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From Semi-Wreck to Finished Beauty

By SARA BROWN



John and Judith Tankard in their recently renovated Edgartown Home.

A bumper sticker perched on a side table in John and Judith Tankard's Edgartown entryway says a lot about their architectural philosophy: "Gut fish, not houses."

The rest of their home is a testament to how they much the couple believes in that motto. While the circa-1730 "half-house" at the corner of School street and Pent Lane has been restored, the couple said their goal was to remain true to the original home.

"We restored what was here, and made it look like what it was supposed to look like," Mrs. Tankard said. The home features original beams, floors and (small) doorways, plus new additions like a basement, side porch and state-of-the-art kitchen, and personal touches from the Tankards such as framed artwork from France, fresh flowers, and vintage quilts.



The dining room used to be the kitchen.

Overall, the couple said, they weren't trying to change the house much. "We were trying to put back the old house, idealize the way it was, rather than make it look brand new," Mr. Tankard said. "We were trying to do almost as little as

possible.”

“Everything that looks like it was here before has been restored,” added Mrs. Tankard.

For their work, the Tankards were awarded the first Historic District Excellence award from the Edgartown historic district commission. The award recognizes the homeowners for “outstanding efforts in the renovation of their home,” assistant building inspector Kim Rogers said, and for “working well with the historic district commission.”

The renovation and partial demolition started in 2004 after the couple, Newton, Mass. residents interested in a second home, purchased the house. The house had been on the market awhile and was not in good shape, Mrs. Tankard said. “It was almost a wreck — I called it a semi-wreck.”

The historic home couldn’t have landed in better hands. Mr. Tankard is an architect with a practice in Waban and Mrs. Tankard is a landscape historian, author, and preservation consultant. While Mr. Tankard had worked on Vineyard projects before, the couple had not spent much time on the Island.



Mr. Tankard worked on the home himself, a project in which he “used all my wits to figure out how to solve the problems,” he recalled. The house required custom-fitted, handmade work. “You start getting into these things and you have to solve the problems one at a time,” Mr. Tankard said. Vineyarders Adam T. Hayes and Ivory Littlefield worked on the project as well.

The two-story home has four fireplaces and one chimney, and is located on a narrow, 40-foot-wide lot. Before the Tankards bought the home, the writer Ruth Galvin and her husband, John Galvin, lived at the house.

“Story has it,” Mr. Tankard said, that Mr. Galvin, a public relations executive and author, was friends with John F. Kennedy and the President visited the house. The Tankards said the home also once served as a rectory. The building was expanded by about four feet towards Pent Lane in the 1920s.

The renovation took about a year-and-a-half. The floors, beams, doorways and paneling in the 18th century part of the home are all original, and the new windows were made to look like the original ones. A new back section of the home has a bathroom, hallway, and mudroom, and an 18th century door leads back to a new kitchen, the only area the couple said was really modified.



It has new fixtures, glass-fronted cabinets and abundant counter space.

The old kitchen is now a dining room with a big stone fireplace. A traditional “borning room” is now in use as a study.

The room features part of Tankard family history as well, including an 1850s portrait of one of Mr. Tankard’s relatives, a Baptist minister who went to China as a missionary. His handwarmer from China sits on a desk between two sand dollars.



The renovation won the historic district excellence award.

A pre-Federal style front staircase, which has heavy wear, leads to an upstairs with three bedrooms and Mrs. Tankard’s study, which features baskets displayed on open shelves, a skylight, and a chandelier.

The back bedroom has a “ringside view of the Whaling Church,” Mr. Tankard said.

The Tankards commute to the Island during occasional weekends, though work keeps them from coming full-time. “We lug laptops back and forth, but that doesn’t quite do it,” Mrs. Tankard said.

Outside the house is a small garden with perennials, and a rebuilt white fence, where roses and honeysuckle bloom in the summer. The couple added a screened-in porch that is surrounded by hydrangeas, a “protected and private space,” Mrs. Tankard said. A garden trowel door knocker hints at the interests of the home’s inhabitants, and a garden shed in the back is ready for climbing flowers.



In addition to renovating, the Tankards added personal touches.

The couple also added a basement for electrical and mechanical systems, where the brick base of the chimney stands in the middle of the space. The old timbers are still visible on the ceiling, and along one wall is a piece of the old house, an exterior wall frame: white oak, bumpy and unvarnished.