



Where the Art Is

How an earth-sheltered house was transformed into a light-filled showcase for Maine artists

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by Candace Karu
Photography Darren Setlow

When she first saw the house and surrounding property, Caron Zand fell in love. “I thought it was a little piece of the Garden of Eden,” she recalls. Tucked into the side of a hill overlooking Spurwink Marsh and the distant ocean in Cape Elizabeth beyond, the wood-and-concrete building was unlike anything she had ever seen. In addition to a breathtaking view, the grounds were home to deer and foxes, snowy egrets and woodpeckers. Zand first took her husband, Don Head, to see the earth-sheltered structure and surrounding eight acres in 1994. The house, built in the early 1980s, was designed for maximum energy efficiency, incorporating a south-facing orientation, extensive use of glass and brick to capture solar energy, and a roof made entirely of sod. When it was built, the unusual home attracted national media attention, including articles in *Outside* magazine and *Better Homes and Gardens Building Ideas*. The original architect, Don Metz, specialized in the Natural House, a type of energy-conscious construction that utilizes native materials and minimal applied decoration. Zand was attracted less to the utilitarian exterior than the gracefully practical floor plan and spectacular views.

Head was less enchanted. For several years, he had grown happily accustomed to condominium living, reveling in the extra leisure time it afforded him. “I knew that the maintenance involved in this property would take up most of our free time,” he explains. “And I just wasn’t ready for that.” Despite his reservations, the couple put their condominium on the market and kept their options open, looking at properties from Scarborough to Falmouth. The following spring, with a contract

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pending on their condo, Head and Zand revisited the house on the marsh, and Zand eventually convinced her husband it was the right choice for them.

That same year, the couple, who had been recently married, began collecting art by living Maine artists. Zand was working as the director of public relations at Casco Northern Bank, where she managed their extensive collection of contemporary Maine art. In that capacity, she forged relationships with gallery owners and artists around the state. Her research and curatorial decisions informed the artistic selections that she and her husband made. “I really enjoyed the idea that I could collect works by artists I knew or could meet,” says Head, who is originally from West Virginia. “It was amazing to me, with my hillbilly background, that I could be an art collector without any real education in art.” Zand, who studied in art history in college, praises her husband as an incredibly quick learner with a sophisticated eye. “Traveling in Europe, he studied the masters and then learned to take this knowledge and apply it to

the study of local artists,” she remembers.

Their collection grew organically. Zand, who has been on the board of trustees at the Maine College of Art for four years, has helped organize the school’s annual art auction as a trustee and a former staff member, a dual role that gave her access to the work of both students and established artists. Head, president of Head and Associates, an investment firm in downtown Portland, found himself scouring in-town galleries during his lunch hour. Over the years, he has developed close relationships with gallery owners and artists. Peggy Golden, owner of Greenhut Galleries in Portland, says of her client and friend: “Don takes the time to study and learn. He always makes a point to meet the artists he is interested in. He is very clear about what he likes and dislikes, and he enjoys the process of learning, which is how he has developed as a collector in a relatively short period of time.”

Zand and Head lived in their house for several years before contemplating a renovation. Though the home’s original energy-



The expansive marsh views compete with the couple's extensive art collection for a visitor's attention. "When I saw this painting it spoke to me about food and eating. The colors just made me happy," says Zand of the still life by Heidi Prior Gerquest titled *Gourds with Yellow Urn*, which hangs above the sideboard (opening page). The antique silver service is a family heirloom.

The rich greens of the Shaker-style kitchen cabinets and the granite countertops are a perfect background for Cathy Schroder's ceramics "Cream & Sugar" and "Big Red Bowl" (opposite). The Heidi Prior Gerquest oil is titled *Gourds, Artichokes, and Parsnips*. Zand and Head have developed a friendship with artist Connie Hayes, whose three views of Vinalhaven are displayed over the mantle of the dining room fireplace. Zand's father found the small ivory horses below the paintings in Manilla in the early 1960s. The vase on the top shelf of the niche is by glass artist Ernest Paterno; the two bottom vases are by Portland glassblower Ben Coombs.



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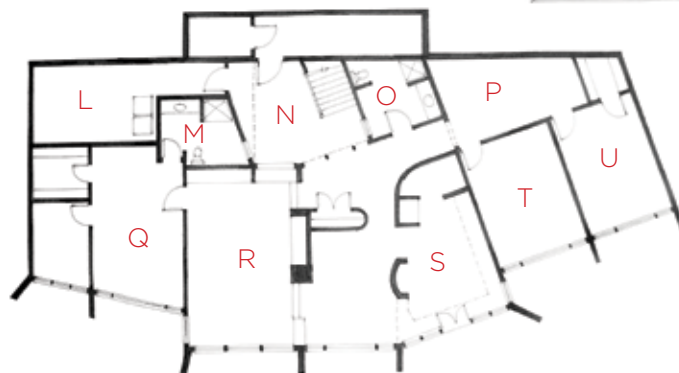
Portland artist Laura Fuller has worked extensively with Zand and Head to create custom-designed stained glass pieces throughout the home (below). The light captured by the southern exposure highlights the beauty of the found glass objects Fuller uses in her work. A small marble sculpture of a polar bear by Norm Rosenbaum sits on the wrought iron coffee table.

The light-filled atrium landing is the perfect place to display some of the couple's favorite pieces (right). From left to right are Stephen Etnier's oil painting titled *Winnegance Bay*, John Bisbee's welded spike sculpture, which was won after furious bidding at a Maine College of Art auction, and a Thomas Connolly oil titled *Bug Light*.

An indoor courtyard filled with lush greenery anchors the atrium (opposite). The Karen Gelardi ink-on-paper piece that hangs there is another Maine College of Art acquisition. The metal bistro table and chairs make this a perfect place for morning coffee.



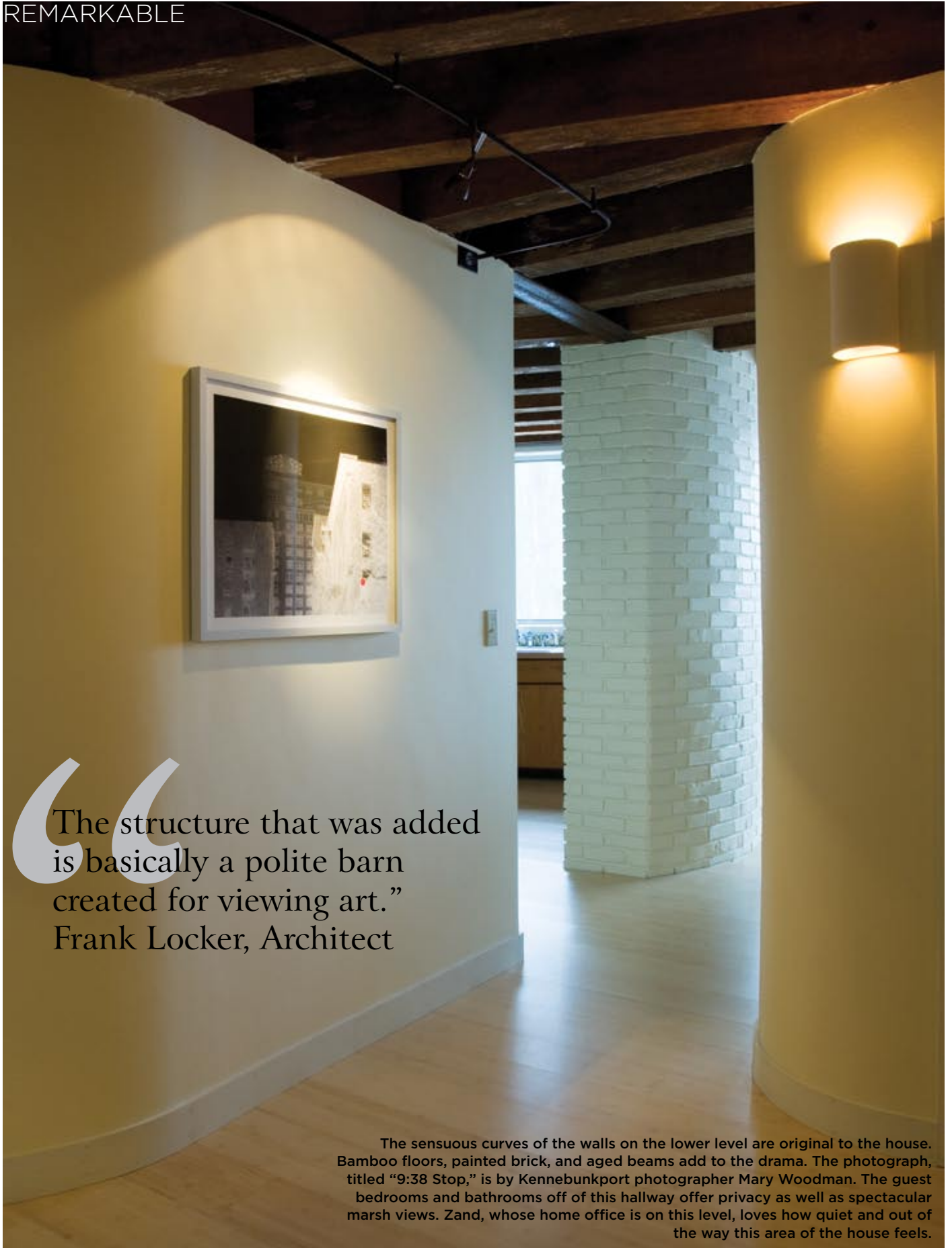
LOWER LEVEL





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- A Garage
- B Mudroom
- C Bath
- D Entry
- E Sunset Room
- F Open to Atrium
- G Bath
- H Kitchen
- I Dining Room
- J Living Room
- K Master Bedroom
- L Laundry
- M Bath
- N Atrium
- O Bath
- P Library
- Q Bedroom
- R Family Room
- S Exercise Room
- T Bedroom
- U Bedroom



“The structure that was added is basically a polite barn created for viewing art.”
Frank Locker, Architect

The sensuous curves of the walls on the lower level are original to the house. Bamboo floors, painted brick, and aged beams add to the drama. The photograph, titled “9:38 Stop,” is by Kennebunkport photographer Mary Woodman. The guest bedrooms and bathrooms off of this hallway offer privacy as well as spectacular marsh views. Zand, whose home office is on this level, loves how quiet and out of the way this area of the house feels.



Zand and Head have formed a close friendship with artists Holly Ready and Anne Ireland. The Ready gouache (top left), titled *Summer Marsh, Spurwink River*, is a scene that could have been painted from the couple's backyard. The painting below it, by Yarmouth artist Ireland, is titled *Mill Cove, Red*. The third painting (on the right) is by Joel Babb, titled *Middle Street*. Zand's family collected the Middle Eastern antiquities displayed in the glass cases.

saving concept was sound, significant structural problems had developed over the years. Moreover, their art collection and their social lives were fast outgrowing the existing space. The couple, both of whom are involved in a number of Maine-based arts and civic organizations, wanted a place where they could not only entertain family and friends, but could also host larger social gatherings. In addition to her work with the Maine College of Art, Zand is a past president and current board member of the Boys and Girls Clubs, while Head serves as president of the board for the Portland Opera Repertory Theater.

The couple consulted their good friend, architect and educator Frank Locker, who agreed to re-imagine the house as

a haven for art, entertaining, and gracious living. Locker, who works primarily as an educational planner, no longer practices architecture. Still, he was intrigued by the unusual opportunity to work with his friends and transform an ailing but functional space into a much larger two-level home. "I felt like I was taking an odd duck and turning it into something very natural," says Locker. "The structure that was added is basically a polite barn created for viewing art."

With its soaring three-story atrium, the new entry-level addition includes an open floor plan with a living room, dining room, kitchen, sunroom, and master-bedroom suite. The atrium, topped by massive skylights, unifies the old and

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new. “It would have been easy to make the existing lower level feel like it was second class,” says Locker. “Not only is the stairway an indicator of privacy, it made the transition from the new space inviting, instead of feeling pit-like.” A charming indoor garden area anchors the atrium and the sweeping staircase, adding warmth and color to a space whose sheer volume might otherwise have felt overwhelming.

Choosing a builder for the project proved easier than Zand and Head had anticipated. As they were completing their plans for the addition, they met Craig Cooper of Rainbow Construction through mutual friends. Not only did they admire his work, but Cooper had the advantage of having worked on the original structure, which meant he knew the house’s most intimate secrets. “The most challenging aspect of this job was that Caron and Don lived in the house during the renovation,” recalls Cooper. This minor inconvenience was quickly overshadowed by the thrill of collaboration. “The job was a combined effort,” he says. “We made a really good team.”

The result is a welcoming, light-filled home with extraordinary vistas both inside and out. Views of the estuary and surrounding marsh, which are part of the Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge, change with the weather and the seasons. The south-facing exposure allows sunlight to flood the house throughout the day, illuminating an art collection that is a visual banquet of established and emerging Maine artists. “It is very exciting for us to live with the art and to have the artists come here to see their work displayed in this environment,” says Zand. “In the end, our relationships with the artists are as important to us as the collection.” 