



The Coastal Makeover

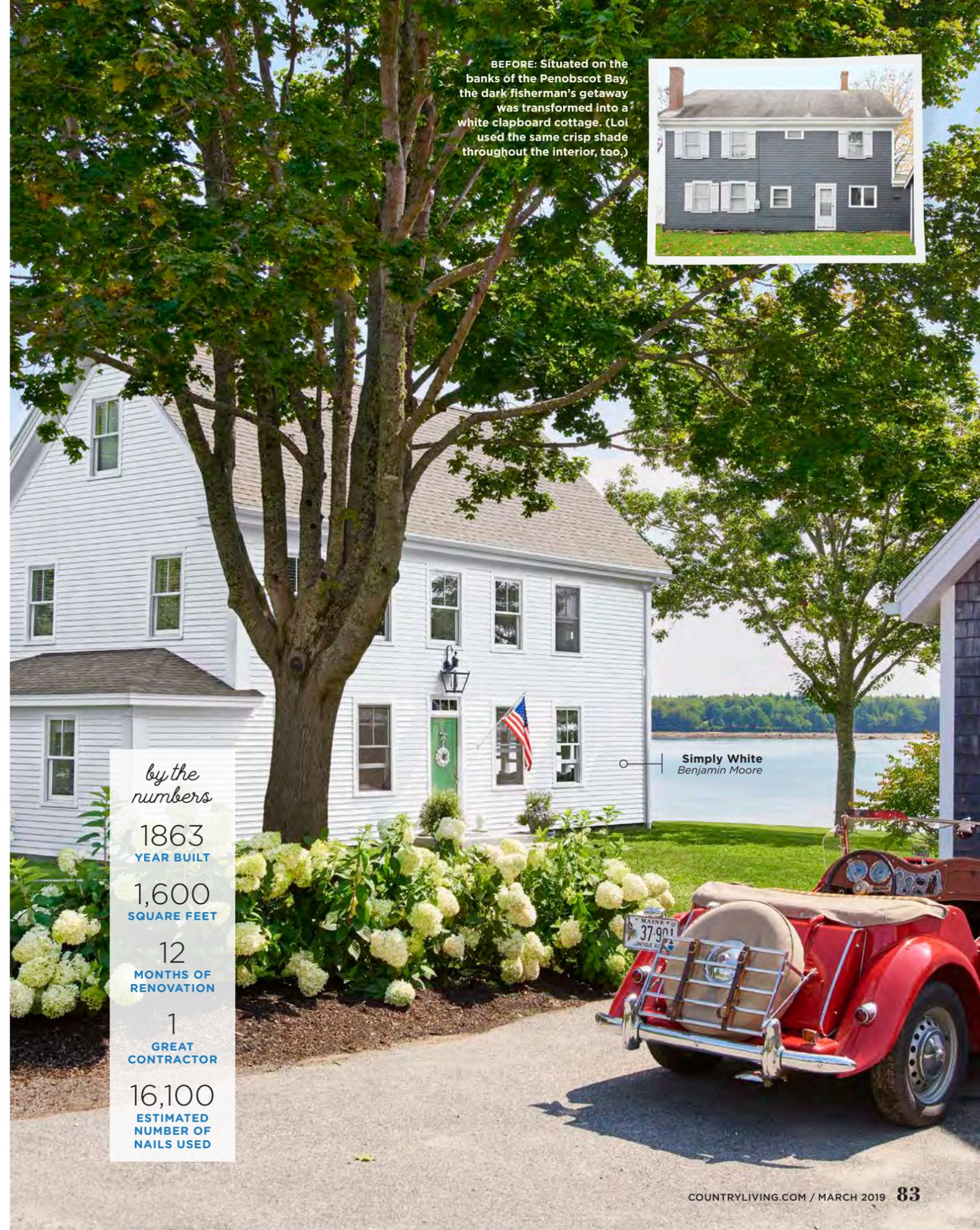
Maine Attraction

No stranger to *large-scale renovations*, designer (and former antiques dealer) Loi Thai has tackled six of his own. So, when he fell *hook, line, and sinker* for his seventh *labor of love*—an 1863 former fisherman’s cottage in seeming disrepair—the *old-house enthusiast* employed his *hard-earned know-how* and a hardy down-east sort of discipline that calls to mind the second half of an old proverb: *Teach a man to renovate*, and he’ll feast on fresh Maine lobster for a lifetime.

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BEFORE: Situated on the banks of the Penobscot Bay, the dark fisherman’s getaway was transformed into a white clapboard cottage. (Loi used the same crisp shade throughout the interior, too.)



by the numbers
1863
YEAR BUILT
1,600
SQUARE FEET
12
MONTHS OF RENOVATION
1
GREAT CONTRACTOR
16,100
ESTIMATED NUMBER OF NAILS USED

Simply White
Benjamin Moore



makeover must-have Box-Store Buys

Although Loi, who owned Maryland's Tone on Tone antiques store—a (fittingly!) tony Bethesda shop—for 15 years, appreciates antiques, he equally embraces the practicality and accessibility of mass retailer finds. Here, an old factory dolly-turned-coffee table pairs with slipcovered seating (*crate andbarrel.com*) and an indoor/outdoor wicker chair (*cb2.com*). “I believe good design is available at all price points,” says Loi, who also utilizes catalog-sourced light fixtures and economical jute rugs. (Tibetan terrier Mocha approves of the Serena & Lily dhurrie; *serenaandlily.com*.)

Five years ago, designer Loi Thai (@loithai; *tone-on-tone.com*) and partner Thom Troeschel set out to find a summer home. Their requirements were simple: a community full of charm, a climate that didn't require air-conditioning, and a location that was decidedly *not* within “weekend driving” distance of their Baltimore, Maryland, home. Says Loi, “When we go away, we want to really go away. There's no ‘Oh, we can hurry back to take care of this or that.’” Enter Castine, Maine (population 1,366, a historic seaside town (check!) with average summer highs in the 70s (check!) that's a 14.5-hour road trip from the D.C. area (check the oil while you're at it!). While the couple fell in love with Castine, their relationship with their now-home was more complicated. “It was a wreck,” Loi says of the fisherman's cottage that had served as a rental during the last few years and was, as a result, rather neglected. “Everyone in town assumed we'd knock it down.” But the old-house enthusiasts embarked on a full-scale renovation that honored the home's humble history while making it, well, livable. “We didn't want to gussy it up or make it fancy—and we didn't even add a single inch to the square footage. Now, it's just a simple restored cottage that's reflective of its maritime past,” he says. Here's how Loi breathed (salty) fresh air into the breeziest of before-and-afters.



BEFORE: In the living room, formal curtains covered uneven windows, and the walls were an unappealing aqua.



makeover must-have Ocean Views

After adding and expanding windows (most of which are outfitted with custom bamboo shades; *tone-on-tone.com*), Loi looked to man-made scenery to add color indoors. The sea-themed collection is ever-moving and ever-changing, as dynamic as its subject matter. Provenance and value mattered little. The paintings simply had to be sourced locally, from go-to spots including Pumpkin Patch Antiques, Ronald Harte Antiques, Searsport Antique Mall, Antiques in the Inn, and The York Antiques Gallery.

“We didn't want to gussy up the house or make it fancy...It's just a simple restored cottage that's reflective of its maritime past.”

-LOI THAI



BEFORE: The dining room's original floors were neither level nor in good shape, so they had to be replaced—along with all the windows. But the fireplace only required a coat of white paint.

makeover must-have
Scaled-Down Furniture

Much of today's larger-scale furniture is designed for open-concept layouts and, as a result, can overpower the cozier, more compact rooms you typically find in historic homes. In the dining room, Loi kept scale top of mind, remaining wary of towering backrests and heavy silhouettes, and instead embraced seating with clean lines. A small pine cabinet finds new purpose as a bar; a 19th-century whale weather vane is a nod to the water.

makeover must-have
Air. Lots of It.

You've likely seen sponge-ware grace plenty a page in this magazine, but rarely in this "coastal minimalist" context. After replacing dated upper cabinets with clean-lined shelving, Loi filled the ledges with his 1800s assortment of pottery, which he calls the "Tupperware of the early-American household." When neatly organized (or strategically staggered) in an open, airy setting (read: lots of white space), the humble grouping takes on a modern feel.



makeover must-have
Yankee Practicality

Pinterest-worthy inspiration is fine and good, but a kitchen's true appeal comes down to functionality. Plan—and spend—accordingly. "We didn't need a big, elaborate kitchen, because we don't do big, elaborate meals," says Loi. The couple kept the room's footprint intact while trading the 1960s elements—dark wood, laminate countertops, mismatched appliances—for white shiplap walls, light gray cabinets, satin nickel hardware (*restorationhardware.com*), and a classic apron sink (*rohlhome.com*).



makeover must-have
Natural Hues

When it came time to choose the home's palette, Loi looked to the more obvious blues and greens, as well as moody, misty grays. "Mornings are foggy here, so the grays remind me of the fog rolling in," he says. The color can be seen on painted floors (in Behr Porch and Floor Paint's Pebbled Path), as well as on furniture both antique and new, including the guest room's Jenny Lind bed (crateandbarrel.com). A map of Maine—one of many in Loi's collection—adorns the wall.



makeover must-have
A Thoughtful Mix

While there's nothing that initially screams "vacation" about an antique secretary, Loi knew the Swedish piece would be perfect in the master bedroom. "I love the whitewashed, driftwood-y look, and the architecture reminds me of the house," he says. He paired it with an indoor/outdoor wicker chair (cb2.com). An antique English footbath is now filled with shells. Says Loi, "I like finding new uses for old things. I consider it my form of recycling."



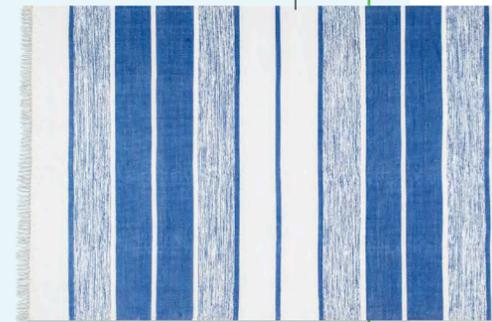
BEFORE: The upstairs bedrooms were home to dated floral wallpaper and crooked windows. The original wood floors were so bowed that support posts had to be installed to straighten them out.

"Find a Contractor with an Old Soul..."

...and more bits of wisdom *Loi Thai* soaked up during his seaside renovation



"A wishbone chair adds texture without taking up a lot of space."



For small-scale furniture, look to midcentury pieces.

Our living and dining is all in one space, so I didn't want heavy furniture with towering backrests. (3) **Weave Chair** \$150; polyandbark.com



Blue and white is always right. I love a good statement rug in that color combo, but it has to hold up to everything from foot traffic and pets to the spills and accidents of everyday life. I also like nautical decor that ties to the water. (4) **"Lakewood Awning" Stripes Tassel Rug** \$79 for 4' x 6'; rugsusa.com (6) **White Whale Hooked Pillow** \$45; lbean.com



Long live the "whatnot." Popular in 19th-century England, the shelf style is a nice option for displaying objects, especially when space is at a premium. (5) **Bamboo Wall Shelf** \$50; wayfair.com

Suit up for saltwater. Coastal elements can be harsh, so people tend to paint one side of their house annually instead of taking on the whole project every few years. (See page 83 for Loi's exterior paint pick.)

"My collections really vary. I have rocks and shells from the nearby beach, books about Maine and by Maine authors, as well as pottery, landscapes, and hand-carved decoys."



Old-soul contractors are the best sort. Ours, Stan Leach, is a lifelong Mainer with a true appreciation for the challenges that come with an old house. You want someone who gets the desire to preserve the quirks, flaws, and character.

Staying focused equals staying on budget. Don't second-guess that scone (or paint color, or countertop material...). If you keep changing your mind, costs go up and the project gets delayed. (1) **Grandview Single Sconce** \$304; rejuvenation.com

Beware the attic of a 100-year-old house! Our home wasn't winterized—it was a "three-season" cottage, heated only by fireplaces. We found a lot of dead animals (even animal skeletons) in ours!

The door sets the tone. The house is intentionally casual, and the simple front door establishes a similarly unfussy approach. I almost used a blue paint, but I thought green was more unexpected and so fresh and warm. (2) **Willow MV4 by Fine Paints of Europe**; finepaints.ofeurope.com



"I love my mochaware—it's so nautical in form and coloration. It looks very seaside."

ILLUSTRATION BY MELINDA JOSIE.