

BY ROE OSBORN



A photo from 1906 shows Naumkeag, in Stockbridge, Mass., with the original decorative shingling (1). Elaborate staging allows the crew to reach the gable peaks (2). The restoration crew replicated the curved scalloped shingles along the gable eaves (3).

Shingle-Style Restoration

On our way home from a trip to western Massachusetts this spring, my wife and I decided to visit Naumkeag, a historic house in Stockbridge known primarily for its expansive gardens. As we drove in, I saw pipe staging next to the house and immediately noticed fresh cedar shingles applied in intricate and unexpected patterns to one of the gables. As we walked through the gardens—which were as gorgeous as advertised—I kept looking over my shoulder at the crew working on the house.

When Stanford White, of architectural firm McKim, Mead & White, designed Naumkeag, he took “shingle-style” to another level. White combined brick and stone with natural wood shingles to create multiple gables, towers with conical roofs, and hip-roof dormers whose sides flare out as they meet the roof. He designed the roof shingles to curl softly from the roof plane to the wall plane without a hard intersection, and extra shingle courses were blended in to accommodate the change in exposure from roof to wall. Mark Wilson, Naumkeag’s curator from The Trustees of Reservations, told me that the roof reshingling completed in 2014 had been done in Alaskan yellow cedar.

The company on site for the sidewall shingle work was LaRochelle Construction, from South Hadley, Mass. Wilson said that the crew was fast and efficient, faithfully following photos and drawings of the original shingle work, including one shingle at the peak of the south gable that seems to stick out at an odd angle (see photo, bottom left). That gable—along with every other gable on the house—features scalloped shingles that curve gently from the surface of the gable wall to the gable fascia. A LaRochelle crew member also told me that they hand-cut each of the scalloped shingles and built up multiple layers of shingles to achieve the concave curve. The crew member said that one of the biggest challenges was setting up staging tall enough to reach the gable peaks.

The original sidewall shingles on the house were cypress. Wilson said that after consulting with a preservation architect as well as with the Massachusetts Historical Commission, The Trustees of Reservations opted for red cedars on the walls because of cedar’s availability. He said that two porches on the house had been enclosed in later renovations with the original cypress shingles left intact; in their protected environment, those shingles will forever stand as a monument to the craftsmen who built Naumkeag.

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Photos: 1. The Trustees Archive/Naumkeag; 2 & 3. Roe Osborn