been looking for the perfect New England property on which to build their dream home. The wife was sure she had just found it; others, including her husband, told her to run from it as fast as she could.





### Tear down or restore?

The property sat unoccupied for years as it succumbed to the elements and evolved into various states of decay. Stone walls fell apart, floors rotted, and invasive climbing ivy nearly swallowed up the house. Yet, the thought of tearing down the property never crossed the homeowner's mind. After seeing it in person for the first time, her mind was made up. "I felt like we found a gem," she says.

"I never wanted this to be a teardown," she adds, noting that the home's original black slate roof is what first grabbed her attention. "I just knew we were going to have to restore it," she says. In fact, she was so fixated on authenticity that she sourced the exact material used for the original roof, Black Monson slate, which was quarried in Maine during the first half of the 20th century, and is only available today in salvage form.





The black slate roof was a major selling point for the new homeowner, who insisted on using the exact material, Black Monson slate, to restore it. As a counterpoint to the lake home's slate roof, standing seam metal roofing was chosen for the newly built guest house.

### The dream team

It was clear that to successfully pull off a project of this size and scope would require a builder and architect with a shared vision. Enter architect Dennis Swart and builder Tom Burke.

"I remember meeting Tom Burke and the homeowners on the property and seeing it for the first time and thinking, Wow, we can definitely do something here," recalls Swart. Burke is a close friend of the homeowners and immediately jumped at the opportunity, having previously built a custom home for them down South.





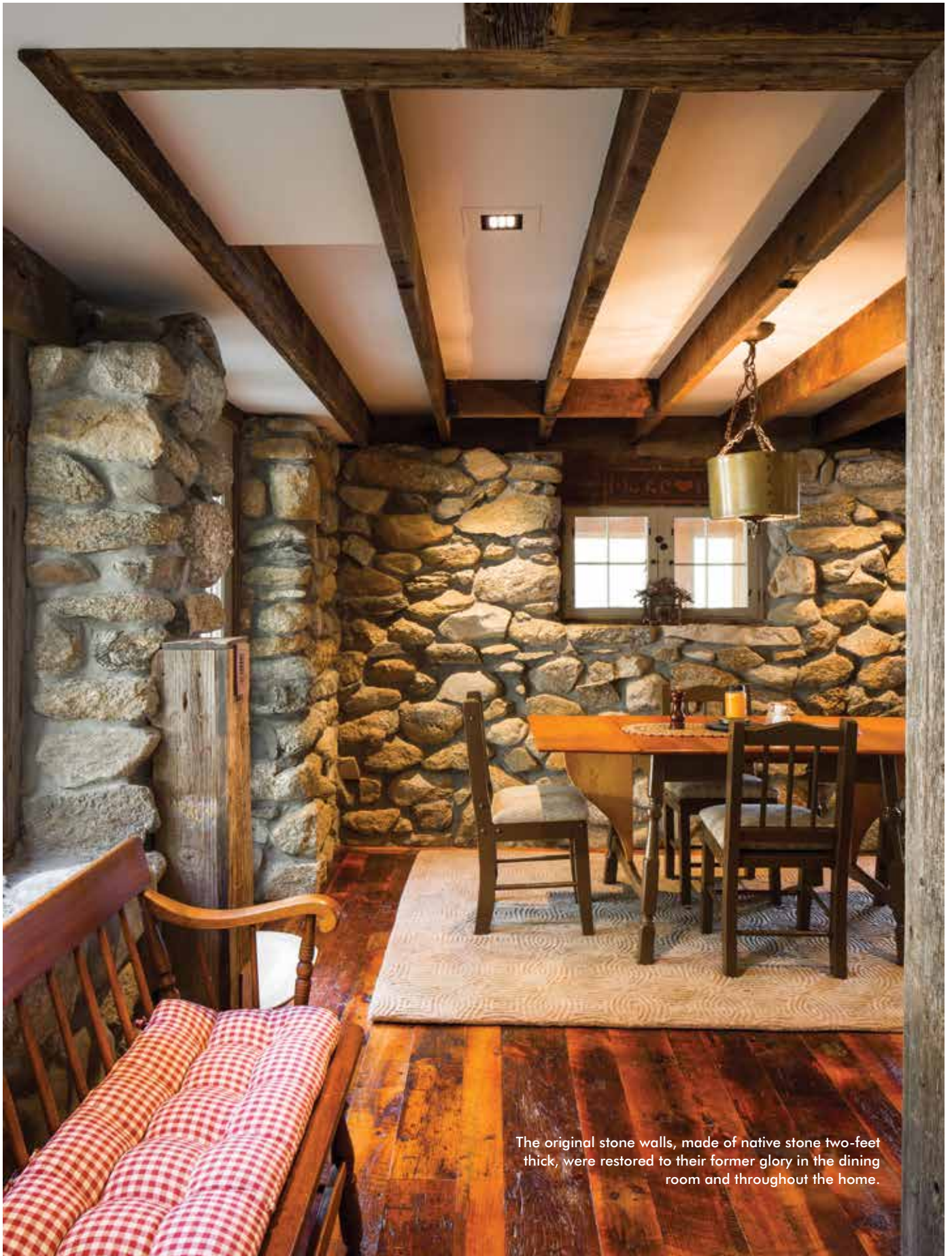
At 400 square feet, the newly built guest house is just big enough to fit a main living area with a pull-out couch, three-quarter bath and a wet bar.

### Permits and process

As if there weren't enough challenges already, the main house sits a mere 15 feet from the edge of Snipatuit Pond, which is a sure sign of a complicated town zoning and permitting process.

Fortuitously, this is where the homeowner's vision paid off. "Once the town learned that I didn't want to tear it down, they were thrilled," she says. "Don't get me wrong, the process took a very long time and all of the various departments involved were very thorough, but in the end the town was very excited to see the property was being preserved."





The original stone walls, made of native stone two-feet thick, were restored to their former glory in the dining room and throughout the home.





Reclaimed and salvaged materials, like the wood trusses in the living room and the skipjack pine in the kitchen (below), create an added layer of rustic authenticity to the design.



In addition to preserving the property, their end goal also included adding a three-season porch and expanding the upstairs for larger bedrooms. “There are always trade-offs,” says the homeowner, citing that the permitting process is all about give and take. In order to satisfy the town, the homeowners agreed to install a Presby septic system—touted as the next generation in wastewater treatment—seeing as they were keeping the existing footprint so close to the water.

What’s just as impressive as the finished product is the fact that the homeowner acted as her own general contractor throughout most of the construction. “Our builder lives on Martha’s Vineyard and it wasn’t feasible for him to be here full time,” she says, so she shared the general contracting duties with Burke.

“Tom would come over and devote a couple months here at a time, and when he wasn’t on-site, I was the one vetting and hiring subcontractors, sourcing and ordering material, and just trying to keep the wheels turning towards completion.”




A three-season porch was added as part of the renovation project.

## Focus on reclaimed materials

“I’m most proud of the fact that the majority of the home has been restored using reclaimed or salvaged material,” says the homeowner, who points out, in particular, the wood trusses in the living room. It turns out that one of the contractors involved was knowledgeable in local building history and observed that the parlor’s wood trusses most likely started out as the frame of a ship. “He pointed out all the very distinct mortising and tenon marks on the beams and said that it was quite common in New England for ships to be salvaged for their wood once they became un-seaworthy,” she adds.

With that information, she was further inspired to locate matching aged wood for the remainder of the project. “We purchased an old barn that had been dismantled and used the salvaged materials for flooring, shelving, walls, barn doors, even in the bar above the garage,” says the homeowner.

It may have taken three and half years to complete, but the finished product is a true testament to believing in your vision. It’s often during these journeys in life that we find our greatest joys. 



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The home's original windows were refurbished, and what couldn't be salvaged was re-created by Blackburn Building Conservation, LLC, in Middleboro, Mass.

## in the details



Only available in salvage form, Black Monson slate was sourced to restore the roof.



Berkley outdoor wall light by Arroyo Craftsmen can be purchased online at [1800lighting.com](http://1800lighting.com).



Joshua's Mountain Cabinetry, of Assonet, Mass., custom crafted a built-in buffet made of birch for the dining room.





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