





Manganello's Mission

A Maine builder and designer brings dramatic details to a classic Cape in Falmouth

by Candace Karu
Photography Trent Bell

Nicola Manganello is a new breed of entrepreneur: she combines an art-school education with business experience and whip-smart instincts. Her distinctive design sense and thorough knowledge of building codes, materials, and practices form the foundation of her eponymous business—Nicola's Homes. Manganello is a real-estate developer for the twenty-first century, one who has a long personal history in Maine and a vision for how people want to live in her beloved state.

Manganello credits her business acumen to her father, Ed Manganello, founder of the successful Westbrook-based sporting-goods company, Olympia Sports. Growing up in Yarmouth, she was intrigued by the intricacies of her father's company, but her interest in business competed with a growing passion for the arts. When it came time to choose a college, Manganello decided on Maine College of Art and immersed herself in the study of sculpture and color theory. "Sculpture appealed to me because I have always thought and planned in three dimensions," she says. "MECA taught me how to execute the visions that I saw in my head."

Manganello's college experience included a semester in Rome where, in addition to expanding her classical art education, she developed a

All dressed up for the holidays, the great room is bathed in firelight and the glow of Christmas lights on an old-fashioned tree decked in raffia and red wooden beads. The fireplace, mantle, and exposed chimney were constructed using stones left over from another of Manganello's renovations. Matchstick bamboo blinds and burlap drapes add warm accents to the room. Reclaimed barn beams throughout the first floor lend a feeling of timelessness to the new construction.



love of fashion. After graduation, she turned this avocation into her first business: Nicola's, a high-end women's clothing store that opened on Main Street in Yarmouth in 1996. The boutique occupied part of an old home and Manganello lived next to the shop. Nicola's immediate success required that Manganello move out to free up space for an expansion, including a room devoted to decorating accessories and housewares. "That experience of renovating a nineteenth-century farmhouse gave me the bug," recalls Manganello. "I loved the process of taking something old and making it new—making it uniquely my own."

It was during this period that Manganello married her then-husband William Oliver, and soon after gave birth to their daughter Maeve, now 9. As the boutique continued to grow, the decor section became even more successful than the clothing business. "We got to the point where

the store was ready for the next level," says Manganello. "But I wasn't. I didn't want to miss Maeve growing up. I needed more flexibility."

Closing her retail space opened up a new phase in Manganello's career. She started Nicola's Homes, a fledgling construction and renovation business that called upon her emerging skills as both a general contractor and interior designer. "This new venture allowed me to be a mom and still run a growing business," says Manganello. "I was able to make my own hours."

The new venture also allowed Manganello to grow into her role as a developer and carve out a niche in a market filled with talented designers and established builders. "I realized that I loved making new houses look old," she says. "And I loved adding warmth and style to big vanilla boxes."

The culmination of Manganello's acquired talents is on display at

Al Kronk at Rusted Puffin Metalworks in Portland constructed the custom stainless oven hood with copper accents (opposite) that hangs over the Viking range from Agren Appliance in South Portland. Kitchen Concepts in Westbrook crafted the carrera marble countertops and an integrated farm sink. The forged iron chandelier from Dwellings in Falmouth hangs above a custom, built-in banquette and table designed by Manganello. The antique ladder-back chairs are from Antiques on Nine in Kennebunk. Maria Wyzkowski's watercolor *Peebles Cove Cottage*, hangs between two sunny windows. The many rich details—apothecary jars from Portland Architectural Salvage, a blue-green antique blanket chest from Pillars in Yarmouth, and the reproduction French dessert tray, also from Dwellings—make the kitchen a feast for the eyes, combining functionality with great design.

Manganello wanted to highlight the two large windows (right) in the entry hall. Rather than using fabric window treatments, she reimaged two aged pediments with a warm, deep patina from Pillars in Yarmouth. Tessa O'Brien of Lady Paints in Portland custom fit them to the window moulding. The oil painting between the windows, titled *Trout*, is also by Tessa O'Brien. All artwork in the home is from the Elizabeth Moss Gallery in Falmouth.

At Old House Parts in Kennebunk, Manganello found a scarred, broken newel post (below) that she knew would be perfect for the stair rail at Maeve's Way. Once again Tessa O'Brien worked her magic and restored the wooden wonder to its original beauty and function. The horizontal balusters are a fresh take on the classic vertical design.



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In the master bathroom Manganello achieved a contemporary update in a traditional setting. Vessel sinks with clean, sculptural lines top the his-and-her vanities. Mirrors abound, creating a reflective, light-filled space. Even the windowpane glass of the antique medicine cabinet was replaced with mirrors, enhancing both the natural and supplied light. The classic claw-foot tub is by Kohler. Carol Sloane's group of four oils, titled *History of My Childhood*, flank the medicine cabinet.



- A Great Room
- B Kitchen
- C Entry
- D Butler's Pantry
- E Dining Room
- F Bathroom
- G Master Bedroom
- H Master Closet
- I Office
- J Garage
- K Bedroom



The simplicity of painted shiplap paneling is a perfect backdrop for the muted colors of the master bedroom. An antique French headboard anchors the bed, which has been dressed with pale custom linens. The cream-colored bedside chest with dove gray accents is from Simply Home in Falmouth. The vintage glass lamp is from Antiques on Nine in Kennebunk. Above the bed are Jacqueline Hudson's lithograph *Windy Morning*, and Kate McGloughlin's pastel *Seaweed and Surf*.



36 Maeve's Way in Falmouth Foreside. The classic New England Cape is the second of six houses she is slated to build on this quiet, tree-lined lane named after her daughter. The designer has finished and furnished every inch of the project: from billowing window treatments and striking artwork to the down-filled couches and elegant bedding. No detail has been neglected. "The furnishings may not pay for themselves immediately," explains Manganello. "But they are the most effective way I have of showing prospective clients what I can do to make a home unique."

If, as architect Mies van der Rohe once said, God is in the details, then 36 Maeve's Way is close to heaven. Manganello has an uncanny ability to create an environment of laid-back luxury punctuated with playful yet practical elements that surprise and delight. Vintage sliding barn doors and their beautifully distressed hardware create a divider between kitchen and family room that is as utilitarian as it is lovely. A pair of aged pediments, covered in layers of worn paint that reveal their history, grace the top of two hall windows, lending an authentic air of the past to the new construction.

To achieve her distinctive synthesis of style and substance in the home, Manganello worked with architect Travis Kinney of Gulfshore Design in Scarborough. Describing his working relationship with Manganello, Kinney says, "It's a fairly loose process, and one that's a bit of an anomaly. This is a spec house that has all the high-end details

of a custom home."

Inspired by the classical proportions reflected in the house, Kinney achieved stylistic and historical continuity by using traditional materials such as shiplap siding on the main section and cedar shingles on the garage. To retain the dimensions and scale of a traditional New England barn, the architect designed the garage with two bays in front and one perpendicular bay on the back side, resulting in a two-story building that is thirty-five-feet-square.

Manganello surrounds herself with a small cohort of talented people who understand her vision. Most recently, she has begun collaborating with Tessa O'Brien of Lady Paints in Portland. O'Brien's contributions can be found throughout the house. With her unerring eye and enviable woodworking skills, she can make antique elements blend seamlessly into a new construction. In the home, an ancient carved newel post at the base of the staircase looks like it was custom made for the spot—a look that was only achieved after O'Brien spent dozens of hours at her workbench.

Today, two of Manganello's mentors drop by to get a look at the holiday decorations. Ed and Marie Manganello survey the results of their daughter's labors with obvious pride. "The importance of a home to a family and all that that means...I definitely get that from my mom," explains Manganello. "It's why I love what I do. I want people to feel that way about the houses I build."

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A fireplace and painted paneling (opposite) make the home's dining room particularly inviting. The table and iron chairs, fitted with custom cushions, are from Simply Home in Falmouth. A Ted Tihansky oil painting, titled *Island Inn*, hangs over the fireplace. The classic lines of the home (above) are shown to full advantage at twilight.