

# The Promise

By: Hannah Kunze

Photography by Katherine Jackson unless otherwise noted.

*An interior designer delights in transforming her own Cape Cod cottage.*

**A little girl from Indiana stood on the shore** watching the ocean fluctuate for the first time. She felt the sand sift between her toes, and the breeze cool her face, and she understood that this was someplace special. She was only twelve, but she quietly promised herself that she would return when she was older to experience this feeling over and over.

Allyson Muller remembers this moment fondly. She was on her first school trip to Boston, and they had just returned from the whale watch in Hyannis. The promise was as innocent as any made by a young child, but nobody, least of all little Allyson, could have foreseen the essential role Cape Cod would play in ensuring her survival.

In 2018, Muller fulfilled her childhood dream when she bought her 902 sq. foot cottage in Mashpee's Maushop Village. It was plain, but for Muller, owner and principal designer at LUXE Haus Interiors, she saw vast potential. "I really liked the original architecture in the house," she notes. "It was very plain, like a box, but I loved the original unit because I could see the vision of how I could make each room extraordinary. I'd rather have a plain canvas than one where I have to rip everything out."

Despite finally achieving her lifelong goal, it was not under the joyous circumstances Muller had long imagined. Instead, designing her home provided meaning and purpose during an excruciating battle with terminal illness. "I was renovating the house after a near-death experience, not knowing if I'd ever be able to see it completed," she remembers. "It gave me something to live for during a time when I didn't think I would make it."



Photo by Allyson Muller



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Photo by Tom Quarticelli

Elegant and timeless inside and out, the cottage truly is something to live for. Perched on a gently sloping cliff overlooking Nantucket Sound, the cottage is cradled by a remarkable assortment of local fauna, including fragrant beach roses, holly, rolling green grass, and rustling seagrasses. A trellis intertwined with jubilant trumpet vines leads to a hydrangea-lined patio overlooking the cliffside.

Muller was so captivated by the local landscape that she incorporated it into her home design. “In a town where nature is the reason people visit, I wanted to make the

environment a focal point both inside and out,” she explains. “I wanted to feel like I was walking in nature inside the home.” This goal was accomplished through careful color choices evocative of beach scenes. In the upstairs master bathroom, gentle green walls resemble sea glass, while graphic nautical floor tiles simulate the experience of strolling through shell-strewn sand. Downstairs, creamy white walls are adorned with vintage nautical-inspired artworks in various shades of sandy brown, white, and blue. “I try to keep my colors light and airy,” Muller says. “I want every beachy space to feel clean.”



Muller’s design style exemplifies the subtle difference between a clean design and a sterile one. Despite being designed with sleekness in mind, the original home’s imperfections were preserved to maintain its character. The walls, for example, are coated with clean white paint that allows the original dimpled wooden shiplaps to show through. For Muller, replacing the walls entirely would have been too perfect: “I like the imperfect because it’s real. I want lived-in character,” she describes. “I like the dimple on somebody’s cheek and the sideways noses. I like the old, idyllic character.”

With its rich history, Cape Cod offered ample character for Muller to draw upon in her design. Mashpee in particular offered significant inspiration for various features throughout the home. For instance, the arched doors of the cabinet built-ins in the living room, built by Wes Coventry and Tyler Smolinski of Coventry Woodworking, were inspired by the Mashpee Baptist Church, one of the first structures visitors see when entering the historic town. Muller also incorporated physical elements of the Cape into her furniture: several custom-made cabinets placed thoughtfully around the home were constructed with Cape Cod wood by carpenter Kya Keeslar, from Coventry Woodworking’s mill. Infusing town and era-specific features into a home is characteristic of Muller’s designs. “It’s important to incorporate the feeling of the neighborhood into the home so it doesn’t feel like a departure when you walk from outside in,” she believes. “In general, I really like

working with the characteristics of the existing unit and playing those features up.”

With this mindset, Muller found Cape Cod’s British colonial history impossible to ignore. She strove to unite the elegance of an English seaside cottage with the quaintness of bygone era Cape Cod under one design. In the master bathroom, this harmony is seamless. Mint-colored shiplap walls and bouquets of Cape Cod hydrangeas complement the room’s focal point: an elegant clawfoot tub from the Victorian era. Muller insisted on incorporating the clawfoot despite doubts from contractors and friends. “Everyone thought I was crazy,” she laughs. “They said it would be too crowded to have a standalone shower and a tub in such a small room. But I was persistent, and when it was done, everyone agreed it was the right decision.” The tub is particularly well-loved during chilly weather, when a post-beach soak is a restorative experience.

English flair also characterizes Muller’s bedrooms. The guest suite has original wood-shuttered skylights, and her master bedroom perched at the top of the house, which she lovingly refers to as the ‘attic’, gained the fond nickname from its slanting ceilings. While the black nickel and chrome open-frame headboard and wicker bedside storage create a truly cozy, Anglo-inspired atmosphere, it was the room’s proximity to nature that captured Muller’s heart and convinced her to purchase the home. “Waking up to the sunrise over Nantucket



Sound and the sound of the waves every morning feels like magic," she describes. "The windows are open, the sea breeze blows the drapes in a gentle way, and the birds start to sing early. The Cape comes alive in the morning. There's nothing better than that."

After tearing herself away from the birds and the morning breeze, Muller heads downstairs, where the focal point of the open-concept kitchen and living area is an immense built-in fireplace with floor-to-ceiling cabinets flanking each side of the mantel. Hanging on the shiplap above the electric fireplace is a television disguised as a nautical painting, designed to preserve the home's vintage elegance. Muller now regards the setup as an essential and beautiful component of her home, but recalls the risk inherent in her initial decision to include such large furniture in a small room with low ceilings. "In my previous experience, floor-to-ceiling built-ins made a room feel bigger, but with a room that small, I wasn't sure," Muller recalls. "At first, I panicked because it seemed to take up too much space, but when it was finally fully installed, the size and height of the cabinets made the ceilings appear considerably taller. Neighbors thought I gained more space somehow, despite having a huge piece of furniture there."

The risk was important to take for more than aesthetic reasons. In order to live in the cottage year-round, Muller needed to thoughtfully create storage solutions for both summer and winter necessities. The large cabinets were the ideal solution; one houses summer essentials and



shoes, while the other functions as the kitchen pantry. "Practicality can be beautiful," says Muller. "You don't have to sacrifice one for the other."

The cottage haven was a hard-won prize. For Muller, the people made the experience worth the trials. Unable to be present during the renovations due to her long recovery, Muller was stunned by the effortlessness of the process. "I've worked with hundreds of contractors over my career, and John Clark of @designREMODEL, was the easiest and most conscientious person I've ever worked with. To me, that speaks volumes of people on the Cape." Muller goes on to cite how her neighbors supported her during the renovations by sending frequent progress photos, and how, during the pandemic, the bond between neighbors only got stronger. "The people of Maushop Village are truly what makes the neighborhood so special," she says.

When that twelve-year-old girl made a promise to herself that she would one day return to Cape Cod, she couldn't have understood how important her vow would prove to her wellbeing years later. After navigating significant obstacles, that little girl got her fairytale ending: a beautiful life in an equally beautiful Cape Cod home. "Buying this home was probably the most meaningful thing I've ever done," Muller believes, "That little girl would be proud. I couldn't feel luckier to be here." 🏡

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