

New England HOME

Celebrating Fine Design, Architecture, and Building

IN HARMONY
Summer's Poetry of Place

Homeward Bound

A family-run interiors shop in Seal Harbor, Maine, merges a sense of place with a new take on timeless design. BY LISA H. SPEIDEL

First interior designer Laura Keeler fell for Vassar Pierce, then she fell—hard—for Mount Desert Island. Pierce’s family had been vacationing in Northeast Harbor, a summer community on the southern end of the Maine island, for generations; in fact, his thrice great-grandfather was one of the founders of nearby Acadia National Park.

“It’s one of the most beautiful places in the world,” Keeler Pierce says. “Because the mountains meet the sea, it has a unique topography for New England; it completely captivates you.”

The now-married couple started looking for a vacation home on the island—and a reason to spend more time there. They inquired with their realtor about commercial space; a seasonal home furnishings



Everything at Rusticator, from the furnishings and art to the light fixtures, is for sale, says shop owner and designer Laura Keeler Pierce. Many pieces are also customizable—note the Dunes and Duchess side tables that can be made in any color, and the Jill Rosenwald ceramics available in a range of patterns and sizes.



shop would be an ideal complement to Keeler Pierce's Boston-based interior design firm, Keeler & Co. Turns out, a former general store on Main Street that had sat empty for two decades had hit the market. Keeler Pierce jumped on a Cape Air flight from Boston to Bar Harbor to confirm her gut feeling. "I said to my husband, 'We have to do this,'" she remembers. The building even had two apartments, so the Pierces could stay in one while they hunted for

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: Keeler Pierce, her husband, Vassar Pierce, and their golden retriever, Henry, relax in the sweet apartment behind the shop. Custom-designed pillows, timeless accessories, and games to while away a sultry summer evening are all in stock. Set up to mimic a home, the store welcomes shoppers into the dining room and encourages them to continue into the living room, discovering treasures along the way; Hadley Powell of Powell Fine Art Advisory curates the rotating collection of art.



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ABOVE: A playful mix of colors and patterns signal summer at Rusticator. **FACING PAGE:** A perfect home base for their new shop, this iconic building, constructed in 1880, had seen better days when the Pierces purchased it. A thoughtful gut renovation—retaining as much of the original exterior as possible—has returned it to its former glory.

a more permanent place.

Rusticator, a warm and inviting shop, officially opened in 2020, and it's a family affair: the couple or Keeler Pierce's mom, Helen Keeler, are usually behind the counter. Smitten by the island—no surprise!—the designer's parents bought their own cottage. You'll find Dad overseeing shipping and inventory and “anything related to the basement.”

Rusticator brims with beautiful textiles, artisan-made goods, and custom furnishings. The curated mix is enchanting: cribbage and serving boards from Aronson Woodworks; hand-turned bowls from Millpond Bob; drink-drops, etageres, and dining tables from Dunes and Duchess; toasty-warm blankets from Paulette Rollo; and summer-entertaining-ready

table linens from Summerill & Bishop.

Keeler Pierce artfully balances her desire to showcase New England vendors with her love for a layered English sensibility. And, of course, her wish to celebrate a special place. The shop's name pays homage to the days when people would pack up their households for the summer and decamp to the island to recharge. “They would call themselves ‘rusticators,’ ” explains Keeler Pierce, “and return again and again...it's like coming home.”

With the shop up and running, the only thing missing now is that perfect vacation retreat for the couple to call home.

*Rusticator, Seal Harbor, Maine,
rusticatorshop.com*