

The Best Homes from This Old House

CHERYL FENTON **writer**

talk about frustration. You happily devote 55 minutes to a television show that focuses on reinventing a subject—a home, a fashion, a person, or a recipe. The process is fascinating, but then at the program's end, you're left with only a quick, five-minute snapshot of the outcome. Weeks later, you're still wondering what really happened during that show that made the stories so compelling.

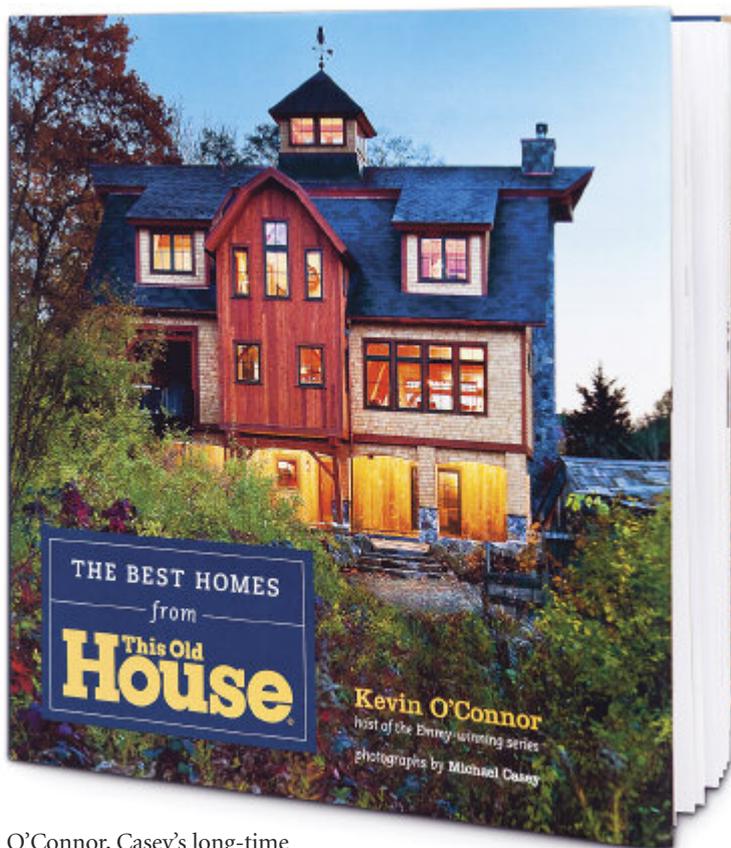
With their book *The Best Homes from This Old House* (Stewart, Tabori & Chang, 2011),

Wellesley photographer Michael Casey and Kevin O'Connor, Casey's long-time friend and an Emmy-nominated host of *This Old House*, finally satisfy our need to see what happens next. They take snapshots of some of the favorite homes that were transformed on the famous show and turn them into a compilation of riveting stories and glorious photos.

"Kevin found that as he traveled around, airports, trade shows, people asked whatever happened to that house they liked. People really wanted to know more about the finished projects," says Casey. "The book picks up where the show leaves off."

As part of America's longest-running home-improvement show, airing on PBS since 1979, the duo chronicles ten of the decade's finest transformations. The book, a labor of love that took three and a half years to complete, is rich with more than 200 stunning photographs of before-and-after interiors and exteriors, along with unique insights and stories.

According to O'Connor, the homes had to meet two criteria—they had to be from within the ten years he has served as host of the show, and he had to consider the transformations "remarkable." From finials to fireplaces, patios to porticos, Casey then turned these evolu-

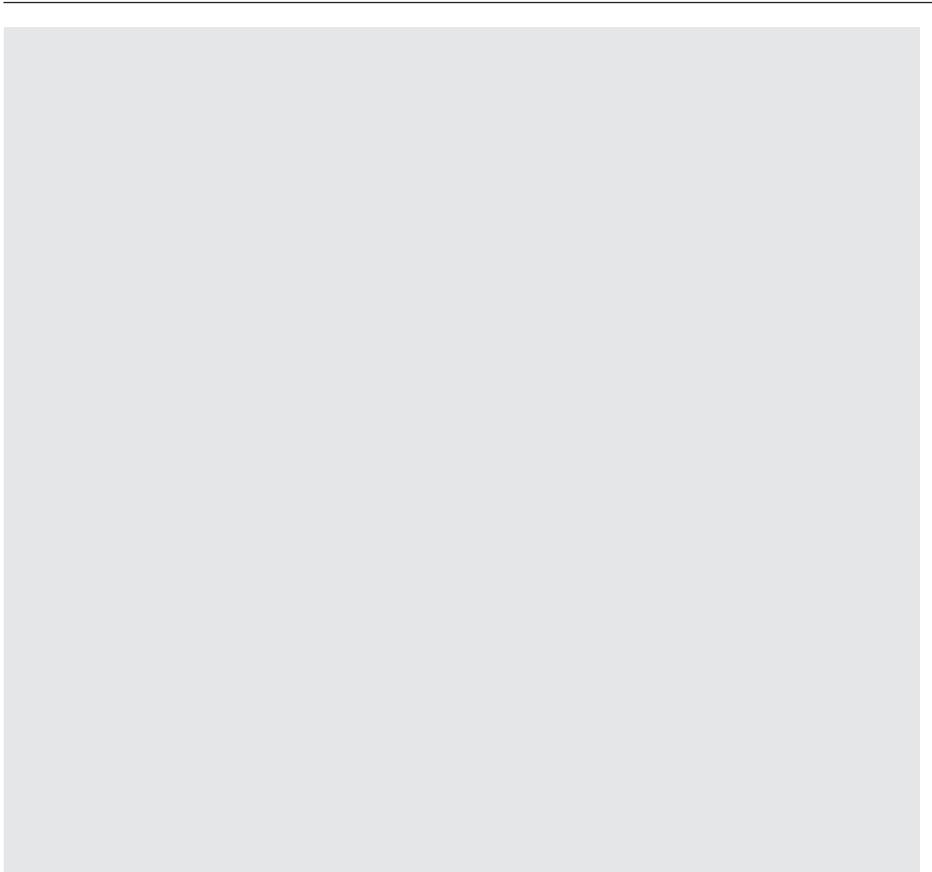


COURTESY OF STEWART, TABORI & CHANG / PHOTOGRAPHY BY MICHAEL CASEY



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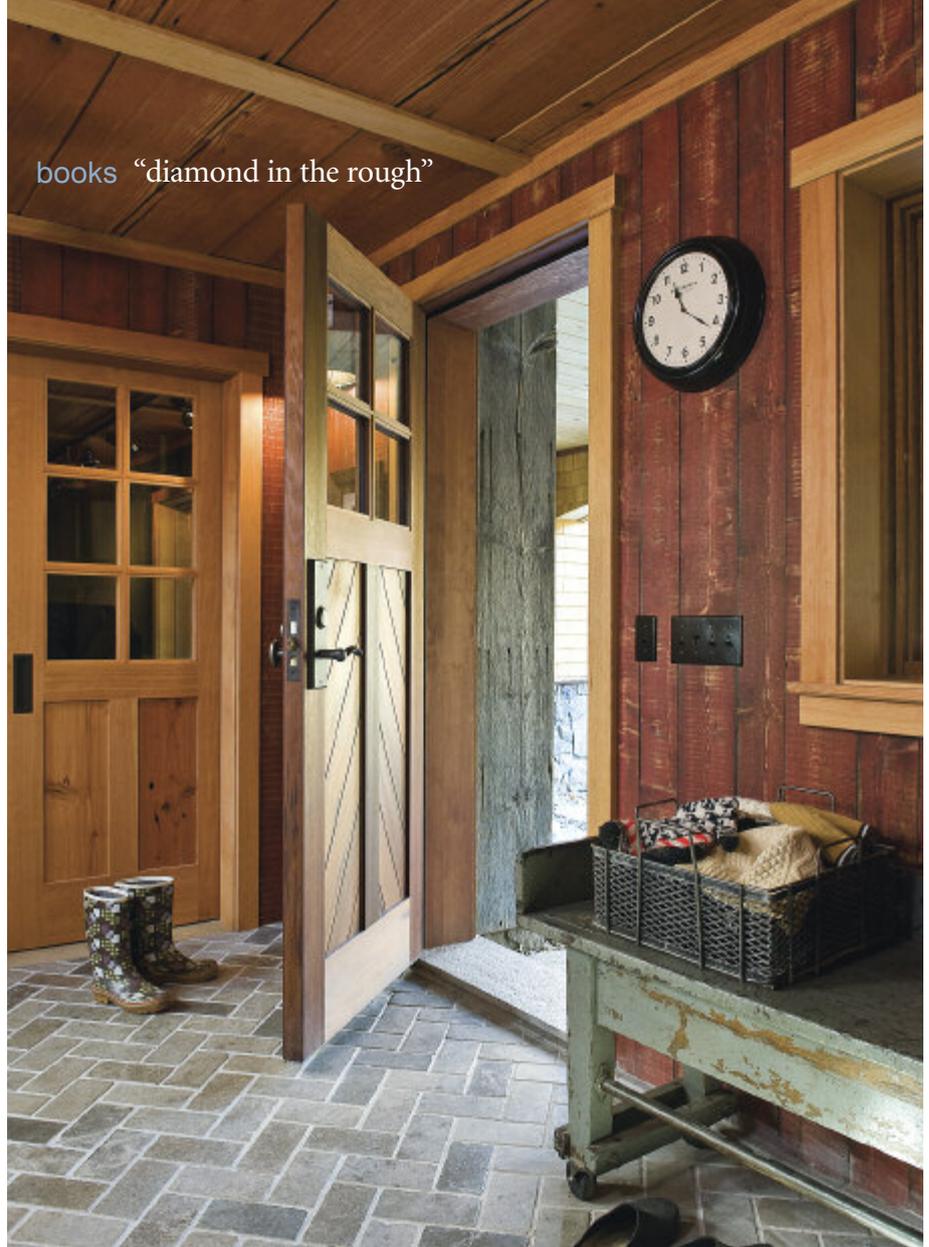
MICHAEL CASEY



tions into mini-scrapbooks of the process, his lens capturing finished details forsaken by the show.

“A lot of architectural stuff tends to be cold and overdressed. I treated these more as portraits of homes,” he says. “I studied the spaces and walked through them with [Kevin] to understand what made each house special. Collectively they’re all very warm. I wanted it to feel that the homeowner has just stood up and walked out of the shot.”

Think of the Shingle style of an 1897 Victorian in Newton or an Austin bungalow with go-green aspirations. Imagine the western flare of a Weston timber frame or a Brooklyn brownstone with a 1940s boardinghouse history. These and others are finally getting their place in the spotlight or, should we say, in the natural light.



MICHAEL CASEY

books “diamond in the rough”

“An important aspect of my photography is to use as much natural light as possible. It helps create a beautiful look and genuine feel to the room,” says Casey. “I worked hard to use [strobos] subtly to give a kiss of light or a nice fill light to bring up important features in a room.”

Complementing each photo, O’Connor weaves individual stories of everything from house hunting chaos to the discovery of a foreclosed diamond in the rough. These conversational leads give each house its own story of evolution into the final glorious renovation.

From Advertising to Aperture

Casey’s career had its own evolution, beginning with a degree in Fine Arts from the College of the Holy Cross. With sights set on a photography job upon graduation, his life took a few turns before settling behind the camera.

Casey moved to Santa Fe right after college to teach at a Native American school, where he enjoyed the Southwestern culture and rich art. By way of a brief stint in the exciting world of

Senator Bob Kerrey's presidential campaign, he returned to Boston a year later to a life in advertising. He spent 12 years working at agencies on the account and strategy side for clients like Reebok, Titleist, and McDonald's.

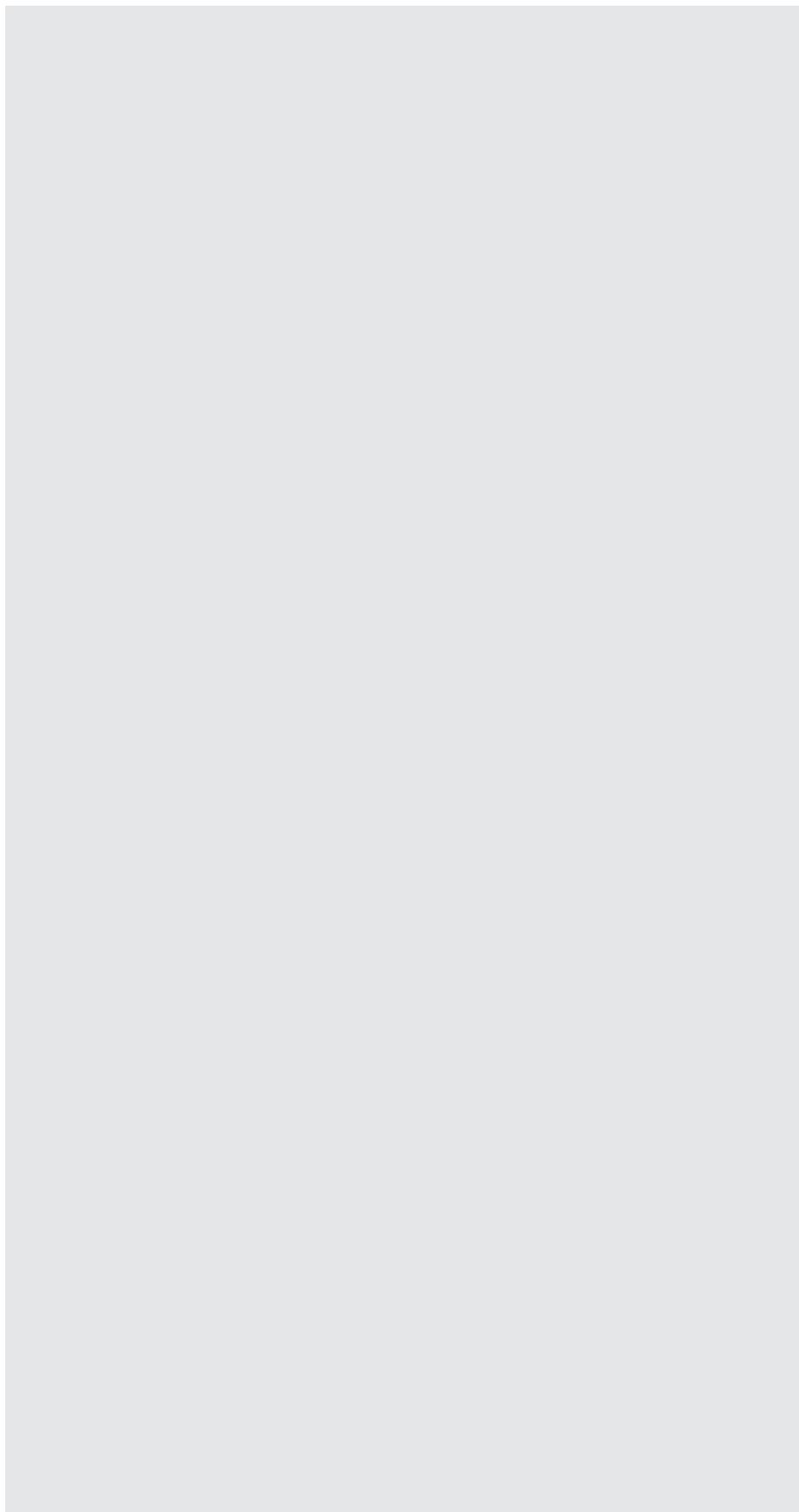
That didn't mean he had hung up his camera, however. Casey always had a place on his shoulder for his Nikon D3 or Nikon D3s.

"I was always shooting pictures," says Casey. "I knew I was good at it and wanted to make the move eventually." Armed with his intuitive understanding of relationships, branding strategies, and communication skills, he left the advertising world to start Casey Photography in 2005. "Understanding brand training from advertising has carried over beautifully to my photography. I ask the right questions to make sure we're getting the right thing. Having the ability to translate what a client wants visually is a skill."

Today his photos grace feature stories in magazines, as well as film premieres for HBO, business executive portraits, and portfolios for clients like Titleist, the Massachusetts Office of Tourism, Harvard, and TJX. Although selective on personal portraits, he'll always pick up a camera for family and friends to capture an important time on film.

The Best of the Best

The houses for *The Best Homes from This Old House* stand as Casey's favorite things he's photographed. "I still love looking through the book. It's great to see this long-





MICHAEL CASEY

books “beautiful contemporary design”

When Casey shared the book with the American Society of Media Photographers (ASMP), he received his own candid response—a recommendation to submit it to their Best of 2012. He is proud to announce that the book was selected as one of the winners this past July.

Bringing His Work Home

The Casey family has been renovat-

ing their own home since moving there in 2011. And in this case, Casey is happy to quite literally bring his work home.

“Lisa and I have had the luxury of having ten great homes to refer to. We’ve even borrowed ideas from the book to use in our own home,” he says. A Cambridge home in chapter ten gave them the idea to open up the back of their Colonial home to a more contemporary feel, with six-foot-tall window walls for a better view of a backyard reservation. This house also proves to be his favorite in the book.

“I was never a big fan of contemporary-style homes because I found them boxy and cold. The Cambridge home changed all that,” says Casey, applauding the homeowner’s thoughtful design process that involved seven different full-scale 3-D models. “The flow of the space, the materials used throughout the home, the generous use of glass on the back. I loved the light that came through, and really got an appreciation of what beautiful contemporary design was all about. This place was just so well done.”

One other thing has changed for the better—the relationship between two college buddies.

“I’d say this [book] took our friendship to a new level,” says Casey. Proof that although a foundation is strong, sometimes it takes a new undertaking to make it remarkable. [WV](#)

The Best Homes from This Old House is available at **WELLESLEY BOOKS**.

term project that actually happened. It’s beautifully published. It was quite a feat.”

An accomplishment that began as a friend helping a friend.

When O’Connor accepted the job with *This Old House*, Casey offered to help create a branding strategy for what he knew would become celebrity status for his long-time college friend. Casey didn’t realize that the next chapter in this friendship would be a book collaboration.

“I had just started my photography business,” he remembers. “Kevin finally had perspective on what he wanted the book to be...to showcase the finished homes.”

To make this idea come alive, the book needed to coordinate the work of dozens of experts in several fields over the course of years.

“I needed more than just a photographer and 250 photographs,” says O’Connor. “I needed a partner who could help me bring the idea to life, create the product, and market it successfully. Mike has a rare combination of skills that made all that possible. He was part of the entire process, from the pitch to publication. He was a collaborator, not just the photographer. When it came to the photography, he nailed it.”

“The creative process is hard and suffers from a lack of candor,” he continues. “Mike and I were completely candid with each other, as I suspect most people are with those who they’ve known and shared so much with since they were 18 years old.”