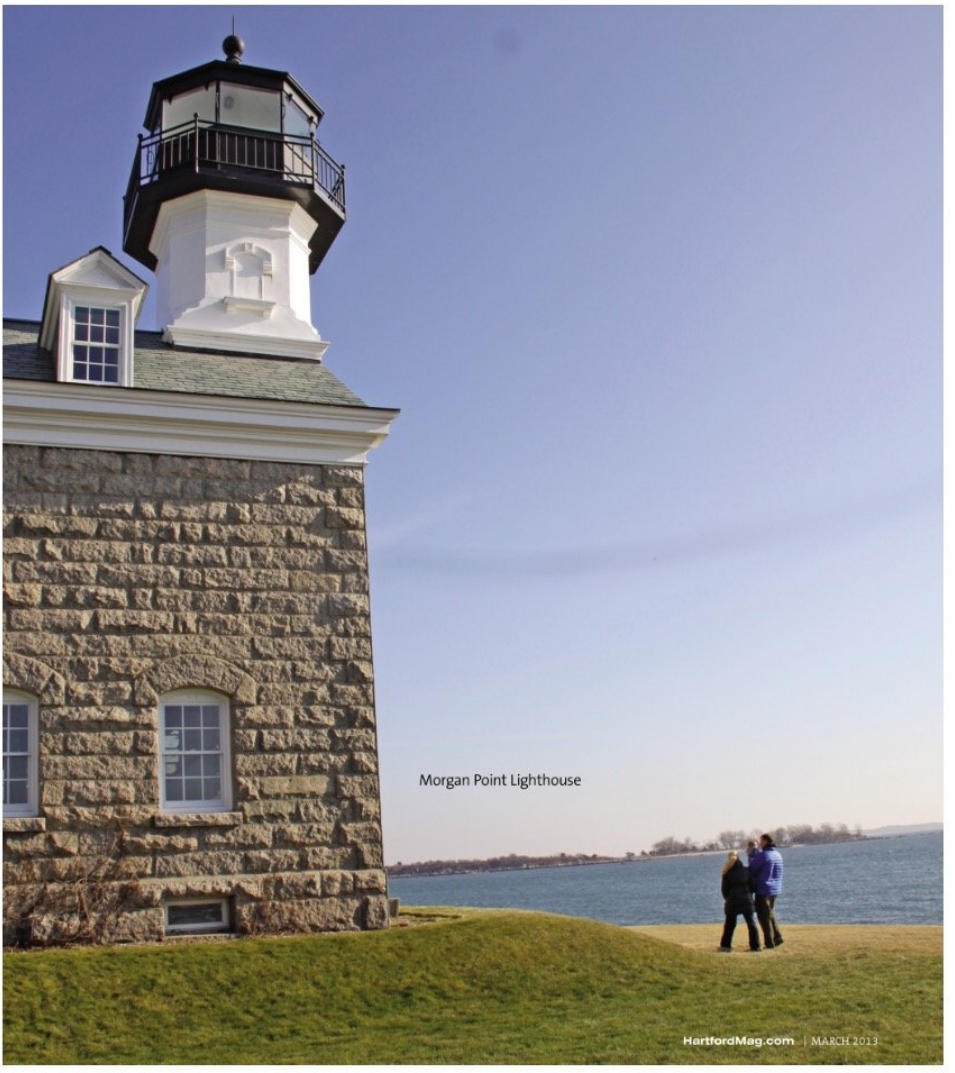
MORGAN POINT

By Sarah Cody (by-author-23-1.html)



A historic lighthouse in Noank becomes a one-of-a-kind second home.



In the cold months, the Morgan Point Lighthouse in Noank is wonderfully quiet, with panoramic views of the Mystic River and Fishers Island, free of boat traffic and summer crowds. "The wintertime is really a time for reflection and solitude up here. It's nice to have it as your own," says Debbie O'Malley, gazing out from her parents' incredibly unique getaway: a historic beacon turned summer home that has become a beloved family retreat. She and her husband, Manhattan radio personality Ian O'Malley, steal up to this amazing property for weekends year-round from their home in Fairfield County for bonding time with their baby son, Beckett, and to relax and re-charge. "You immediately start to decompress," says Ian, recalling meals of comfort food by a roaring fire in a quaint, friendly village filled with old coastal charm. Spring is on the horizon, and the family is gearing up, once again, to experience the warm weather activity of Long Island Sound from their one-of-

a-kind home.







Their love affair with this lighthouse wouldn't have been possible without the vision of Debbie's dad, Jason Pilalas, who recently retired from his position as partner in a California investment firm. A little more than 20 years ago, he was visiting friends in Newport when he noticed a tiny "for-sale" ad in the *Wall Street Journal*. The Morgan Point Lighthouse was on the market. He was immediately struck by the resemblance it bore to a beacon he loved as a child, when he would row his little boat around in the Sound. "I had harbored the dream for 40 years of living in the lighthouse on Captain's Island off Greenwich, knowing I never could," says Jason. "When I found its exact twin, we were going to own it, that's all there was to it."

But decades of being battered by nor'easters had taken its toll, and the lighthouse was in complete disrepair, with crumbling plaster, a leaky roof and moisture in the floorboards. "The wood was just rotted and it smelled very musty," says Jason's wife, Rena, who was completely overwhelmed by the thought of restoring the mold- and cobweb-filled relic. But Jason, who missed the charm of New England, saw the possibilities and convinced his wife, his college sweetheart, that they were up to the task. He remembers the conversation with a chuckle: "She said, 'Well, if the old fool thinks this is a good idea, I'll give him another chance.'" The lighthouse was built in 1868 to replace an older structure that helped guide boaters into a harbor filled with treacherous rocks. It was nearly identical to several other lighthouses built in the area around the same time, including beacons in Norwalk, Block Island and, of course, Greenwich. Jason hired a father-son team, an architect and builder, who specialized in restoring Lutheran churches. They went to work on the original two-story, eight-room structure, knocking down every wall and gutting the interior down to the granite facade. Where possible, they saved the original flooring and aimed to "preserve and improve" the exterior by bringing it back to its full glory. They also designed a new cedar-shingled "back house" attached to the original structure.

While the extension is filled with modern amenities, the Pilalases were adamant that it retain the feel of the lighthouse. "Everyone has commented that the new addition fits so well with the old part of the lighthouse," says Rena. "It matches," agrees Ian, noting that the best view of the home is from the water. "There's nothing jarring about it." The area sports a sunny great room, the family's center of activity, with French doors and a unique cathedral ceiling designed to resemble an upside-down ship. With the extension, the home now has five bedrooms, three bathrooms and a unique "crow's nest" office.