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TURNING THE TIDE

WITH HEART, SOUL AND VISION, DESIGNER PHILIP MITCHELL RETURNS A CLASSIC MARITIME COTTAGE TO ITS FORMER GLORY.

Text by IRIS BENAROIA | Photography by JANET KIMBER



A nook in the corner of the living room features a grouping of pieces that has sentimental value.

Homeowners Philip Mitchell and Mark Narsansky picked up the abstract painting by Italian artist Gianluca Nastro in New York. The table is a treasured antique Singer sewing machine Philip inherited from his maternal grandmother.

Lamp, Brunschwig & Fils; **artwork** by Gianluca Nastro (on table), Flair Home Collection; **lampshade**, RomEla Antique Lighting.

OPPOSITE: An intimate seating arrangement welcomes guests to the living room. The original fireplace was rebuilt using an elegant old mantel found in Halifax, fitting in seamlessly with the home's classic style. **Rug**, Elte; **antique chairs**, Patina Antiques; **firescreen**, fire tools, Restoration Hardware; **artwork** (by window), Peter Rotter (top); Leslie James Skelton (bottom), D&E Lake.





A wall was torn down between the dining room and kitchen (off to the left) to create a casual flow for entertaining and allow the view of the bay to be seen throughout the length of the home. The formal room feels cosy with its warm wood tones, full drapes and low ceiling. **Wall colour**, Creamy White (OC-7), **trim colour**, Olive Branch (2143-30), Benjamin Moore; **chandelier**, Douglas Poole Antiques; **drapes**, Kravet. OPPOSITE: The kitchen's beadboard walls, apron sink and original large-plank flooring create an authentic cottagey look. A multifunctional island houses a second sink, extra storage and a wine fridge. Philip opted for surface-mounted light fixtures all set on dimmers to cast a soft glow in the country-inspired space. **Cabinets**, Bellini Custom Cabinetry; **island countertop**, Caledonia Marble; **perimeter countertop**, Bella Marble & Granite.



Mark Narsansky (left) and Philip Mitchell won a Heritage Trust of Nova Scotia award for the restoration of their 1860s house. **Design,** Philip Mitchell Design; **contracting,** Greg Cole, ColeBuilt; **house number,** Chiselworks; **sconces,** Summerhill Hardware.

MORNING TIDE

Right now, I'm looking at the most stunning view of the water from my back window," says Toronto designer Philip Mitchell from his weekend home in Chester, N.S. "Some days, 50 boats sail by."

On this afternoon at Morning Tide, the charming 1860s Gothic Revival cottage restored by Philip two years ago, grapefruit-sized hydrangeas bob in the breeze thanks to his partner, Mark Narsansky, the green thumb in the relationship, who is also a painter. Mark has planted two varieties of hydrangeas, six types of roses, crimson-coloured geraniums and lilac trees. The latter emit a heady scent to passersby in the quaint town of about 2,000.

It may be a low-key seaside town, but Chester can satisfy even the epicurean, says Philip. Patisseries, organic grocers and a farmers market are all within walking distance, where Philip and Mark buy fresh ingredients for frequent get-togethers with friends. They also spend their time engaging in marathon lounging-and-reading sessions in the sunroom — or "summer living room," as they call it.

"In the city, we live very differently: we work nonstop," says Philip of life at their primary residence, a Toronto

condo (shown in *H&H*, October 2009). His eponymous design firm has him jetting off to style homes as far-flung as Milan, London and the Cayman Islands. Mark, who runs RBA Advertising in Toronto, doesn't have much downtime, either. "We don't even cook at home," says Philip. The pair eventually want to move permanently to Morning Tide.

Eight years ago, they cottoned on to Chester's charm when visiting friends, immediately falling in love with its picturesque buildings, sense of community and laid-back friendly feel. Two years ago, they took the plunge and bought the 2,000-square-foot clapboard house that sits right in the heart of the town. "We looked at 20 properties in one day, and this was the last one. Before we made it to the second floor, we said, 'We'll take it!'"

Originally, Morning Tide was more like Mourning Vibe. The derelict two-storey dwelling had five bedrooms on the second floor and had undergone about the same number of sloppy renovations through the years. In an attempt to modernize it, "the beautiful charm, detail and architectural elements had been stripped from the house," says Philip. "A lot of people said they would have torn it down, but we saw the potential.

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TOP LEFT: Located in the heart of town, the classically symmetrical exterior with double bay windows is a step back in time. **Benches**, Westminster Teak; **siding colour**, Stonington Gray (HC-170), Benjamin Moore.

RIGHT: In the entranceway, the beautiful newel post on the staircase

was restored. Covers were built for all of the radiators, so they look like pieces of furniture. Straight ahead is the fridge, disguised as an antique armoire. Dozens of new and old maps of Nova Scotia line the wall. **Stair runner**, Elte; antique **maps**, D&E Lake.

ABOVE LEFT: Coastal- and cottagey-

feeling, the sunroom — the only space in the house with light-toned painted floors — has subtle East Coast motifs, including bright buoys in the shelves above the window and a bronzed pendant lantern. **Sectional sofa**, Pottery Barn; **rug**, lantern (on table), Restoration Hardware; **pendant**

lantern, Sescolite. RIGHT: Mark enjoys gardening on the reclaimed-brick terrace, which includes outdoor dining and living areas. An herb garden provides cooking essentials. **Landscape design**, Mark Narsansky; **walkway**, ColeBuilt.

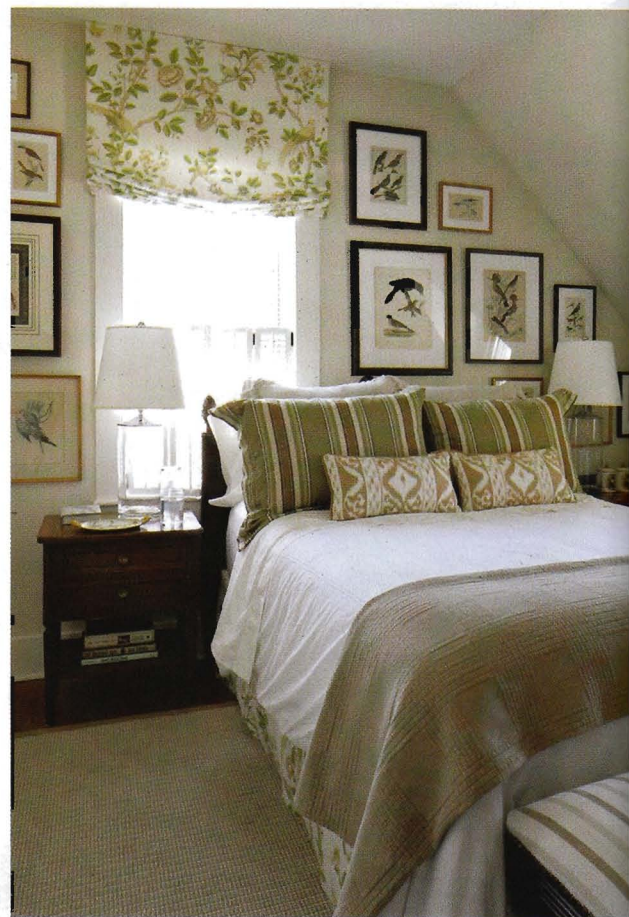


Though a big undertaking, the doorway was centred in the sweet little guest room to accommodate twin beds, which have storage below. Quintessential Nova Scotia quilts and nautical sketches provide a charming sense of place. **Mirror**, Target; **antique prints**, Blue Shutters Antiques and W.R. Antiques; **picture framing**, D&E Lake; **bedding**, Au Lit Fine Linens; **sham fabric**, Têlio and Lee Jofa.

TOP LEFT: A vignette in one of the guest rooms shows part of a collection of green Jasperware by Wedgwood that the couple has been collecting for years. They switch up displays throughout the home for a personalized touch. **Lamp**, Target; antique **Jasperware** by Wedgwood, Cynthia Findlay Antiques; **chest**, Five O Seven Antiques; **mirror**, W.R. Antiques.

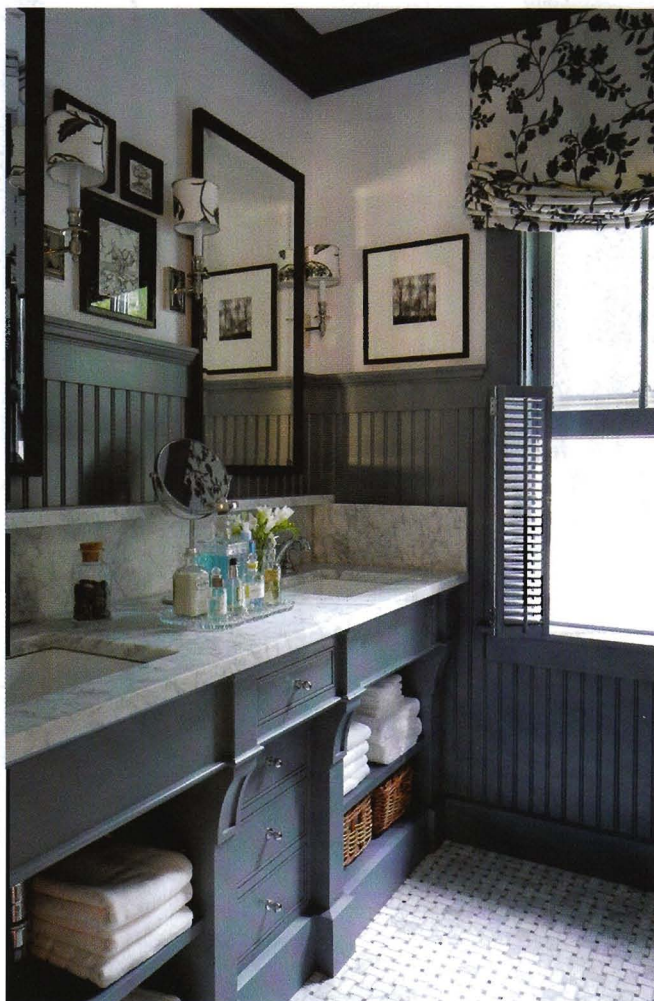


RIGHT: Vintage bird prints hang everywhere in the guest room, known as "The Bird Room." By placing the headboard against the window, Philip was able to use a larger bed while keeping clearance under the sloped ceiling.



Duvet cover, Au Lit Fine Linens; **bedside tables**, bench, Patina Antiques; **artwork**, D&E Lake; porcelain **platter**, Jim Smith Studio.

BOTTOM LEFT: Philip's attention to detail shines in the principal bathroom, with its exquisite millwork, useful storage and marble countertop, which gives the room a vintage apothecary feel. Grey and white basketweave floor tiles and crewel fabric pop against the blue-grey wainscoting. **Vanity**, Bellini Custom Cabinetry; **stand mirror**, Ginger's; **countertop**, Bella Marble & Granite; **floor tiles**, Saltillo Imports; **sconces**, Summerhill Hardware; **artwork** by Sarah Irwin (etchings) and Margot Metcalfe (photograph), Jo Beale Gallery.



RIGHT: In the main-floor powder room, nautical-inspired light fixtures are a charming nod to the Maritime location. Panelled walls, a farmhouse-style sink and bifold shutters add character. **Sink**, Kohler; **sconces**, Summerhill Hardware; **artwork**, Crowther & Brayley; **wall colour**, Olive Branch (2143-30), Benjamin Moore.



RECIPES

AS SHOWN ON PAGES 198 to 202



Mom's Saucy Apple Cake

SERVES 8

Trish says this is a much-requested family dessert: "The kids love the sauce — but what's not to love about sugar and butter!" During apple season, her dad's orchard is plentiful. Here's one sweet way to enjoy the harvest.

Cake

- 1 cup (250 mL) sugar
- ¼ cup (60 mL) butter, cubed, at room temperature
- 2 eggs
- 1 cup (250 mL) all-purpose flour
- 1 tsp (5 mL) cinnamon
- 1 tsp (5 mL) baking soda
- ¼ tsp (1 mL) salt
- 2 cups (500 mL) chopped peeled apples (McIntosh or Gala)

Sauce

- ½ cup (125 mL) brown sugar
- ½ cup (125 mL) white sugar
- ½ cup (125 mL) 18% cream
- ¼ cup (60 mL) butter

1. Preheat oven to 350°F (180°C). Grease a 9"- (2½ L) square cake pan. (For an extra-rustic look, we baked ours in a cast-iron pan.)
2. In a large bowl, beat together sugar, butter and eggs until light and fluffy.
3. Combine flour, cinnamon, baking soda and salt. Stir into batter with apples. Spread in prepared pan.
4. Bake for 30 to 40 minutes, or until centre of cake springs back when lightly touched or a toothpick comes out clean.
5. To make sauce, combine sauce ingredients in a small saucepan. Bring to a gentle boil and cook, stirring, until slightly thickened.
6. Serve cake warm with warm sauce. **H&H**

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PROMISED LAND

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Sandra's friend Bridget Hutchison, a well-known landscape designer in the area — along with her daughter Chloe, an architect and landscape designer — was also very helpful in planning the structure of the beds. A team of students descends on the property every summer to manage the weeding.

"Sandy's a grinder in the garden," says Mike, who's taken on much of the cooking duty since he retired. "I have to let her know it's time to come in for lunch." Later, in the evening, he pours the wine and they stroll their property in peace. "I love working in it and walking it," says Sandra. As for Mike, "Looking at it unwinds me to no end," he says. "It's like a canvas. When I see a nice painting that sort of thing happens, and this garden just does it for me." **H&H**

TURNING THE TIDE

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The interior had hints of what once was, so we turned it into a research project."

The couple studied images of the village and its architecture during the 1880s at a library in Chester and toured untouched homes in the area. The house itself turned out to be inspiring, as well. Beautiful original wide-planked wood floors, for instance, were found buried beneath linoleum and carpet and were painstakingly salvaged and varnished to highlight their honey hue. They even moved wood flooring from a closet and a bathroom to the kitchen where it was missing.

During the renovation, completed with local contractor Greg Cole, a few walls were taken down, but for the most part, rooms were left small in keeping with the home's provenance. The bedrooms, however, were pared back to three: a principal bedroom and two guest rooms. Typical of 19th-century

construction, there was a lot of wasted space in the form of dramatic ceiling slopes and an attic, so the attic was merged with a bedroom to create the principal bathroom.

They also added the airy sunroom off the living room, painted a soothing vanilla and outfitted with a large, cosy sectional. Form and function it seems were both paramount in the redesign, which saw much detailed millwork and clever storage solutions that are as elegant as they are ingenious. The nature-inspired palette of rich earthy browns and greens, seaside blues and whites befits the pair's handsome furniture. Philip opted for warm tones for the cottage, instead of a typical summery look, because they use the house year-round, taking in galleries and theatre shows with friends in the cool fall months.

In deference to the home's 19th-century design, Philip chose not to go overly slick in the interior. "I do both contemporary and traditional work; currently, my firm is doing a lot of contemporary," he admits, "but we've never followed the trends at home. We like *stuff*. There's something special about surrounding yourself with beautiful things." And, indeed, he has done just that, lining the home with family antiques and treasures from the couple's many travels.

The home epitomizes cosiness and understated luxury. Generous panelling and beadboard highlight its heritage, as do traditional furnishings and the homey unfitted kitchen. You won't find any books wrapped in faddish uniform paper; here, they're all in plain view, adding colour and personality to the living room's built-in shelves. The classic lanterns and unique ceiling fixtures echo the home's East Coast cottage aesthetic.

The result is a happy lived-in home, so graciously restored that it won a 2010 Heritage Trust of Nova Scotia Built Heritage Award. "Preserving Canada's architectural heritage is a very important element of what I do," says Philip, noting he plans to restore more neglected Chester properties. But, for now, you'll find him relaxing with Mark on weekends at Morning Tide, drinking in the stunning water views. **H&H**