



Portal to the Past

A young family writes
the latest chapter of a storied
384-year-old cottage built
in the oldest town on Cape Cod.

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Chopped Dill
Benjamin Moore

Stephenie and Chase Watts—
with their kids, Hampton (7)
and Klein (4)—updated their
cute-as-a-button 1639 cedar shake
cottage by painting the door a
happy hue. The storybook white
picket fence was already in place.

W

hile their high school classmates were holding hands

at the movies, sweethearts Stephenie and Chase Watts were spending their Friday nights wandering through Pottery Barn and Restoration Hardware, dreaming of someday decorating their own home. "Those were our date nights," Chase says.

Today, the couple, who now own an interior design studio (Watts Design House; @stepheniewatts), is more likely to spend their evenings cuddled up with their two children inside their 1639 shingled cottage in Sandwich, Massachusetts. "The house sat on the market for two months," says Chase, who is also a real estate agent and discovered the listing two-and-a-half years ago while scrolling on his phone. "I guess not everyone wants a house that's more than 380 years old."

The cottage is a time capsule, sitting on its original post-and-beam foundation that makes for occasionally uneven floors. Other timeworn quirks include low-beamed ceilings and multiple woodburning fireplaces lined with the county's namesake Barnstable bricks. "It was around the late 1700s or early 1800s that the house got the facade that you see now," Stephenie says.

The couple learned about one of the home's early inhabitants from a keepsake bundle found in the attic by the previous owners. Scraps of satin ribbon and lace, a lock of auburn hair, and a handwritten recipe for loaf cake tell the story of a merchant and his wife who raised their family in the house during the 1800s. The discovery only reinforced the Wattses' resolve to become stewards of the cottage.

Their renovations have been light—mainly cosmetic modifications such as swapping laminate flooring for tile in a bathroom. They scoured local shops, flea markets, and Facebook Marketplace for vintage furnishings. "We wanted it to feel like a salty old sailor lives here. What treasures would he come back with?" Stephenie says. With that in mind, the couple infused rooms with saturated classic New England colors, vintage ship paintings, and shelves lined with well-worn books, collected seashells, and tarnished brass candlesticks. "This house has its quirkiness," Stephenie says. "But there's a soulfulness that can't be re-created—there are certain things that only time can give."



ABOVE: Because the living room's walls and floors aren't level, the couple eyeballed where to hang their miscellany of nautical flags, maps, ship paintings, and landscapes.



**HOW CLEVER IS THAT?
Make Do "Walls"**

For a maximalist like Stephenie, no surface is off-limits for display, especially in a small space. Here, she took advantage of the picture window's wide frame to hang a vertically stacked trio of framed coins.

Midnight Blue
Benjamin Moore

Cottage Capsule
**A MOODY
OIL PAINTING
PALETTE**

Vintage oil paintings of clipper sailing ships and coastal scenes provided the couple with the perfect moody gray-and-blue palette inspiration for their sunroom-turned-den. At first, the Wattses left the ceiling white, "but it didn't feel cozy enough, so we painted it the next year," says Stephenie. Velvet and wool fabrics cover the furniture (including mismatched red vintage chairs found on Facebook Marketplace), which are then all topped with a mix of textiles that reinforce the room's acquired-over-time feel.



HOW CLEVER IS THAT?
Worry-Free Artwork

Framed art makes a kitchen seem less utilitarian. Instead of a fragile painting in the splatter-likely area next to the range, Stephenie framed a print she downloaded free from getty.edu. "I printed it on high-quality paper then had it mounted on foam board and cut to the size of the frame," she says.

Cottage Capsule
CHARACTER IN EVERY CRANNY

The original beams in the kitchen and adjacent dining room (far right) put the ceiling height at a mere 6 feet. Still, the Wattses packed charm into every square inch—right down to the brass switch plates. They also painted the existing cabinets, likely added in the 1940s, and lined the walls in a pretty, light-reflecting tile (cletile.com). A pine farm table serves as the island and brings rustic texture, while unlacquered brass bistro-style shelving (sinklegs.com) and a Gantry-style faucet (waterstoneco.com) add aged shine.

Russian Olive
Behr

RIGHT: The dining room's fireplace mantel was stripped down to expose its original rough-hewn pine and where a previous owner had tucked Dutch tiles into the millwork. Stephenie kept the rest of the room simply furnished with leather and wood chairs from Amsterdam that she found on Etsy and a black antique bench.

“

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—Homeowner Stephenie Watts





Scholar Green
Ralph Lauren Paint

Cottage Capsule
HUNKERED-DOWN HIDEAWAYS

Upstairs, an antique model ship is moored on the mantel in what will become 4-year-old Klein's room. "We wanted his room to feel like a New England summer camp," Stephenie says. The couple painted the mantel then added whimsical twinkle with several brass stars ([etsy.com](https://www.etsy.com)). Elsewhere, framed art, maps, and found artifacts—souvenir pennants, an old license plate, a horseshoe crab shell discovered on the beach by Chase's father—provide a storied display. The mounted oars (far right) came with the house; Chase and Stephenie added white stripes for a finishing touch.



Dropcloth
Farrow & Ball

ABOVE: In the "Captain's Room," the walls and ceiling are coated in the same dark paint color (Griffin by Sherwin-Williams). The spindle bed is another antique find. "We bought it from an older gentleman who told us it had been made by his great-great-grandfather. We had a happy and tearful exchange when we purchased it," Stephenie says. **ABOVE RIGHT:** The upstairs landing resembles the inside of a boat, with a bull's-eye mirror and copper gas lantern ([frenchmarketlanterns.com](https://www.frenchmarketlanterns.com)) adding New England charm.

