

SO *Rhode Island*

All Rooms with a View

How a couple and their homebuilding dream team built a summer home atop Green Hill

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PHOTO BY GRACE LENTINI

By Andrea E. McHugh

After 40 years of marriage and a number of homes built along the way, John and Laida Kearney were hardly intimidated when they decided to build a home in one of South Kingstown's coastal communities. The only question they had was where to do it.

After two years of searching for the right property, the couple had given up on their dream of a Rhode Island summer home. Then, one afternoon, Laida strayed from her usual biking route and came across an expansive lot atop the “hill” of Green Hill, nestled between Trustom Pond National Wildlife Refuge and Green Hill Pond. She quickly hurried home to tell Bob about her discovery. “I told my husband, ‘You have to see the view from this lot!’” With panoramic vistas of the ocean and, in the distance, Block Island, the two knew they had found the ideal location to break ground.

The Kearneys turned to Nancy Leslie of Leslie Architects, based in nearby Wakefield, after seeing many of her homes in the area. (To date, the firm has completed over 525 projects, ranging from small, 17th-century historic restorations and waterfront homes to commercial projects). “I loved her style – the character, the details,” says Laida. The couple also needed an architect with design solutions that would complement their lifestyle. “Nancy was very good about taking feedback,” adds Laida. “We’ve built homes before, but this was different. Talk about building your dream house. This was truly that.”

The process, though lengthy, was seamless, says the couple. “From the architect to the craftsmen, this home was really a labor of love – everybody did it with love,” explains Laida. “It’s full of a lot of positive energy because of the people who built it.”

Builder Steve Lawrence of Lawrence Builders in Narragansett says that the thoughtful design and unique details really set the house apart. “It’s an unbelievable house, one of the nicest in the state,” he says. “It’s not just a big house, it’s a nice home they actually use. They designed it around how they wanted to use it.”

This architect-builder-homeowner “dream team” surpassed even their own expectations. “We wanted a house that ‘went with’ the area, one with a coastal New England feel,” says Laida. “That was all Nancy. When I first saw it on paper, I fell in love with it, and when Steve made it come to life, I was blown away.”

Colloquially called an “upside down” house, the building’s layout is less traditional: bedrooms on the first floor and the kitchen and living spaces on a higher level. This design is becoming more and more popular in areas like South County, as many homeowners choose to make the most of the views during daylight hours when they cook, dine, and relax.

For Laida, the kitchen is the heart of the home and her favorite place in the house. The rounded, expansive, light-filled space enjoys beautiful views of the pond and the ocean. “And my island is one huge slab of marble,” she adds. She intentionally had the kitchen designed to allow people to easily linger and congregate so that she could be part of the conversation while cooking – whether for two or 22.

The third level indulges another of her passions: painting. There she enjoys a studio space, with surrounding views that are nothing short of inspirational. There’s also a deck on the third level where John likes to relax with a cigar and sometimes a glass of wine. The couple decided during the design phase to add an additional bedroom to the floor, since the space practically begged for it. Their son lives there and enjoys the compelling vista. Today, the couple spends the summer, and even more time than they expected, living in the Ocean State.

