Tour a Charming 19th-Century Lighthouse on an Island in Maine

AD100 designer William Sofield and furniture maven Dennis Anderson have embraced the challenges of decorating the remote home

By Mayer Rus

Photography by William Abranowicz

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William Sofield is the designer equivalent of those extreme-sports adrenaline junkies who fly off mountain cliffs wearing nothing but a wingsuit, danger be damned. Over the past three decades, the AD100 Hall of Fame talent—whose client list includes titans of taste on the order of Tom Ford and Helen and Brice Marden—has happily embarked on his own perilous adventures, renovating a series of white elephants that mere mortals would not dare to touch. First there was the rehabilitation of Balcastle, an eccentric early-20th-century brick-and-limestone house with a crenellated tower improbably rising above a street of humble shingled cottages in the town of Southampton, New York. "It was a benign eyesore—Medieval Times meets South Fork swank," Sofield says of the challenging property. Then came the precarious Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford love nest in Los Angeles's Laurel Canyon ("It slid down the hill during an El Niño"), followed by an essentially windowless, ground-floor apartment that once operated as a porno theater in Manhattan's East Village. Since 2004, the designer and his longtime partner, home-furnishings guru Dennis Anderson, have been tackling the restoration of an International Style behemoth designed by Edward Durell Stone and Donald Deskey in Westchester County, New York. "We're hoping to have it finished for my memorial service," Sofield jokes of the never-ending project.




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coast of Winter Harbor, Maine, roughly two miles out to sea. In 1933, the picturesque lighthouse was officially decommissioned, and the property converted to a private residence. "I saw a real estate listing in *The New York Times* and immediately thought of that song "I Want to Marry a Lighthouse Keeper" from *A Clockwork Orange*. Bill and I put in an offer the next day," Anderson recalls. "We sent a friend from Maine to check it out, but we never actually saw the place until the day before the closing. It was a bit of a gulp when we got there, as in 'What have we done?'" adds Sofield.



The 1930s Magic Chef range was one of the homeowners' additions.

Gulp, indeed. There was no running water or electricity. The original cast-iron stove in the kitchen provided the only source of heat. And practically every piece of furniture, every plate, lamp, book, and tchotchke that had arrived on the island since the 1860s—

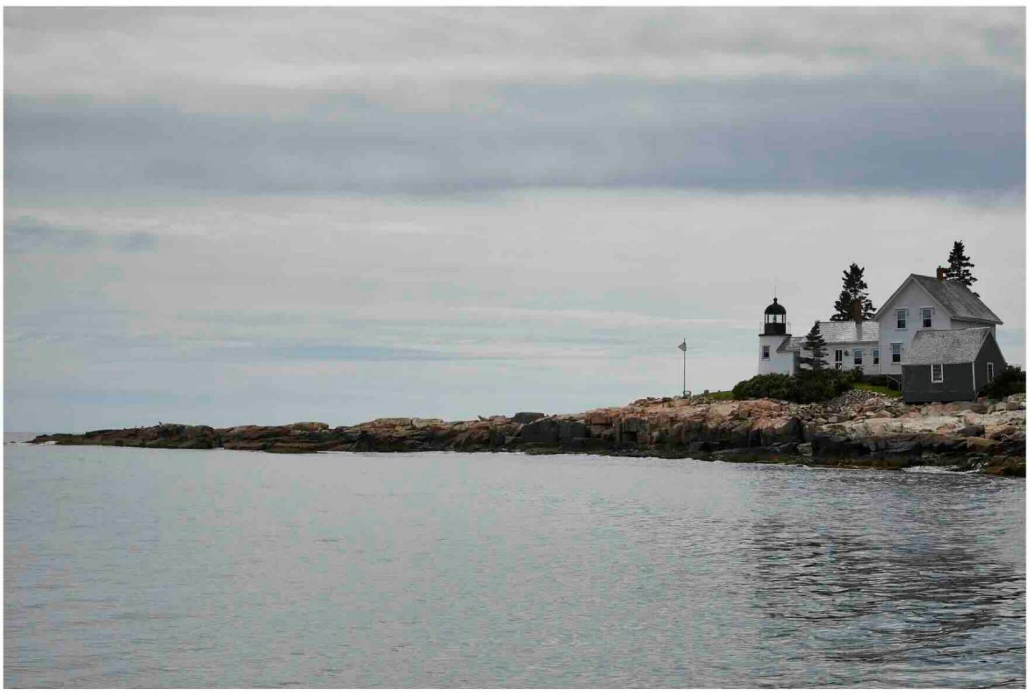
including items belonging to author Bernice Richmond, the home's second private owner—was still on-site. "We lived like survivalists for a while, using candles and kerosene lamps for light and flushing the toilets with buckets of seawater. We finally caved and bought a propane refrigerator, and we eventually installed solar panels on the boathouse for power—real jet-set stuff," the designer explains. Of course, there was a flip side. "It is the most exceptional, charming place on earth," Sofield insists, rhapsodizing about the island's craggy topography and remoteness, its strange energy—something to do with the rock formations, he posits— and its ravishing views.

Outfitting the house was less an exercise in classic decorating (i.e., wish fulfillment) than habituation. "We live in the house the way we found it. There was never a discussion about style. You don't get rid of things on an island like this so easily, and it's difficult to bring anything in. The house is what it is, and we love it that way," Anderson says of the ad hoc interior design.





homeowners are perhaps not a salty sea captain or stolid Down-Easter. There's the antique Chinese wedding bed of cinnabar lacquer in the music room, the Paul Poiret bench tucked discreetly beneath a window, the A.H. Davenport Aesthetic Movement daybed with amethyst orbs, and the massive Louise Nevelson wall sculpture parked in the summer kitchen. Some of the fetching additions to the home were imported from Bedford House, Anderson's home-furnishings emporium in Katonah, New York.



But all that finery notwithstanding, the house remains what it has always been—a rugged coastal redoubt brimming with New England vigor. "It's the kind of space you couldn't control even if you wanted to," Sofield says of his formidable island hideaway. "I'm always striving for perfection for my clients, so living here is the most liberating experience you can imagine."

This tour of William Sofield and Dennis Anderson's Maine home appears in AD*'s Star Power issue. Never miss an issue when you subscribe to* AD.