



Step 1
Cragmere

Step 2
Rockhouse



SEACOAST REAL ESTATE PHOTOGRAPHY - ANNE ERWIN SOTHEBY'S INTERNATIONAL REALTY

Flying in Place

Welcome to Shore Road in York—and a master class in open concept. **“Rockhouse”** is the Yang of Maine oceanfront real estate.

BY COLIN W. SARGENT

WHAT DO YOU DREAM of when you already live in a dream house? The question stops software engineer and hotelier Christopher Crane short. He beetles his brow, walks a few steps toward the Atlantic, and points toward London. “You dream of living in a dream house that’s closer to the water.”

In 1998, he and his wife Elizabeth were a pair of Britons from away visiting friends in Maine. “Liz is from Guisborough, in North Yorkshire. I’m from Derbyshire.”

During their first visit to the Yorks and Ogunquit, they poked around the coast and stumbled upon the ghost of a stone and shingle mansion designed by Portland architect Antoine Dorticos for sale on Shore Road in York. “Cragmere was for sale forever. It was a wreck. Liz told me, ‘You must be crazy. You like modern homes. I like modern homes.’ It turns out, I was,” Chris says.





“We renovated Cragmere from 1997 to 1998 and lived there for 11 years.”

If Cragmere was the question, the modern house we’re standing in at 11 Cragmere Way is the answer. “Cragmere was a grand cottage. But that was shelter. This is exposure.”

SEA CHANGE

Right on the booming shelves of surf, tucked below the knoll where Cragmere holds court, was a mid-century modern designed by Fletcher Ashley in 1959. “Somewhere there’s a 1959 penny on this property, below a post,” Chris says as he takes us through Rockhouse, Cragmere’s younger, hipper sister that was developed from the original Cragmere parcel, closer to the water. “We bought Rockhouse to have a better view from Cragmere. We wanted to clear some brush down here. But once we got to the deck hanging over the water, we said, ‘It’s pretty



nice here!’ The architect [who transformed the Ashley design into what Rockhouse is today] was my nephew from England, Charles MacKeith—my sister’s son. With his partner, Madeleine Adams, they completely reimaged this space.”

IF ROCKHOUSE WERE A MUSICAL COMPOSITION...

Chris guides us past a Yamaha baby grand toward staggering views of the water. If Frank Sinatra were still around, this would have been his spot, baby. Who plays the piano? “Chris does,” Liz says. If this house could be summed up in a song, what would it be? Chris shrugs. “Fly Me to the Moon.”

Visitors can’t help but feel a sense of Frank Lloyd Wright’s famous dictum of “compression and release” as the trajectory of sightlines opens toward the vast ocean. “I said I was in the software business [largely programs used by Customs workers processing imports into different countries], but we’re also in the hotel business. See that big building to the right of Nubble Light?” Chris points. “That’s our ViewPoint Hotel.”

DOOR-I-GAMI

The most innovative part of the design is that the rooms in Rockhouse actually glide,



The trajectory of the beams takes you soaring over the water.

shift, and recompose with a seamless system of pocket doors, cabinets, and sleeping quarters that vanish when closed.

“It’s better than open concept, because the rooms can change,” Chris says. “Un-

like Cragmere, where there are [fixed] rooms, we wanted to have more options.” Many of the rooms are “dual purpose with Murphy beds,” as easy to turn into a new shape as a transformer toy. Walls of glass and plaster appear and disappear. A study or a gym becomes a bedroom. Industrial light and magic.

“There are two first-floor bedrooms,” Chris says. “I use that one for my office.” With the massive sliding doors closed, it becomes a guest suite. The other is a fabulous master-bedroom suite that opens to a two-sided fireplace and the area they call



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“It’s better than open concept, because the rooms can change.”



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the “snug,” or winter living room, when the sliding doors are open.

VISIONS

As we tour the solar-heated infinity pool created by Northern Pool and Spa, Liz says, “There was a whale here last week.”

You’re so close to Boon Island “you can see the water on the other side of the lighthouse,” Chris says. “The silvery slips of land on the horizon are The Isles of Shoals.” Houses in this lucky part of the world can tell time by the passages of the *Finestkind* tour boat that cruises by us, having just passed the Cliff House resort. We ask Chris and Liz if they’ve been on the *Finestkind* to gaze up at their



sparkling glass house. “Yes.” Guilty. Every once in a while, you should seize the chance to see how the other half lives—even if you’re them.

Chris points to the ledge: “Sedimentary rock. See how it’s vertical? You can see how some of the plates pushed it up that way. A three-inch-wide section must cover a hun-

dred thousand, even millions of years.” He looks at the deck. “Being from Maine, you know that every single screw and nail out here has to be stainless steel” as proof against the elements. “You couldn’t build this house here today. It had to have the grandfathered footprint of the Ashley design. Otherwise, the house would have had

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to be located 100 feet back. We were told the early owner actually blasted into the rocks to create the swimming pool.”

Heading back into the house from the spectacular private views (they surpass the views visitors marvel at in Cape Elizabeth at the Lobster Shack), Chris points at an overhead set of shelves suspended from the ceiling inside. Up to this point we’d never seen, or heard of, an aerial library. “When you’re inside the house looking out at the ocean, you look directly at the surf and can’t see these books. But standing on the ocean side looking in, you see the upper library suspended from the ceiling—a juxtaposition of thoughts and ideas.”

Between skylights and smooth maple floors, views of designer pine trees and river birches outside bring to mind a Neil Welliver painting against the gallery-white walls.

Because the devil’s in the details, Chris points out the enormous Dura-therm custom windows. “Every win-

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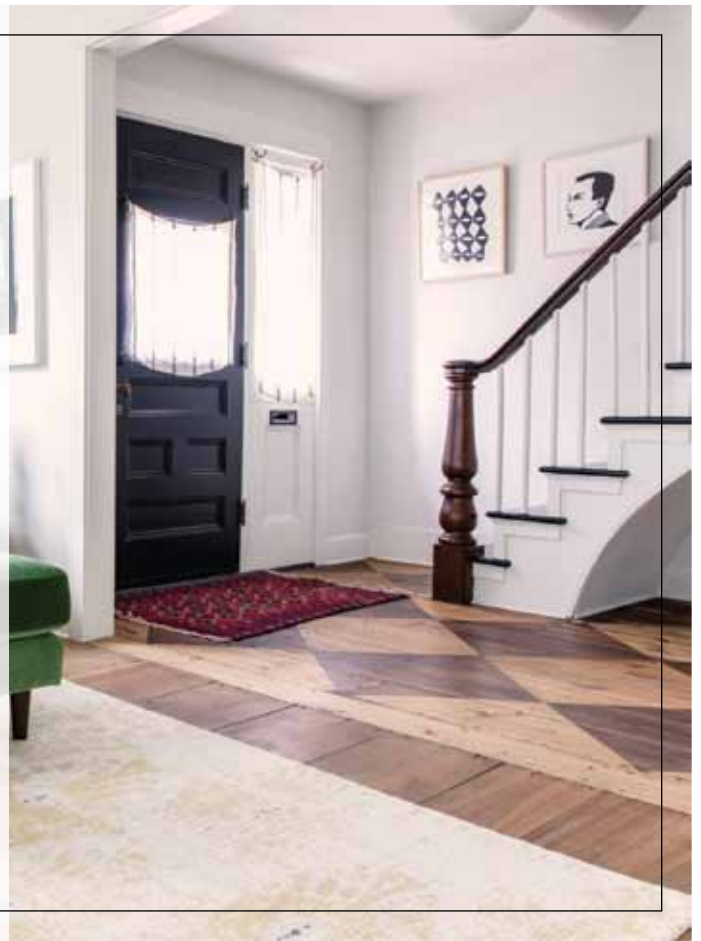


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dow takes four people to carry.” And it takes computer-controlled twin boilers to monitor ten zones of micro-climates with underfloor heating so you see no registers anywhere. Outside there’s a radiant walkway and drive.

One interested couple of possible purchasers has come through twice without pulling the trigger. Why? “It seems too much like a vacation home.”

Exactly. It’s a perfect day, and the ocean is almost too close, too dazzling. During electrical storms, it must be even more cinematic out here. At night there’s so little light pollution Chris has a telescope in the tower so he can collect the stars—seashells in the sky.

Nothing is forever, even in a place this fortunate. “A visiting friend of mine once asked us, ‘When is summer in Maine?’” Chris says. “By then I knew to answer, ‘Sometimes on a Wednesday.’”

Rockhouse could be yours for \$5.98M. Taxes are \$31,059. ■

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