

# DECOR MAINE

| ARCHITECTURE ART DESIGN EXPERIENCE FOOD SUSTAINABILITY |

OCTOBER 2020

*Making Waves:*  
Iceland Meets Maine  
on a Portland Pier

A Modern Home  
on Munjoy Hill  
(Stargazing Spot  
Included)

Camp, Upgraded,  
on Round Pond

PLUS:  
An Antiquing  
Road Trip, Up and  
Down the Coast



Janeen, Patrick, and children (left to right) Isaiah, Naomi, and Jeremiah pose for a portrait inside The Hús.



words: Heather Chapman photos: Michael D. Wilson

# *The* Seaward Side

A unique partnership links Portland to Reykjavík  
through the “blue economy”

**Builder: Optimum Construction Tile: Capozza Tile & Floor Covering Center  
Countertops: Shad's Custom Countertops Plant Installations: Plant Office  
Lighting: Reflex Lighting**



**A** FERRY'S BLARING HORN PIERCES the fog as the ship departs the passenger terminal at the Maine State Pier. The waterfront bustles with ships of all sizes cutting through the swirling tides. No matter their destination nor intent, the saltwater unites them, just as it does the ocean-minded individuals who share collaborative office space one wharf west, at the sea-facing tip of 68 Commercial Street.

Bathed in natural light, milky-white walls, and soothing ash-wood finishes, The Hús—which encapsulates the New England Ocean Cluster, a membership organization that connects companies and entrepreneurs to the ocean-based economy—is a coworking space that seamlessly marries an Icelandic aesthetic (“Hús” is Icelandic for “house”) with the ragged cliffs and windswept shorelines of coastal Maine. Although the design feels effortless, Janeen Arnold—cofounder and designer of the New England Ocean Cluster (NEOC)—explains that hard work and collaboration are behind the bright office space. “This was a vast dark abyss when we got our hands on it,” says Janeen, adding, “It used to be the Portland Science Center, so the walls and windows were covered in a thick black vinyl.” Aside from



*left* The Hús occupies the upper portion of 68 Commercial Street, right above Scales Restaurant on the Maine Wharf.

*above* Janeen created a one-of-a-kind driftwood light for the space, emphasizing biophilic design.

*opposite* The galley kitchen: tile by Capozza Tile & Floor Covering Center's Commercial Division, cabinets by Mod Cabinetry, and countertops by Shad's Custom Countertops.





cosmetic fixes, the team also removed a stairwell and dropped ceiling, and tore down a few walls. “For a majority of the finish-work and carpentry details, Optimum Construction and their subcontractors, lead by Marcus Golding and Gino Difazio, were instrumental in staying consistent with my vision,” says Janeen.

Design preference was not the only tie to the Iceland-inspired aesthetic. Thanks to the work of Patrick Arnold—NEOC cofounder and husband to Janeen—a unique partnership with Maine’s neighbors in the North Atlantic was forged.

But to understand this partnership, you must first understand Janeen and Patrick, whose life and work here in Maine hinges on the growth of the “blue economy,” explained by the pair as “a commitment to ensuring the full utilization and preservation of ocean resources.” Fittingly for this maritime couple, their work together began on Norwegian Cruise Line. “I was a dancer and a singer, performing in the Broadway and Cirque du Soleil shows, and Patrick was a navigation officer. It was on these cruises that we got to experience a variety of thriving world port cities,” says Janeen.

Seeing active docks, shipping terminals, and vibrant ports, the couple were struck by the stark

*above* Surprisingly, the windows in this bright conference room were once covered in thick black vinyl.

*right* A pleasing combination of rope and wood provides a natural and nautical room divider.

*opposite* Pillow textiles by Alaina Marie and lighting choices in collaboration with Grace Rote instill a welcome sense of *hygge*.





Hanging planters by Kristen Camp. Plant installations by John Sundling are found throughout the space.

*opposite* Patrick and Janeen manage their busy business endeavors while making time for family.



contrast to the seemingly abandoned terminal in Portland. In 2007, inspired by their findings, Janeen and Patrick launched their first business, Soli DG. “Our goal with Soli DG was to utilize Maine’s natural deep water and bring activity back to the Maine Port Authority’s International Marine Terminal in Portland. Patrick traveled all over to pitch some of the world’s largest shipping lines under contract with the Maine Port Authority,” says Janeen. “The Icelandic shipping line Eimskip wound up being the best fit for the terminal and for Maine.”

Seven years later, in 2014—with a revitalized terminal allowing Maine-made goods to be successfully exported to Europe—Patrick attended Eimskip’s centennial party in Iceland. “That’s where I met Thor Sigfusson and became acquainted with his work at the Iceland Ocean Cluster in Reykjavík,” Patrick says. A partnership was established a few months later when the Maine Technology Institute paid for Thor to come to Maine to speak about his ocean cluster model. “After the talk, Thor said to me: ‘We could partner together and do this here in Maine,’” says Patrick, adding, “He

knew of our work with Eimskip and the Maine Port Authority, which propelled his interest in us.”

In March of 2020, The Hús opened its doors as a sister organization to the Iceland Ocean Cluster: a space where sea-minded individuals with industry knowledge could connect and grow their businesses alongside the blue economy in Maine. With companies like Bristol Seafood, Maine Standard Biofuels, and SustainaMetric, plus nonprofit and university entities such as the University of Southern Maine and the Maine Center for Graduate Professional Studies, the office houses a well-rounded variety of like-minded individuals and groups. “We also mix in artists in residence from time to time, and offer sponsored fellowships like our ‘Inclusion in the Blue Economy Program,’” says Janeen.

Just like the business model, the interior of The Hús also greatly influenced the success of the Iceland Ocean Cluster. “As part of the model, The Hús is the kitchen we cook in, cross-pollinating and blending a variety of diverse ingredients to solve problems and spin off new companies,” says Patrick. “Thor had emphasized the importance of the space, the location,

and the aesthetic as all contributing to the effective nature of this community development. He really pushed us to find a location right next to, or on, the water." When the space above Scales restaurant at the Maine Wharf became available, the couple jumped on the opportunity—excited to house their blue-minded business on a pier with panoramic views of the sea.

"When I went to Iceland, I was blown away by their architecture and the Scandinavian aesthetic, which focuses on the authenticity of materials. I loved how there were less furnishings but at a higher quality. The celebration of art and innovation are also incredibly apparent in their design and architectural choices," says Janeen. Melding her Icelandic experiences with her studies at the New York School for Interior Design—where she became increasingly passionate about the use of biophilic design—Janeen set forth to connect NEOC tenants with outdoor elements inside The Hús. "I utilized natural light, plants, and a neutral palette, but I also chose colors, images, and tactile materials that would bring the outside in," says Janeen. *Hygge*, the Danish word that translates as coziness and comfort in design that

engenders a feeling of well-being, was something Janeen experienced in Iceland that further inspired her design choices. Working with Maine-based artists and businesspeople was integral to the couple's decor selection. Artwork by renowned artist Michael Torlen adorns the walls, while graphic vinyl work by Justin Levesque adds appropriate splashes of blue and green to the space. "I collaborated with John Sundling of the Plant Office on plant installations, Kristen Camp on a one-of-a-kind raku ceramic wall art piece and hanging planters, and Alaina Marie on custom textile designs for the pillows," says Janeen. Even down to the lighting elements—which were a close collaboration with Grace Rote of Reflex Lighting—nothing within the 20 glass offices, 16 workstations, 2 collaborative rooms, executive boardroom, nor kitchenette-turned-coffee-bar-turned-presentation-space was left to happenstance.

And individuals who rent office space at The Hús take notice. "The highest compliment I can receive is that people *want* to be here, even though the space is synonymous with work," says Janeen. Comments overheard include reference to feeling as though the atmo-

sphere is cozy, inviting, and convenient, with snacks, coffee, and other unique products—some made by businesses within the Iceland Ocean Cluster—for sale at NEOC's in-house shop, The Catch.

Most important to the clusters, however, is the unique community they cultivate within their walls, whether an ocean away in Iceland or right here in Portland. Patrick says, "Thor's model builds a community of members and tenants with shared values who believe collaboration is the key to accelerate progress towards a more sustainable blue economy. We are excited to follow Iceland in this enterprise and continue contributing our small part in the growing relations between Maine and the high North Atlantic." ■

*left* The New England Ocean Cluster is equipped with two private phone booths. *Plant installations by the Plant Office. opposite, far left* With 20 glass offices, 14 workstations, 2 break-out rooms, an executive boardroom, a sleek kitchen, and more, The Hús has everything to conduct a productive and comfortable day at work. *opposite, right* A salvaged bicycle painted white makes for an eye-catching stand. White and neutral tones were used throughout the space to counter the visual weight of the black ceiling.

