

# Camden Kinetic





## A Collection of Influences Culminates in a Home Bursting With Energy

Some houses appear as though they were simply plunked down, fully formed, without any consideration of their surroundings. And there they sit, utterly out of place. Such was the case with the circa 1958 ranch-style house that architect Peter Edwards and his wife, Annie, purchased several years ago in Camden.

Situated on an abruptly sloping wooded lot within walking distance of the village and a stone's throw from its pristine harbor, the house was as crude as the location was beautiful. In a neighborhood of tastefully renovated older homes and handsome, conservatively designed newer homes, the "contemporary" ranch home was certainly out of place. "It was cold and dismissive," says Edwards of his former house. "It was sort of wedged into the hillside like a big rectangular slab that had been shot from the other side of the bay." The new home that Edwards—who works at the Rockport firm of Bernhard & Priestly Architecture—designed to replace the old is both a homage to Maine and a challenge to the state's conventional nature. Crackling with nautical influences and modern flair, the home is bursting with energy.

### Like a Phoenix from a Foundation

When Edwards and his wife first moved to Maine from Boston, the couple hoped to stumble upon an old fixer-upper farmhouse. Instead, they fell in love with a gorgeous site that had a very odd house on it. "It just didn't fit in with the fabric of the village," Edwards remembers. "I almost felt a sense of social obligation to replace it." So Edwards did just that by knocking it flat and starting anew. "If we'd found that 1800s Cape Cod farmhouse," he says, "I would have felt wedded to a style, and rightfully so."

The Edwards' family—with two kids at the time, and now three—lived for two years in the dark, small-windowed ranch house as Edwards struggled to get his designs for a new home out of his mind and onto paper. Back then, the only way to look out from the strangely placed windows in the master bedroom—which was located where the broad, open living room is today—was to stand on tiptoes and crane your neck.

From the start, Edwards knew he wanted to design a home that would be both contemporary and contextual, but he wasn't immediately sure how to achieve such a feat. "The whole time I was trying to convince myself that I had the guts to do something contemporary," he says, "and still be able to anchor it in Maine." Having long admired the haphazard complexity of the stacked granite slabs of piers and breakwaters, Edwards composed a home that he describes as a cluster of "discreet, identifiable—though interlocked—geometric forms." He worked through reams and

REMARKABLE  
by Joshua Bodwell  
Photography Darren Setlow

Dusk falls just two blocks from the Camden harbor and the Edwards' house, hunkered against the hillside, settles in for the coming night.



reams of paper—often seeking assurances from colleague John Priestly and others within his firm—throughout the frustrating process of realizing his vision. Edwards finally reached out to Todd Fulshaw and Tim Hess, two old friends and former classmates from his days at Cornell University. “I just got too close to the design,” he confesses. Leaning on his knowledge and experience of creating Cubist art and sculpture, Fulshaw worked with Edwards to “solve” the home’s intricate massing. “They helped me move the design from a concept to something buildable,” he says.

Once the first major puzzle was solved, the rest of the design fell into place. Ninety-percent of the old one-story house was soon after leveled to its foundation, and a two-story home replete with a small “tower” rose up from its ashes. The biggest holdover from the original house’s design, Edwards says, is the way the new house pushes out from the hillside. “I wanted to hang on to that simple, long, horizontal reach,” he muses, “and pay homage to the inherent frugality of the original ranch house design.” The finished home marries varying textures and colors with intersecting forms and rooflines that miraculously never crowd or compete with one another.

#### **The Exterior Elements**

The palette of materials Edwards worked with carry a strong stamp of the Maine vernacular, such as the large slabs of





granite, natural white-cedar shingles, and galvanized metal roof. “Too many homes today are designed for the moment and maintained so they won’t change at all,” Edwards confides. “I’m looking forward to seeing this house age. It may very well change from white to gray in as little as ten years, and weather into the context of the land like an old farm building.”

The home’s siding is actually about 60 percent cedar shingles and 40 percent painted white siding. “I wanted there to be something like a dialogue between the two sidings,” Edwards says. And within that dialogue he created further “side conversations,” as the painted sections include flat, horizontal, and vertical woods. The siding serves to highlight the interplay between the home’s traditional and modern elements.

From the street approach, the home’s slim profile juts out as the ground below drops away, which gives the impression that the house is imbedded into the hulking granite terraces that poke out from both sides. Edwards notes that the two terraces are not symmetrical, but rather “virtually connected.” The affect, which is perhaps even stronger from the inside, tricks the eye into believing an ancient jetty runs into one side of the house and reappears on

**The airiness of the living room, which was once the original house’s nearly windowless master bedroom, is accentuated by the home’s only exposed beam ceiling (opposite, above). Looking back into the home from the living room (opposite, below) captures both the expanse and subtle play of angles and spaces within the home’s interior.**

**While the new kitchen remained in the same location as the original, it got a major overhaul (above, left). The original cabinets were re-hung in a new configuration only after they’d been refurbished and refit with new hardware and panes of ribbed glass. From the kitchen, the view carries across the dining room and up the stairs (above, right.)**



**The juxtaposition of this Craftsman style table, vintage Tiffany lamp, and Audubon print in the foreground and the spare, metal-railed staircase in the distance plays a similar traditional-versus-modern game as the home's exterior.**

**This study and fireplace remain as two of the only features from the original ranch-style home.**

the other. "When the doors are open," says Edwards, "the two terraces change the house's flow from moving up and down the lot to moving horizontally across it."

Another striking external feature is the home's prominent, maritime-themed deck. The stainless-steel posts and tension rods used for the railings, and for the interior stairs, were influenced by Edward's passion for sailing. "It's definitely boat-like," Edwards says, "with wood under foot and stainless lifelines around." Mangaris, a tropical hardwood, was used for the decking and to cap the metal rail. The deck is supported by two slender posts, both of which practically disappear visually as they plummet down to granite anchors below.

Protruding from the home's midsection is another maritime-inspired feature that Edwards refers to "The Tower." Comparing it to a boat's bridge or coning tower, he notes that it is "the vertical element that holds all the other elements together—it's like a stake in the ground, and it ties the whole house together." With a cantilevered and slightly askew roofline, the tower contains the stairs between the first and second floors and, at its pinnacle is a tiny room accessible only by ladder.

### **"The Big Idea"**

"If there's one lesson I learned on this project that I will carry to my grave," Edwards says, "it's that when you're given the opportunity to reuse an existing foundation, you should seriously consider its value." His voice grows both quieter and more excited when he describes how unusual and wonderful it is to have several mature oak trees so close to the new house that you can almost touch them. "The heavy equipment required to pour a new foundation would have just destroyed their roots and mutilated the site." And for Edwards, the site is one of the home's most stunning features.

"At Cornell there was one memorable professor who always pushed us to answer 'What's the Big Idea?' of every project," Edwards says. "While I'm challenged to try and answer that about this effort," he continues, "if I were forced to, I'd have to say it is the home's relationship to its site."

"Good design, at its core," Edward says, "is a few good ideas, mutually referential and supportive of a primary concept."





Beyond the ladder to “The Tower” hang just two of the home’s many exquisite paintings by homeowner Annie Edwards’ mother, Judy Schultze. To the left is a portrait of Annie herself, and beside that a portrait of the Edwards’ daughter, Grace.

This boat-influenced handrail on the home’s interior staircase is an echo of the railing that surrounds the house’s front deck.



Cubist art and sculpture influenced the intersection of forms on the home's back side. Consciously and subconsciously informed by the vernacular of the Maine landscape, the home's "tower" creates something of a modern "widow's walk."

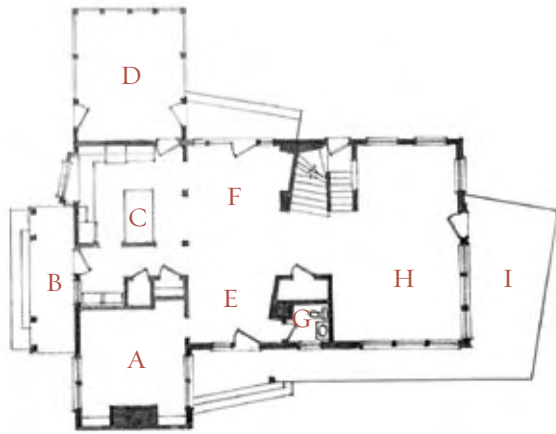


Early morning casts a golden hue on the home's street-side view. Three components conspire to make this side of the home rather dynamic: as the yard drops in a rush toward the harbor below, the deck continues on to jut straight out like a pier, and the overhanging front roofline extends with purpose toward the harbor views. "At first glance it's familiar," says architect/homeowner Peter Edwards. "Upon closer inspection it's curious, inventive, and draws one to discover what might be around the next corner, or inside." He loves watching people stop and query the house, often engaging onlookers in a discussion about architecture.



### First Floor

- A. Study
- B. Side Porch
- C. Kitchen
- D. Screen Porch
- E. Foyer
- F. Dining
- G. Bathroom
- H. Livingroom
- I. Deck
- J. Garage



### Tower



### Second Floor

- K. Bedroom
- L. Bathroom
- M. Master Bedroom

