

**The New Cottage Home**  
**A Tour of Unique American Dwellings**  
**By Jim Tolpin**  
**Taunton Press, Inc., 1998**

A Down-East, Downsized, Shingle-Style Cottage

From the start, the design of this island cottage was a challenging exercise in compromise. The architect, Samuel Van Dam of Portland, Maine, was faced with a couple who came to the design process with two seemingly disparate architectural tastes – one was enthusiastic about the modernistic style that emphasized clean-lined volumetric shapes devoid of superfluous ornament, while the other was drawn to the form and detailing of turn-of-the-century Victorians.

After much discussion, Van Dam found a compromise by designing a house that, on the exterior, reflected the forms of the traditional Shingle-style cottage indigenous to the Maine coast yet drew its interior sense of space – large rooms that flowed through the floor plan both horizontally and vertically – from the injunctions of modernism.

One of the first things you notice as you approach the cottage is the row of white-painted columns that march across the front porch. These supports, though unadorned, evoke a touch of grandeur from the golden age of the Shingle-style cottage. At the same time, they echo the white-barked birches surrounding the house.

The porch wraps around both sea-facing sides of the house and repeats the shape of the dining room, effectively extending the living room into the outdoors. The second-floor porch offers privacy and an unhindered view across the water.

The sharp roof lines and the rather subtle gambrel applied to the back half of the roof offer further reminders of the Shingle era.

To make the most of the sun, Van Dam extended the tall windows well up into the gable, allowing light to flow from floor to floor and into the core of the house.

The first floor's high ceiling contributes to the cottage's sense of spaciousness. The exposed wall and ceiling framing soften the formality of the Shingle style, helping the interior feel casual and cozy. The pickled white finish infuses the space with a soft

luminescence, which prompted one visitor to say that entering the room was “like walking into an Andrew Wyeth watercolor.”

The columns carry the theme of the porch supports inside and also help define the edge of the living room area by creating a sense of separation from the traffic path leading to the side-entry door.

The wall-to-wall row of 2-over-2 windows draws the view into the room, while substantial solid-wood mullions lend a sense of security and frame vignettes from the breathtaking view. The softwood floor is coated with a heavy-duty deck paint, the blue-green color suggesting the deep hues of the Maine ocean.

The kitchen defines its territory with a half-wall to create a niche off the great room-style living room. Its white-painted cabinets are unobtrusive and pleasingly informal. The box standing away from the wall by the entry door encloses a fridge and creates space behind for a hall closet.

The large transom window over the kitchen entry door (just visible at the right edge of the photo) brings southeast light deep into the core of the house and jogs up into the second floor to become a window seat.

By holding the second floor away from the southwest-facing wall, Van Dam made it possible for the windows to extend unbroken up the gable end. This strategy not only illuminates the stairway but also fills the entire house with daylight and a feeling of expanse.

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