

Pro Spotlight: Feel Right at Home on the Water

A Greenwich architect advises on how to overcome some challenges of building waterfront property

Who: Charles Hilton

Where: Greenwich, Connecticut

In his own words: "Waterfront settings are so varied and so dramatic. The weather, the climate, the sun on the water — it's a very intriguing space to build on."

Few things are quite as spectacular as a home on the water. Whether they're cozy log cabins or sprawling historic mansions, waterfront homes provide a beautiful setting for their owners to enjoy the world around them.

They also can pose a series of challenges. Rough weather, strict regulations and property prices can make waterfront homes difficult to build — but they're well worth it, says Charles Hilton, the founding architect of Charles Hilton Architects in Greenwich.



Sustainable design. "I've always loved to build things," Hilton says. "Once I worked for an architect in high school, I knew exactly what I wanted to do and I've never looked back. Today, we work to create great design partnered with sustainability. We care very much about the planet and ensuring that our homes are healthy for their inhabitants and the earth."



International influence. Global inspiration serves as a major element of Hilton's designs. "When I go to new places and experience new cultures, it definitely influences my work," he says. "Many of our clients are also very global and have lived internationally. Their experiences and their time in other cultures influence the design as well."

Thinking about living on the water? See Hilton's advice below for building a waterfront home you'll love.



1. Opt for Durability

Waterfront homes have to withstand some extreme natural elements, such as hurricanes, corrosive saltwater, strong ocean winds and blazing sunshine. That's why using durable materials is important, Hilton says. "Materials for the home need to be durable enough to withstand all the wear and tear — and still look good."

He adds that cedar shingles, like the ones on this Riverside home, are ideal for protecting a home's exterior. "They handle the sun and salt well, and they age beautifully," he says. "The home also features stone you'd find along the waterfront that's durable enough to handle the elements."



2. Bring the Outside In

You're at the beach, so incorporate that feeling throughout your home using neutral sand tones and sea blues, Hilton advises. This will enhance natural light and create a soothing environment. The Pacific Ocean serves as the backyard to this condo in Santa Barbara, California. "A renovation to the space included millwork, limestone flooring and walls with a reflective finish to get the natural light and the dabbling of the ocean into the space," he says.



3. Showcase the View

Traditionally, the front of the home is the exterior with the most visibility. A waterfront home means that you have two major exteriors — the front and the water-facing rear, Hilton says. "Many waterfront homes will have rooms lined horizontally along the back exterior to take advantage of the view in each space."

Rooms in this Riverside home stretch along the back side for optimal views. "The property is located on a cove, and strategic positioning ensured that views up the sound to Manhattan are visible throughout the home," Hilton says.