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Renovation Windswept

by Robert W. Knight, AIA

We are doing a lot of renovation work these days—well not a lot, nobody that I know is doing a lot of anything if they are residential architects. But if you have work, it's probably renovations.

Renovations interest me because I am joining something that is already happening, and may have been happening for a long time—so while there is room to insert new ideas, I should be singing along with the melody of the existing building, and it's fun to try and learn that melody.



In this sense "Windswept" is especially interesting. It's a 2000-square-foot +/- colonial revival frame house on one of the most beautiful sites I have ever seen.

The house was owned by Mary Ellen Chase and is on the National Register, not because of any overwhelming architectural merit, and not even primarily because Mary Ellen Chase lived there for many years in the summer, but because it was more or less the lead character in the book that made her famous in 1940—*Windswept*.

What do you keep, and what do you throw away? The building had no foundation, no insulation, exposed plumbing, wildly dangerous wiring, lovely but decrepit windows etc. Our clients wanted a useable house, ideally one that could be used year round, but they had no ambitions to change anything for the sake of change. Nice starting place for working on a house that is on the National Register.

When we knew that we would be replacing everything but the framing and sheathing, we realized that renovation would cost about \$75-100K more than simply replacing the building with a new copy. Our clients mulled that over for the weekend, called me on Monday and said, "Renovate, don't replace. We want to keep as much of the old place as we can." Of course when we stripped it down to the frame, we found that the house had many pasts. We found both red and green asphalt shingle remnants, we found that the walls, covered with Western red cedar shingles, had once been novelty siding (which now served as the sheathing). We found that the building had about 16 feet added on to each of its H-shaped wings around the time Chase bought it.

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Above: Site. Left: EXIST WEST. The house as we found it. Extremely simple and appealing interiors, but most, not in nearly this good shape. It was a charming, but exhausted farmhouse. Photos courtesy of Knight Associates.

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So what period do you go back to? I read *Windswept*, noting all the specific references to the house—and it is this house, the lead character in the book—that we decided would be our guide. So, although the house is now almost entirely new, I think it is somewhat more faithful to the house that you would see in your mind as you read the book, than the house we started with. **M**



Above top: Interior dining room window. Above bottom: Shingle wall base. The foundation, which really was pretty good... considering. Very well drained soil kept it from collapsing. Photos courtesy of Knight Associates.



Above top: House on cribbing. We moved it, built a foundation under where it had been, and moved it back. Project architect Richard Manzo and I felt it important that it stay exactly where it was. Now, *Windswept* is much stronger. We reinforced most of the truly daring framing (2 x 4 rafters on 30" centers). It has been on an insanely exposed site for almost 100 years and was pretty straight. Maybe we don't need that code! Above bottom: House in snow with green windows. The color change on the outside comes from the book, which talked about dark green trim, but also talked about colors to match the sea outside. We opted for a muted green, and our new shingles will soon be gray. Photos courtesy of Knight Associates.

Alpha One Announces New Access Design Specialist

Alpha One has announced the appointment of Jill Simpson, AIA, as its new Access Design Specialist. She was previously with WBRC Architects/Engineers Education Studio in Bangor where her architectural responsibilities included pre-design analysis through construction documents and construction administration on a variety of project types.

Simpson's accessibility background developed from her relationship with Pine Tree Camp for children and adults with disabilities as a counselor while in college. Currently she has been working with the camp as the lead designer for the camp's master plan and new construction project, which include a wellness center and a new dining hall scheduled to open this summer.

She is a graduate of Drury University's Hammon School of Architecture. At Alpha One Simpson plans to provide universal design information, technical assistance and assessment services for implementing barrier-free access design. She also serves as an ACE mentor at Portland High School. **M**



Jill Simpson, AIA, Alpha One Specialist. Photo courtesy of John Nunan.