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A Gift from the Sea

Heather Atwood (</stories?author=57db6633e4fcb573a5982c71>)

A Beverly Farms artist begins a new chapter by restoring a house with simple solutions inspired by nature



(Photograph by Carol Liscovitz)

Five years ago, Kim Jermain returned to her family's Coffin's Beach house, where she had spent her childhood summers with her parents and four siblings. Jermain needed a place to pause in between leaving one life and starting another, before looking for her next home. Her three sons were grown, and, after a divorce, she was single for the first time in 34 years.

"I was walking the beach one afternoon and pondering my choices," Jermain said. She had recently seen a two-family Beverly Farms residence fastened to a rock on a busy street. It needed *everything*.

“The habits of the hermit crab came to mind.” The house felt like not much more than a shell which she would pull over herself and belongings, and sometimes her sons, and call home.

On her very modest post-divorce budget, Jermain decided to accept the best that this castoff — an 1890 two-bedroom Gambrel with a two-bedroom apartment added later — had to offer. The place had a craggy rock slope out the back door, 40 mph traffic out the front door, and lots of architectural promise in between.

“From the road the house looked like a clean-lined barn with an “L”, but it was actually two apartments, one big and one small, each with two bedrooms.”

Jermain lists “color designer” and “landscape painter” on her resume. She has a color and design consulting business (<https://www.kimberlycollinsjermain.com/>). But she is also a skilled sailor who has lived much of her life between a sail and a ship’s hull — remember those Coffin’s Beach summers? She’s also spent much of her life interpreting light with paint on canvas, from the ultramarine shadows of midnight skies to the lucid greens of underwater seas. Each of these talents inform the other. Jermain designs with a painter’s sense of light and a

sailor's sense of economy. With this quiver of skills, she launched into repairing, renovating, and recreating her new Beverly Farms home.



(Photograph by Carol Liscovitz)

“The century-old house was oriented towards the sun. The kitchens (the main kitchen and the apartment kitchen) receive the first light, then the sun tracks to the west, illuminating the appropriate rooms in succession for the rest of the day. I could see the site’s solar basics, and I imagined putting them into

play. What struck me from the very first, were the natural resources that could be repurposed to make this real estate meet my high standards and environmental conscience.”

Jermain would live in the larger, “more gracious side,” and use the apartment on the opposing North side as her office and studio. Her children, who tended to migrate seasonally in the summer to their home by the sea, would have a bath and bedrooms there.

Jermain needed storage for her artwork and bedrooms for everyone, but she also wanted to be able to turn them on and off. The lackluster economy was a reminder that her design business might experience a setback. “I could handle that with a home office-turned-rental unit in a pinch.”

To a landscape painter, the views framed by the oversized windows of this house provided reassuring glimpses of nature throughout the day. Even with the rocky ledges, the backyard provided some surprisingly lovely and intimate outdoor space. The neighbor’s woodland beyond the shallow depth of rock ledge out the back windows provided unexpected privacy.

Jermain saw a bonus in the property's minimal acreage; the tiny patch of lawn could be easily cut by one person with a reel mower — Jermain's zero-carbon mower of choice, and there was enough sunlight for a small flower and vegetable garden “and an awesome clothesline for open air drying.”

“And there was a level piece of ground on the side yard that would harbor my children's boats, as well as my own. This real estate package made it possible for me to consider making it my own.”





(Photograph by Carol Liscovitz)

Phase one was the critical but unglamorous part of renovation: Jermain jumped to take advantage of the Mass Save energy incentive program that would replace two ancient gas, hot air heating systems, one completely out of steam on the snowy day that Jermain took possession of the project.

“I did an energy audit before beginning the renovation, filled out the paperwork for the zero percent interest loan for some of the high-efficiency utilities.” Two of the latest, wall-hung variety furnaces would pump hot water economically through the veins of this elderly house going forward.

“For months I had little to show my friends except a tricked-out heating plant. No one had more awe for the engineering skills of

my plumber than the one who was sinking the lion's share of her financial resources to reduce her energy footprint.” To passers-by the first weeks of trucks beeping around the property seemed to change almost nothing, but Jermain saw in them her energy future taking shape.

Meanwhile, the dumpster parked in the driveway filled with six tons of old insulation, broken fixtures, and a century’s worth of human habitation.

From the outset, Jermain thought a lot about multiple uses — *Would she need to rent the apartment someday? The whole house? How would she live there growing older?* Who knew what the future would hold, but she wanted to anticipate change as best she could in her renovating decisions. Scale, one of the features that on paper is the easiest first step to modest energy use, was now Jermain’s biggest test. Could she make an attractive home that was physically comfortable in a space small enough to put a big dent in energy use?

The most difficult dance to improve the property was the management of the building materials. Honoring the house’s age, Jermain stepped up her flea market visits

and started scouring Craigslist for things that both matched the home's patina and cost less.

Knowing what to save and what can be repurposed to great effect is an artform. Artist's source what they need to create, as Jermain says. "I retro-fitted my new home with other people's junk."



(Photograph by Carol Liscovitz)

A pedestal sink, faucets and all, from Craigslist set the tone for the bathroom in the small apartment. A gold leafed mirror found at a summertime yard sale years before was pressed into service.

Jermain began to imagine this house as the “test kitchen” for concepts that she shared with her architectural color design clients. “Don’t buy the sales pitch ‘out with the old and in with the new,’ but consider saving, editing, painting, and reusing pieces first.

Jermain would not be scrapping the window sashes. She made plans instead to repair broken panes and jamb liners, as well as replacing the worn-out triple-track storms. These improvements could be done at a fraction of the cost of replacement windows, with benefits: the wood was better and the proportions fit the house. But that busy street needed addressing.

“The ‘triple track’ storm windows are made with a design that baffles the sound from the road,” Jermaine said. “They are made by Harvey Windows and Doors for homes near airports to help mitigate sound from vibration. They really work.”

Building materials that could not be reworked into the redesign were donated to Boston Building Resources, who recycle castoff supplies directly to other eager homeowners. Jermain wanted to prevent as many useable materials as she could from becoming landfill.

Today, renovating any building older than 1978 requires managing some level of lead paint. As a colorist, Jermain has been advocating for twenty three years on how to properly remove the lead paint that endured so well under New England's difficult weather conditions. Jermain went into lead abatement hyper-drive to remove, contain and properly dispose of the aging hazardous materials. Once stripped to the bones, then insulated with care, the blank canvas of walls and floors began to receive paint and color in concert with the vision she imagined when she first toured this vacant building.



“A simple color plan that joined spaces rather than distinguished unique rooms, would keep the overall living area as large as it could be, and satisfy possible renters who come with their own taste. The bathrooms and pantry floors, therefore, became the place where I could add splashes of bold color. Painted cabinets merge with the walls

for an illusion of greater space, also diminishing the number of visual features in a room. “It’s also perfect for artwork.”

She warmed the gray natural light with yellow. She shaded hot sunny spaces with taupe.

An original fir kitchen floor, now painted deep yellow to cover the discoloring of the natural wood caused by years of cooking, radiated light. Jermain’s office and studio required white walls for work, but the second floor bedrooms and bath were made cozy and warm with light cream.

A side entrance was also planned to take advantage of an existing granite foundation, Jermain’s bonus foundation, which had once been a breezeway to a barn.

“I used it as a dock/boat storage before building on it,” Jermain says. “I painted the dinghy and rowboat bottoms there each spring — up off the grass. I miss that workspace.”

But this existing foundation allowed Jermain to add a covered doorway, storage, and sunroom, considerably increasing the size of her living space.

The renovation of the two sides of the house and the exterior took four years, Jermain's youngest son's four years of college. My plan was to have the outside (for curb-appeal) in place within two years," Jermain said. "I lived in the small apartment after finishing it first, then worked on the larger apartment. I wanted to host my son's UVM Sailing Team when they came to Boston to race, so I pushed each season to have more rooms finished that they could share. By Nate's senior year the team had three bedrooms to stay in. They could hang out and watch a movie together in the living room and eat dinner in the new kitchen. The Sailing team had experienced the whole process and cheered me on."

Jermain's ideals have all driven this renovation: "I look to nature for wisdom. Even the humble hermit crab has an eye for what works. Successful reuse depends on good design and sound materials. As an artist, I want to live harmoniously with my environment. Taking a time tested shell of a house, sited and designed to adjust to New England seasonal changes, was the best start to this renovation and life going forward."

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Heather Atwood (/stories?author=57db6633e4fcb573a5982c71)

Heather Atwood is managing editor of The Other Cape.



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