

BY JON VARA

The large marine portholes (top left) were salvaged from a decommissioned ship. Modern replacements were built for the original oak-framed casement windows (far right).



To the Lighthouse

The Graves Island Lighthouse, built in 1903, is a 113-foot granite-block structure on one of the outermost shoals on the approach to Boston Harbor. To provide ballast against winter storms—which send solid water crashing nearly to its top—the bottom third of the main structure is solid masonry all the way through.

The lowest working level, at the 40-foot mark, is reached by a steeply sloping ladder, with six additional floors connected by a spiral staircase. While the stonework tapers on the outside, the interior is a uniform 13-foot cylinder with walls up to 7 feet thick. One former light keeper reportedly compared the keeper's accommodations to living inside a pipe.

When the federal government put the property up for auction in 2013 (while retaining the rights to the automated light and fog signal), Boston-area businessman David Waller bought it and set about fixing it up as a summer home.

Portland, Maine, builder Nat Towl spent much of this past summer working on the lighthouse interior. He notes that even though the original finish has been dam-

aged by decades of neglect, the quality of the original workmanship shines through. “The ceilings were quartersawn oak panels,” he says. “There’s an amazing mahogany handrail on the spiral staircase.”

At about the time that the light was automated in 1976, the original oak-framed casement windows were replaced with solid glass block. Nantucket woodworker Karl Phillips is working from the original drawings to construct modern replacements, which will be equipped with ½-inch Lexan storm panels.

One project involves cutting window openings into the cylindrical room just beneath the light itself, which is formed from curved ¼-inch bronze plates bolted to the granite beneath. Originally designed to house the machinery for operating a 12-foot Fresnel lens (the lens itself is now on display in the Smithsonian Institution), the openings have been fitted with large marine-salvaged portholes, providing the once-windowless space with light, air, and a mind-boggling 360-degree view.

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Photos: David Waller