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Spirit of



A 19th-century sea captain's cottage is reimagined for modern times

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River View (THIS PAGE) Accenting the view to the Mystic River, the soft Roman shades were made by Susan Spurr with a Colefax & Fowler fabric. The furniture is from the owners' collection.
Watery Welcome (OPPOSITE PAGE) A handpainted mural by artist Mark S. King, MSK Decorative Art, depicts the 19th-century clipper ship *Twilight*, which was built on the Mystic River and captained by one of the original owners of the house. Although the house was gutted in 2020, cabinetmaker Daniel Edgecomb's charming stairway was preserved. Leslie Driscoll designed the herringbone patterned floor of reclaimed southern yellow pine. See [Resources](#).

the Sea

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If you want to understand what made *Mystic Mystic*, it's not the bustling, carefully crafted, cute *olde towne* downtown. It's what's just around the corner. Take a turn off the commercial main drag, and you'll find yourself in a world apart—a tidy row of vernacular 19th-century houses. Set facing the Mystic River, these homes look to the river's east bank, where for centuries, shipyards thrived producing sloops, barges, freighters, clipper ships, steamers and every other manner of maritime rig. Nicknamed Captains Row, all-but-one of these homes were once owned by sea captains—courageous adventurers in the golden age of sail. It is only fitting that, once again, one of these dwellings is home to a captain.

This particular 1835 Greek Revival house was constructed by Daniel Denison Edgecomb (1802–1887), a cabinetmaker who is said to have built coffins in the basement. The second owners in 1847 were Captain Gurdon Gates (1814–1892) and his wife Esther. The eldest of four brothers, Gates went “before the mast” as a teenager (all three brothers followed suit and eventually also became captains). By age 23, Gates was master of the schooner *Emeline*. As time went on, the ships under his command became larger and more impressive. About the time he bought this house in the mid-1800s, he commissioned the clipper ship *Twilight* to be built within eyeshot at the Charles Mallory Shipyard across the river. The captain gained local renown for his 1866 record run around the Horn in this ship; in fact, he sailed the *Twilight* four times around the Horn to San Francisco before selling her to a merchant seafaring company in Peru. As steam replaced sail, Captain Gates adapted, until 1872, when the 1,339-ton steam packet *Victor* of the Mallory Line

Family Time (LEFT) In the family room, Leslie Driscoll designed the historically appropriate mouldings and panels, as well as the bookcase/cabinet, which houses a pop-up TV. Custom millwork and paneling is by AB Powell Woodworks. Grasscloth wallcovering from Phillip Jeffries forms the backdrop for a marine painting by Richard Loud. **Dining In** (TOP) The dining room walls are painted in Benjamin Moore's Quiet Moments with trim in Benjamin Moore's White Dove, and the antiques are from the owners' collection. See *Resources*.



Softly To Bed (THIS PAGE, LEFT TO RIGHT) Guest bedroom walls are painted in a soothing muted green—Sherwin Williams Sea Salt—the Roman shade fabric is Lee Jofa’s Wimberly Print; and the embroidery artwork above the bed was made by the client’s mother. The guest bathroom’s marble sink and frame are from RH; the tile pattern layout was designed by Leslie Driscoll; the tile is from Granite Marble & Tile Design Center. **Quiet Corner** (OPPOSITE PAGE) Continuing from the ground floor, the mural on the upper wall of the staircase depicts the tanker ship that the current owner captained in and out of San Francisco Harbor in the 1980s. See *Resources*.



was “cast away” off the east Florida coast while under his command. Terminating his maritime career, the captain returned home.

The current owners previously lived in Mystic—loved it—and planned to retire there. Nudged by the pandemic, the couple discovered the house in 2020. At the time, they were still living in Texas, where the husband, also a captain, was working as a ship’s pilot in Houston harbor, one of the narrowest and busiest ports in the world. But with its romantic history and views to the river, this house was exactly where they wanted to be.

Architect Peter J. Springsteel was brought on to shore things up. There were some surprises. Turned out the sagging floor was in danger of collapse, and there

was evidence of extensive fire damage within the walls. The interior had to be gutted. A new floor joist system installed. But here’s where things went right. While the house was heavily restored inside, the original exterior facades—with an intricate Italianate veranda installed by Captain Gates—were beautifully preserved, as required by the Mystic Historical Commission. Amazingly, there is no feeling of discrepancy between the exterior and the interior: Walking in the front door, you feel you’ve encountered a small historic gem.

This is where interior designer Leslie Driscoll’s skills for designing custom cabinetry and historic mouldings came into play. Calculating at times within fractions of an inch, she accommodated the couple’s extensive eclectic antiques collection, including an exceedingly

tall floor clock. Wide mouldings and a fresh color palette infuse the interiors with warmth and tie open living areas together.

An overarching theme to Leslie Driscoll’s work is her use of artisan and bespoke details to make each space unique to the client. Most notable here is a mural that winds up the staircase. The design ties Captain Gates’s *Twilight* with the current captain, who sailed an oil tanker in and out of the San Francisco harbor earlier in his career. Both ships are memorialized in a custom painting by Mark King, who also incorporated a key common link—San Francisco, as emblemized by the Golden Gate Bridge, positioned at the top of the stair. For our adventurous captains, in the end there’s no place like home. ✨

