

157 Ellsworth Road, Blue Hill

An 1817 farmhouse, rebuilt from the frame out

The story

This house has stood on this spot for over two hundred years. It was built around 1817 in the Federalist style, and it carries an unusual origin story. Local historical society members believe the frame was cut and carved in the Boston area, floated up the Penobscot River, and assembled on site. The evidence is still visible today: every vertical beam is hand-carved with a Roman numeral matching a corresponding mark on the granite foundation. You can see this numbering system exposed on the stairwell.

The frame itself is American Chestnut, a species now functionally extinct. The beams are single span, hand axed, and visible throughout the house.



The renovation

By 2020 the house was in severe disrepair: overgrown grounds, knob and tube wiring, frost-damaged plumbing, a disconnected oil boiler, and a structure beginning to collapse. It was purchased at auction in July 2020 by Howard and Adam Chittenden, then sold to Sven and Christina Schunemann in December 2020.

What followed was a complete rebuild by Sven together with Adam and Isaac Chittenden, now Chittenden Design and Build. The house was taken back to the studs. Everything inside is new. The original Chestnut frame and granite foundation were left untouched.

The design, led by veteran designer and builder Howard Chittenden, had one aim: alter the original farmhouse as little as possible while giving it an updated feel. The plan opened the house up, oriented living toward the blueberry barrens, and made an elegant connection to the 1820s barn (joined to the house in the 1950s, now the primary suite). Two additions were built: an entryway and a sunroom, used as the dining room.

What was done

Structure and envelope

- Full interior demo to the original frame and foundation; new framing erected inside the historic structure, leaving the numbered beams exposed
- New roof (2021), all new siding (sourced from New Zealand)
- All new Marvin windows and doors, from Hammond's in Blue Hill
- 8" sprayed cellulose insulation in walls; spray foam in the roof
- New drywall and paint throughout
- Engineered oak flooring from Hammond's in Blue Hill, run throughout the house except the primary and upstairs bathrooms
- Granite entry steps throughout, reclaimed from old buildings

Systems

- Complete rewiring to 2x200 amp service: one for the front offices, one for the rest of the house. The office service also feeds an outside EV charging cable
- Radiant heat throughout: in-floor in the barn and both additions, in-ceiling in the living room, kitchen, and offices. Heating design by Solartech of Maine
- Full re-plumb, connected to a 1974 Taplin well found in excellent condition, with new pump and pressure tank
- All new septic system with buried tank and new leach field
- Basement: new concrete slab, spray insulation, radon mitigation system, 240V outlets, LED lighting, original root cellar, and two entrances, one via a trap door in the laundry room and one from the garden
- Extensive water filtration (added 2025), including a dedicated arsenic reduction block and a VOC filter. Arsenic occurs naturally in well water in this part of Maine, and the system was built specifically to address the minerals found in this property's water test
- All new LED fixtures, with key rooms on dimmers

Kitchen

- Labradorite counters and island, sourced in Sedgwick
- Custom island designed by Sven and Isaac: heavy but movable, with power and charging on all four corners
- All cabinetry custom built by the crew: pull-out pantry, spice drawer, dinnerware drawers, hidden garbage, and a roll-door appliance garage with three pull-out shelves
- Bertazzoni propane range and dishwasher, Bosch refrigerator, from Brown's in Ellsworth
- Handmade backsplash tile by Wizard Enterprise of Los Angeles in denim, reef, moss, and sorrel, set with sparkle grout
- Black granite sink, sourced in Sedgwick

Bathrooms

- Primary bath in the barn suite: walk-in shower, slipper bath, handmade walnut vanity from Blue Hill-harvested wood, Italian tile from Coastal Interiors in Ellsworth. The shower is plumbed and ready to become a steam shower
- Upstairs bath: same Italian tile, heated towel racks, plus a one-of-a-kind mosaic in the shower, “Mystical Horse,” handmade by Jeff Gaines of Colorado
- New half bath between the offices with live edge vanity and a granite sink from Deer Isle

The pantry and laundry room

- Entered through a sliding barn door made of boards taken from the original barn, hung on the original hardware
- Ample storage with live edge counters, washer and dryer, and a built-in dog crate
- A section of the original sheathing boards is left exposed, the utility panels sit behind more original wood doors, and a trap door leads down to the basement

The primary suite

- Built in what was the barn, believed to date from the 1820s, and still used as a working barn right up until 2020
- Completely rebuilt as part of the renovation into a full suite: sleeping area, en suite bathroom with the walk-in shower plumbed for steam, walk-in closet, and private access to the deck
- The sleeping area has a large bay window overlooking the walled garden, with the blueberry barrens beyond

Upstairs

- Two equal-size bedrooms, echoing the symmetry of the original Federalist plan, each with exposed beams and skylights
- The bedrooms are separated by the full bathroom, which has a shower and heated towel racks
- The stairs up are handmade from solid oak, rising past the numbered Chestnut beams and under “The Dandelion” chandelier

The two additions

- The new entrance sits on the north side, off the road, with direct access from the parking area and underfloor radiant heat. No more coats dripping through the living room in a Maine winter
- The sunroom is on the south side, with a vaulted ceiling and windows on every exterior wall. It opens into the kitchen and looks over the walled garden and out to the blueberry barrens. Currently used as the dining room, lit by a recycled glass chandelier from Rejuvenation, it catches sun all day
- The sunroom also anchors the main walkway through the house, leading past the laundry room and walk-in closet to the primary suite

The front offices

- The two front rooms are equal in size, true to the Federalist floor plan, and sit either side of the new half bath
- Both rooms have doors that close them off from the main house, plus custom made barn doors for full privacy
- One office is fitted with live edge wooden shelving and aventurine crystal drawer pulls
- This part of the house is zoned commercial and runs on its own 200 amp service, so it can operate as a genuine separate workspace: home offices, a studio, a practice, or a small shopfront
- Internet here is fast and reliable. The house sits on the Ellsworth Road line that serves the hospital, so the lines are new and very well maintained. Power and internet outages are rare

Living here

The house sits on the Ellsworth Road, but it does not live like it. Everything was designed to face the other way: toward the walled garden and the blueberry barrens. The rooms, the windows, the light, and the easy step outside are what make daily life here so good. You will hear some road noise, and it is soon forgotten sitting or working in the sunroom, the spacious living room, or anywhere else in the house. Town is an easy, short drive away.

The gardens

The fence, designed and built by Sven from hemlock, creates the feel of an English walled garden. Along the blueberry barrens it switches to black fencing so nothing blocks the view of the field and its wildlife.

Inside the walls: raised beds with a cold frame, a wisteria-covered pergola seating area, an outdoor living room under the primary bedroom window, and a young pinetum of Blue Colorado Spruce, Holly, and Larch alongside a miniature Japanese maple. Granite steps connect the lower and upper gardens and lead to the newly built deck. The front field is planted in wildflowers.

This is a sandy site, so the soil has been built up with heavy mulching and weed barrier. The garden is young and only getting better.

Final note

This is a two-hundred-year-old house. The original floors were not level, and while the new engineered oak flooring was floated to correct this as much as possible, a slight gradient remains in places, adding to the character and charm of the building.

Key contacts and sources

- **Renovation:** Chittenden Design and Build, 207-412-9885, ianchitteden1@gmail.com
- **Heating design:** Solartech, Maine
- **Tile:** Coastal Interiors, Ellsworth, 207-667-7166
- **Windows, doors, flooring:** Hammond's, Blue Hill
- **Appliances:** Brown's, Ellsworth