

THE BIG ISLAND

An open floor plan finds balance from natural materials and a supersized center island. **By Marni Elyse Katz**

PHOTOGRAPHS BY TAMARA FLANAGAN



Architect and builder Michael Graf loves a good steel staircase. Take the monorail steel stair with chunky white oak treads that he designed for the Jones family, who relocated north of Boston two years ago. It serves several purposes. Aesthetically, it is the home's focal point and echoes the building's black windows and the Eastern white pine cladding of the detached garage, which figures prominently in the view. Functionally, it connects the main living space to the primary bedroom suite on the top level as well as to the bar and the adjacent entertaining areas on the lower level. Architecturally, it is the organizing principle for the main floor's open plan. "The stair divides the space into distinct areas, driving how each one is used," Graf says.

The airy statement staircase, which stands directly in front of the home's cedar-lined entry, separates the living room on the right from the kitchen on the left. That was a given. But when it came time to develop the kitchen layout, there were a few points up for debate. Although the home has a formal dining room, the family hoped to incorporate a casual dining table in the kitchen. They also wanted an island. Interior designer Holly Gagne had serious doubts that the space could support both.

Gagne felt that a small island—to fit a table the island would have to be small—would seem out of proportion against the large walls of cabinetry. More importantly, it would not allow for sufficient circulation paths. "With their busy lifestyle we felt a table and chairs next to an island with stools would feel very cluttered," Gagne says. Instead, she advocated for one big island with seating on two sides. The couple agreed. "We love the big island for prepping and cooking, and the four of us eat there all the time," Kerry Jones says. "With COVID, we've used the dining room quite a bit for special

Left: Cement tiles by Eskayel for Cle bring color to a powder room; the pendants by Kelly Wearstler for Visual Comfort are from Newburyport Lighting; and the concrete sink ties to the lower level floor. **Right:** Leather stools by Regina Andrew Design line two sides of the kitchen island, giving a communal feel to mealtimes. The floorboards are from Keiver-Willard Lumber Corp. in Newburyport. Carriage Hill Craft Metals in Amesbury made the stair handrails.





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family dinners, too.”

In order to create a sense of calm and integrate the interior with its surroundings, Gagne chose materials and colors that reflect those Graf used in the architecture. “Because there are so many large windows and an open layout, you see a lot of different spaces, both indoors and outdoors, no matter where you are in the house,” she says. In the kitchen, flat black hardware punctuates crisp white cabinetry while the subway tiles’ contrasting black grout mirrors the sharp, black lines of the windows and stair rails. The island’s gray quartz countertop ties to the lightly-polished poured concrete floor of the lower level and the powder room’s concrete sink. There are also standout moments of earthy woods, including character-grade white oak floorboards. “The family came from a home in Colorado with

RESOURCES

Architect and contractor:
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a lot of wood and rustic elements, so we wanted to give them that warmth here, but with a brighter, lighter, and more contemporary feel,” Gagne says.

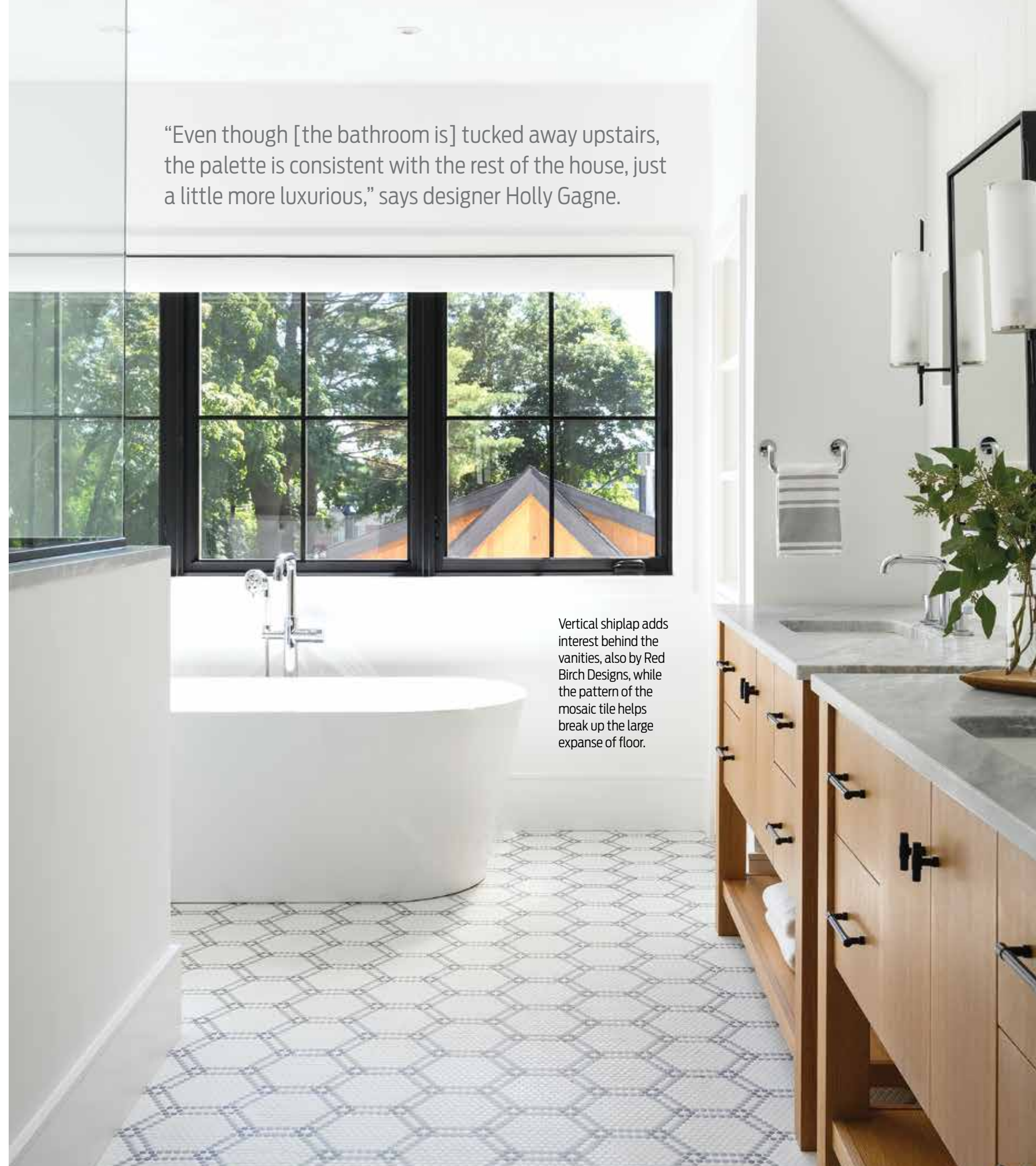
Because the Joneses love to entertain—they had 125 guests at their holiday party last year, but these days they limit gatherings to six around the fire pit—connecting the main level with the entertaining areas on lower level and adjacent outdoor patio was key. The stairway’s spare design and central placement, along with the cohesive colors and materials, marry upstairs with down.

The bar, located at the bottom of the stairs, features a live edge waterfall top made from two bookmatched slabs of old growth larch that Graf found at Timberdoodle Farm in Strafford, New Hampshire. “I discovered this small saw mill that specializes in locally sourced trees,” he says. “These pieces were milled from an urban tree harvested in Dover, New Hampshire.”

At the end of the day, the owners retreat to their third-floor suite with its sunny, spa-like bath. A pair of white oak vanities topped with gray marble tie to the rustic exterior of the garage, which is visible from the windows over the soaking tub. A half-wall offers privacy and a place for a built-in bench in the large, walk-in steam shower. “Even though it’s tucked away upstairs, the palette is consistent with the rest of the house, just a little more luxurious,” Gagne says. “Even here, there’s an easy flow and nothing to distract from the landscape.” ■

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Above, left: Newburyport craftsman Brian Days of Red Birch Designs built the cabinetry for the bar on the lower level. It has a live-edge larch wood top and a backsplash made from carved coconut shell tiles by EccoTessa. **Left:** The pantry is accessible from the kitchen as well as from the deck, which wraps that end of the house.



“Even though [the bathroom is] tucked away upstairs, the palette is consistent with the rest of the house, just a little more luxurious,” says designer Holly Gagne.

Vertical shiplap adds interest behind the vanities, also by Red Birch Designs, while the pattern of the mosaic tile helps break up the large expanse of floor.