



**Best Remodel:
Home and
Large Addition**
As presented by



THE NOT-SO-UGLY Duckling Home

A quiet Chatham home receives a thoughtfully phased renovation by Fitzgerald Custom Homes as they honor its original character, and are presented a BRICC Award by the Home Builders and Remodelers Association of Cape Cod, proving that the most meaningful transformations are built on trust, patience, and exceptional craftsmanship.

By Allyson Plessner

Photos by Amber Jane Barricman

THERE'S A REASON CLASSIC FABLES ENDURE ACROSS cultures and generations. These stories linger not because they promise instant change, but because they speak to something deeper: that growth takes time, transformation isn't linear, and the most beautiful outcomes don't erase the past; they honor it.

You wouldn't know it now, but when Deb and Roland Trailor first encountered their Chatham home, it wasn't love at first sight. "We called it "The Ugly Duckling,"" Deb jokes, invoking the familiar fairytale. They spent two years looking for the perfect home, in the perfect neighborhood. Like Hans Christian Andersen's *The Ugly Duckling* though, the home had something essential: character. What it needed wasn't a reinvention but rather understanding, imagination, and the right partners to help it make a transformation.

When it came time to select those partners, it was important to the Trailors to find professionals who understood their personality and goals for their new home. Working with Erik Tolley of ERT Architects, they were introduced to Tom Fitzgerald of Fitzgerald Custom Homes. "Right away, Tom and his team felt like family," agree Deb and Roland. They stuck with the same team for all three phases of their remodel: kitchen, garage, and porches. "That alone is a statement to our confidence in them," says Deb.

"We knew that we wanted to do the remodel in phases," she continues. This wasn't simply a practical decision but an intentional strategy that allowed the Trailors to experience the home's character gradually unfold. Each phase became a moment of discovery, giving them insight into what truly mattered, which features deserved preservation, and where thoughtful evolution could take place.

"Taking a phased approach also meant we had to be intentional about maintaining continuity," says Fitzgerald. One of the most delicate aspects of the renovation was striking a careful balance: modernizing the home while honoring the details that made it uniquely special. "Taking a home back to the studs can sound appealing, like a clean slate" Deb notes, "but we chose this house for its good bones."

Certain elements of the original home were non-negotiable. The peg wooden floors in the main living area, worn with decades of life and character, had to remain—but preserving them wasn't easy. When the roof above was replaced, Fitzgerald and his team had to get creative as the home was open to the elements, carefully protecting and restoring the floors so their historic charm would endure. Similarly, hand railings crafted from boat oars lead the staircase to the new "bonus room," a thoughtful nod to the home's past while seamlessly embracing its next chapter. "I get compliments on the original features we maintained all the time," Deb notes proudly.

Integrating these historic details with new design elements required both vision and craftsmanship. “My husband envisioned big windows to let in light, a large front porch with a distinctive ‘eyebrow’ detail, and a generous bonus room,” Deb explains. Every addition was carefully considered, not to overwrite the home’s story, but to contribute new chapters that felt authentic, functional, and respectful of the home’s character. The result is a home that honors its history while confidently embracing the future, where each room tells a story of balance between tradition and innovation.

That philosophy aligns seamlessly with Fitzgerald Custom Homes’ guiding principle: elevate the experience. As Tom Fitzgerald puts it, “Building a home is both an emotional and financial investment.” Their job is to guide clients through that process, to make it seamless, collaborative, and even fun. “We’re always looking at new technologies, new ways of doing things, and how to be more efficient. Codes change, materials evolve, you always have to be furthering your education,” says Fitzgerald. “I hope at the end of the day our clients say, ‘I can’t wait to do the next one.’”

Tom Fitzgerald’s formative years on the Cape were actually spent learning glassblowing. “I’ve always liked building things, getting creative, solving problems,” he says. It’s those skills—craftsmanship, patience, and comfort with unpredictability—plus a deep appreciation for Cape Cod architecture, that have

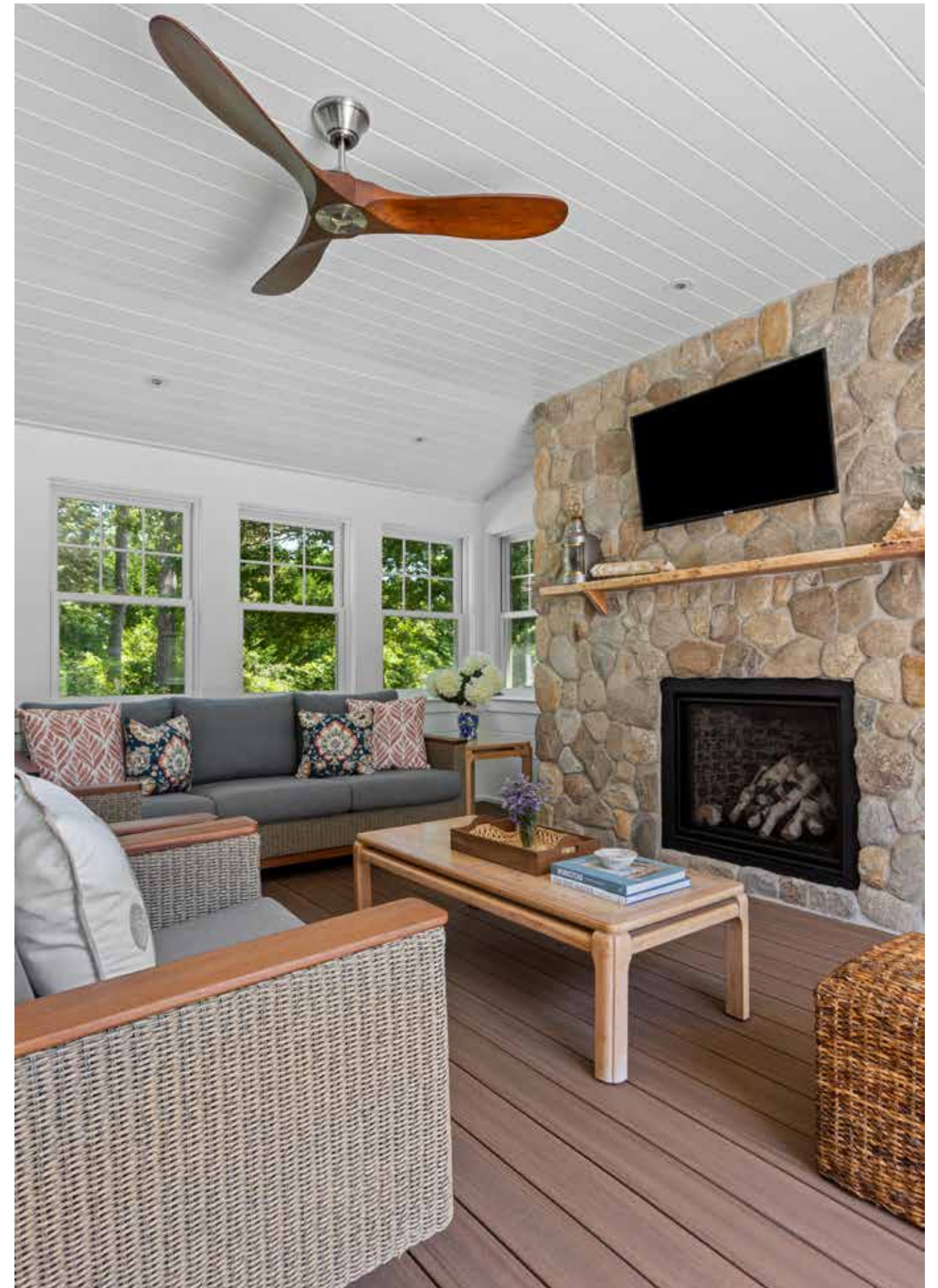
successfully carried him into his business now. After all, who better than a glassblower to understand the creativity that comes with building a home?

For this home, Fitzgerald was intimately attuned to capturing the Trailors’ personality in the design—an understanding that comes only from listening closely and building genuine trust. “It’s different,” he reflects on the project. “The vision Deb and Roland brought to the table was bold and creative, yet it also had to meet the quiet, practical demands of everyday life. They live here. They wanted the space to function but also be able to pull into their driveway and say, ‘I’m glad I’m home.’”

When asked about his favorite feature, Fitzgerald doesn’t hesitate: the farmer’s porch. “Who doesn’t love a farmer’s porch?” he laughs.

Deb’s favorite part, however, is a bit more unassuming, and she is quick to point indoors to the kitchen. Here, subtle yet transformative decisions, like rotating the island for better flow and designing a built-in microwave that blends seamlessly into the countertop, make the space intuitive and effortless. “It’s the perfect height,” she says, a small detail that speaks volumes about the care put into the design. These features, big and small, combine to create a space that feels both personal and purposeful, design meeting daily life.

Upstairs, the home reveals one of its most striking surprises: a bonus room crowned with cathedral



ceilings. Originally planned as a flat ceiling, the idea changed mid-phase.

“I laid on the floor and looked up through the rafters,” recalls Tom Fitzgerald. “I took a picture of the blue sky through and sent it to the homeowner. It was very geometric and symmetrical, and we immediately agreed: the ceiling needed to be cathedral.”

That decision required serious engineering. A turret stood in the way, demanding a creative structural solution involving a turnbuckle and close collaboration with Roland, who brought his own engineering background to the challenge. The end result was well worth it. The airiness of the cathedral style is pulled together with shiplap, giving the home that essential nautical charm—the perfect finishing touch to the remodel.



The thoughtful craftsmanship caught the eye of others in the building community as well. The home earned a Home Builders and Remodelers Association of Cape Cod BRICC Award in 2025 for “Best Remodel: Home and Large Addition.”

When asked about the award, Fitzgerald says, “It’s a team effort. There’s no one thing, between the architect and us pulling it off, submitting for the project, working with the homeowners. The actual building part is pretty straightforward. There’s a lot more that goes into building a home than swinging a hammer.”

From the start, the setting of this home mattered to the Trailors as much as the structure. Located within an association that includes a dock, pool, and tennis courts, the home offered something essential: a genuine sense of community. On Cape Cod, that sense of belonging is as much a part of the architecture as the shingles and porches. The Cape is defined by the rhythm of quiet winters, bustling summers, and familiar faces returning year after year. Committing to this home meant committing to the lifestyle that drew the Trailors to the Cape in the first place.

“When Roland first brought me here I was taken by the beauty, peacefulness, and wonderful beaches but also the bustle of summer and vibrant community,” explains Deb. Today, she and Roland enjoy sunrises from one porch and sunsets from the other. The home feels welcoming and familiar, yet full of thoughtful surprises, from the eyebrow porch detail Roland imagined to the soaring cathedral ceilings upstairs. It’s warm, traditional, but also unique, like them.

Most importantly for the Trailors, their once ugly duckling home now affords them plenty of



opportunities to retreat together and enjoy the transformation of the space. Whether it’s reading on the farmer’s porch or hosting in their modernized kitchen, there’s no shortage of spaces for them to appreciate the thoughtful changes their home has undergone. No longer an ugly duckling, the Trailor’s home is now a beloved refuge, a home base. In fact, a sign on the front now dubs the home with its new, more fitting name: The Landing Pad. 🏡

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