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JULY-AUGUST 2019
Life strews happy accidents along every path, but some people really know how to work them.

Canadian-born interior designer Philip Mitchell and his husband, Mark Nasansky, an advertising executive, have that wondrous blend of timing and talent. The two met almost 20 years ago through mutual clients and since then have shared a modern apartment in Toronto, a six-bedroom weekend cottage an hour's drive away on Lake Erie, and an office and apartment in Manhattan.

So when a troubled 18th-century cottage on the coast of Nova Scotia came on their radar, they weren't exactly looking to add to their real estate roster. What would prompt the two to scoop it up and embark on a total renovation? The answer comes down to being the right people in the right place (not to mention a healthy obsession with the past). The pair had been vacationing in Chester, Nova Scotia, an idyllic seaside village of roughly 1,500 year-round residents on the east coast of Canada, for a few summers when they heard about the house. Known for its centuries-old architecture, wooden boat sailing, and sparkling summer weather, Chester has been a part-time haven for affluent Americans and Europeans since the late 1970s. It's also quiet and quaint—decidedly under the radar.

"This is embarrassing to say, but even though I'm from Canada, I'd never been east of Montreal," Mitchell says. "I'd never been to any of the Maritime provinces. But we totally fell in love. Chester has historic integrity and unbelievably friendly people. It's a little slice of heaven."