



Ambling Home, Seamless Change  
As featured in *The Day*, Real-Estate Section, January 22, 1999

***Stonington construction firm wins prize for remodeling seasonal home***

JOHN DECIANTIS HASN'T ENTETERED a lot of building industry contests in his 25 years in the construction business. So, when the Connecticut Home Builders Association judges came out to look at the 3,700-square-foot house on Wamphassuc Point in Stonington he remodeled last year, they had words of advice: He'd entered the wrong category. Instead of contesting in the bathroom-remodeling category, they urged that he enter for Best Residential Remodeling under \$250,000.

And, when he did, he won.

What swayed the judges, he thinks, is the view of the rambling structure from the other side of the water. There, on the opposite bank of Stonington Harbor; the judges could see the seamless way the new part of the home blends with the old, which goes back to at least the 1850s and was once part of the old Noyes Farm. The old section is the one made new again.

"We had a good set of plans," says DeCiantis, owner of DeCiantis Construction in Stonington, pointing to the architectural renderings of Ken Pilon, a principal in the firm of Moser, Pilon and Nelson in Wethersfield. "We take the concept and keep in mind the intent of the room down to who sleeps on what side of the bed. We keep in contact with the architect and owner via telephone . . . I met with the owners every couple weeks."

As a small construction company that specializes in unique detailing work, DeCiantis prides himself on his relationship with clients. "Eighty percent of our work is with existing clients and referrals," he says. "You give them what they ask for and you don't charge them more than what you say you're going to."

Still, he says this six-month project went 30 percent over budget as the owners kept discovering different touches they wanted to add, including moving the bathroom, extra exterior work and converting a room downstairs into a formal dining area, complete with a new mantle for the fireplace, a new mantle surround and extensive plastering work.

"They knew what they wanted, and they knew they weren't looking for a bargain," DeCiantis says. In fact, he says the owners told him his initial estimate was twice as high as anyone else's. Quality was uppermost in the owners' minds, they say.

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Indeed, quality can be seen in the choice of the white, 6-foot-long Kohler “Vintage” tub with Kohler “Georges Brass” faucets, the granite in the tops of the tub shelf and the dressing table and the non-skid tumbled marble floor tile.

“He wanted the look of European cathedrals,” DeCiantis says, referring to owner Dr Roy Beebe, who with wife Arlene uses the home in the summer and as a weekend retreat. “The tub weighs about 600 pounds, so we left a hole in the wall and had a crane lift it up.”

Beaded wainscoting, topped by a custom chair rail, put the finishing touches on the bathroom interior, while Runtal radiant panels provided a viewer-friendly heating source, used also as a towel warmer.

### **Plans flip-flop**

The master bathroom area originally was going to be a huge, walk-in closet, but DeCiantis convinced the Beebes to convert the original bathroom into a small walk-in-closet and use the other area for the bathroom, essentially flip-flopping the plans. A large closet didn’t seem necessary for a summer residence, DeCiantis says. Now, the closet is closer to the main part of the bedroom, affording easier accessibility.

The entire upstairs part of the renovation was made more open by taking off the original hip roof that provided less than 7-foot ceilings and changing it to a gable design that increased the ceiling height to 10 feet. Opening up the room even more, the original wood floors were painted white, and DeCiantis installed French doors leading to a narrow balcony over looking the water.

On the other side of the house, DeCiantis says he convinced the owners to save a series of tiny windows that were an original part of the design. They would have been eliminated in the original plans. Inside the window jams; he sprayed insulation foam called Selection 500 by Demilac. The new-fangled foam, considered 40 percent more efficient than conventional insulation and environmentally friendly to boot, is a liquid that expands 100 times, filling every inside crevice.

The remodeling accomplished what it set out to do, combining the best of new, modern techniques with some of the sensibilities from the past. As DeCiantis says, “The owner didn’t want to have to deal with any problems. He wanted things to last.”

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