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Rooted in

Syde-by-Syde

Modeled after the well-known Kraggsyde estate, Rocksyste is both a nod to its cousin and a place all its own.



History

*Albert, Richter & Tittmann
Architects, Inc., creates a
Shingle-style home based on
iconic forms of the past.*

BY MARY GRAUERHOLZ
PHOTOGRAPHS BY ROBERT BENSON



Rocksyde, perched on a rocky cove on Cape Ann, possesses a distinct grandeur—not because of its size, but its intimate relationship with nature. At 5,000 square feet, the Shingle-style home is just one-fifth the size of some of the houses built in this very American architectural mode. But beauty is more glorious than size, as Rocksyde attests; this home achieves its powerful profile through creative lines that embrace the sun, air, ocean, and space, all of it wrapped in an aura of American history.

Rocksyde's identity is rooted in Shingle style's iconic connection with seaside New England. Gazing at its exterior, a foundation of native sap rock—rusty-red streaked granite—seems to spill into an outcrop toward the sea. South-side windows carry in sunlight and ocean-tinged air. Dark green trim and, of course, the eponymous cedar shingles carry the same spirit.

As many markers of shingle style that Rocksyde has, its relatively small size separates it from the original era, when late-1800s Boston industrialists celebrated their wealth by building larger-than-life shingle-style summer homes in places such as the North Shore and Newport. Keeping Rocksyde contained was all part of a larger plan, says the project's leader, John Tittmann, principal of Albert, Righter & Tittmann Architects, Inc., in Boston.

"The house is not bigger than it needs to be," Tittmann says. "Some people might say it's too small, but the family was not bound by convention of size." More important to the owners of the year-round home, Tittmann says, was establishing a connection to the natural setting and a historical context. Next door to Rocksyde is the site of perhaps the most famous shingle-style home ever built, Kraggyde. Designed by Peabody & Stearns, Kraggyde was razed in 1929 (though there is a replica of it in Maine).

"Rocksyde's owners are very interested in architectural history," Tittmann says. The family, with longtime roots in the area, "loved the idea of the house





Seaside Shingle

The house appears to organically grow from its rocky coastal spot.

speaking to the history of the place.”

Rocksyde has a festive, happy spirit, with rooms flowing naturally one into the next. Its orientation, east to west, means the broad side of the home faces south, allowing for maximum solar warmth in the cooler months. As Tittmann says, “This is important for a house in New England.” Rocksyde’s orientation means the house runs perpendicular to the view, contrary to what many architects would do. Tittmann sees it differently. “It’s more important to get some good sun in every room, saving the spectacular view for the living room,” he says. “You walk through these sunlit rooms and get a reward, this beautiful view.”

Rocksyde was a close collaborative effort with the owners, an active family that includes two teenage children, who

love to be outdoors, kayaking in the cove and having summer meals on the patio. “Rocksyde [tries] to look at the way a modern family lives and lets the house be shaped [accordingly],” Tittmann says. “It’s very informal living in a way. In most grand houses, you don’t have the kitchen right between the living room and dining room.” It’s not to say that Rocksyde is

an everyday sort of home. Architectural details draw the eye, beginning with a beautiful drum ceiling in the front foyer.

The drum ceiling, just beyond the entry’s mahogany door, crowns a round foyer with a striking black and white checkerboard marble floor. The ceiling has seven arches or “fins”—think spokes of a wheel—that connect to the other

first floor rooms. A mudroom, powder room, and coat closet are tucked out of sight, allowing the house to be formal when it needs to be. The number seven is purposeful—Tittmann wanted asymmetry. The space, he says, “is not meant to be static; it’s meant to flow through. It’s purposefully asymmetrical.”

The living room, with a spacious



GRAND ESTATE

Originally located on Manchester-by-the-Sea’s Smith Point, Kragtsyde was designed by the prominent architectural firm Peabody & Stearns in 1882 for wealthy Bostonian George Nixon Black, Jr. The house is an example of the Shingle style, a popular American architectural style influenced by Great Britain’s Arts & Crafts Movement established by English designer William Morris as well as the resurgence of interest in Colonial Revival architecture sparked by the 1876 Centennial World’s Fair. Architectural historian Vincent Scully described the house as “[Peabody & Stearns] one great masterpiece of the early 1880s. Peabody & Stearns, to my knowledge,

never created a house of such quality.” The rambling organic shingle-clad house with Richardsonian arch pushed the limits of design for the firm. (They went back to designing Colonial Revival houses in New England.) Frederick Law Olmsted designed the property’s grounds.

The Nixon Black family spent May to October in the seaside getaway until George’s death. The house was demolished in 1929 (one year after Nixon Black’s death) by the Pierpont Stackpole family after they purchased the property. On Kragtsyde’s foundation, they built a stucco house, which was razed in the 1950s.



Black and White
The round foyer
boasts a drum ceiling
and checkerboard
marble floor.



Key Steps
Resembling a piano, the dramatic staircase is a prominent design element.

window that wraps around a corner, also reflects an eccentric symmetry. Off the living room is a reading nook and a triangular balcony; in the nearby westernmost wing is a study and a guest suite, also built on an angle, which opens the space. "There are many traditional elements, but they're deployed very unconventionally," the architect says. "There's a lot of dynamic movement but it's subtle."

Everywhere are pockets of architectural details that seem more like art. The dining room shines with light floating through the dramatic staircase, constructed in black and white boxes that seem to float in air, animating the space. A frieze near the ceiling intersects with the colonnettes that screen the staircase from the dining room. "It was important for the staircase to be a feature," Titt-

mann says. "We didn't want to isolate the two floors; the staircase had to be an important element, so you're drawn down and drawn up."

At the top of the stairs are the family bedrooms, including a master suite to the east, on the water side, and the children's bedrooms nearby. The basement level is one large finished room—identified on the exterior by the large masonry arch.





Built into a bank with a very steep grade sloping north, the house allows for some spectacular ocean views, culminating on the home's east side. From the north-side kitchen—two floors above-ground level—leafy sweeps of green treetops and cove views beyond are visible. The site's topography and grade, while lending dramatic beauty, had its challenges. "It was a very tricky site," Tittmann says. The architect, along with his colleagues, including builder Carl Anderson of Manchester and landscape architect Richard Burck of Richard Burck Associates, Inc., in Somerville, worked in concert with the family and the site itself to create the family's dream home.

"It seems like a very natural expression of how to live in that part of the world," Tittmann muses about the house. "Connected to the earth, ocean, and history—through stone, sun, and cultural aspects—like the echo of Kragssyde." 



High Design
The architectural elements throughout the house are impeccable. Truly the work of masters.

