

Set in Stone by Andrea McHugh

Cape Cod Home Magazine November 2012

One doesn't have to look hard to find the footprints of Cape Cod's past scattered about. Stone walls dating as far back as the Pilgrims' first foray into the New World offer a glimpse into the one of the oldest construction methods in existence: masonry. "That's part of the reason I love it," says Brian Boley, proprietor of Sandwich-based M.B. Masonry. "It lasts forever." The survival of some of the best known architectural structures around the globe—Rome's iconic Colosseum, the Egyptian Pyramids, the Great Wall of China, and the Parthenon in Greece—can all be credited to good masonry. That longevity, attributed to meticulous craftsmanship, is what Boley so admires and looks to emulate. And some of Boley's finest stonework is on display in a recently built guest house in North Falmouth.

The nearly \$2 million project, which overlooks Rand's Canal, was built by Sea Dar Construction, a firm with offices in Boston and Osterville. Builder Peter Kimball notes that while the home was intended to merge modern luxury with creature comforts, it also needed to accommodate the large extended families of the homeowners as well as their active lifestyles, replete with

swimming and entertaining. The interior and exterior spaces also had to blend together seamlessly while offering privacy. At the same time, square footage and environmental requirements needed to be carefully considered. “All of these projects are in environmentally sensitive areas, so there are a lot of restrictions on where you can build,” says Kimball. “There are almost always either zoning or space constraints.” Each stone, brick, tile, slab of granite, and mass of marble is hand chosen, chiseled, shaved, fitted, and embedded into the structure.

Waterfront building space on the Cape is limited, with scores of new construction projects replacing dilapidated summer homes and beach shanties. “We’re not building houses on expansive lots. We’re building them where there used to be little beach houses,” adds Kimball. The zoning and environmental considerations, he explains, were the crucial components that civil engineers, architects, builders, and most other contractors took into account when designing this new structure. Architect Stephen Hart of Hart Associates in Belmont agrees, adding that the biggest challenge was fitting all of the pieces of the project—the house, the pool, the hardscaping—on a finite footprint while abiding by all the regulations.

Though a guesthouse and not the primary residence on the property, careful attention was paid to the details throughout the project. Hart says that although the single style home is about 4,000 square feet, he'd consider it a "fairly compact three bedroom house." Hart redesigned the main residence on the property just over four years ago, taking an existing domicile and giving it a "drastic renovation." It was the launching point for when the homeowners commissioned him to devise the vision for the guest home more recently. "They're supposed to look like cousins, if not sisters," he describes. By design, compact, top grade materials became—quite literally—the cornerstone of the project. Kimball says locally quarried granite from Quincy and Weymouth (with some from New York State) was chosen for all of the exterior stonework, which he and Hart sourced and Boley was tasked with crafting. Each stone, brick, tile, slab of granite, and mass of marble Boley used was hand chosen, chiseled, shaved, fitted, and embedded into the structure. Each stone took roughly 15 to 20 minutes to shape. "I try to make my work look dry-stacked, like there's no cement or mortar," Boley says. To attain that appearance, the exposed mortar is raked out about one to two inches deep. The methods in which the stones are placed are also telltale signs of good masonry. In a wall, stones smaller than the size of a fist

are a red flag, he warns: smaller pieces are generally used to fill in the gaps that shouldn't be that large in the first place. "A nice wall has the same ratio of big to small stones all the way from the bottom to the top," Boley adds. "I like Brian's approach. I feel his aesthetic is more of a period look. He's got a fresh look at things because he's young. He's eager to please, and talented," Hart says. His workmanship hasn't gone unnoticed.

"Typically, we're working on multimillion houses, and at first, I may have been apprehensive about working with someone his age. But he proved himself," concedes Trevor Kurz, president, founder of Kurzhaus Designs, Inc., which is opening a new location in South Harwich. "I like Brian's approach.

Hart agrees that on this project, Boley's almost seamless placement and ratio of large to small stones are signs of good masonry. His hand was impressive. A floor to ceiling stone hearth is the heart of the guesthouse, constructed of oversized, solid, reclaimed granite slabs from Old New England Stoneyard north of Boston. The design is reminiscent of a Colonial hearth in its "H" style construction, but it has a history all its own. "The hearth and the mantle pieces all came from an old bridge that had been taken down in Salisbury," Kimball says, referring to the Massachusetts coastal community bordering New Hampshire. Taking a cue from the interior, the pool and

adjoining stone patio fuse sleek design with utilitarian function. Built by Hyannisport's Viola and Associates, the guesthouse pool is small on space but big on design.

Carefully selected and spaced stones frame the garage's handsome wooden doors. An edge that allows the water to flow calmly into a catch basin below, the gentle hush of flowing water is both serene and soothing. Beyond its beauty, the pool features a pressure-driven mechanism to create an artificial current that the swimmers in the family use as a training challenge. While the overall effect of the eye-catching home and meticulously manicured grounds is one of stately grandeur, it is a compound that is well used by the homeowners. For the time that they are there, it feels like home.

Andrea McHugh is a freelance writer who lives in Newport, Rhode Island. For more information, go to www.mbmasonry.com