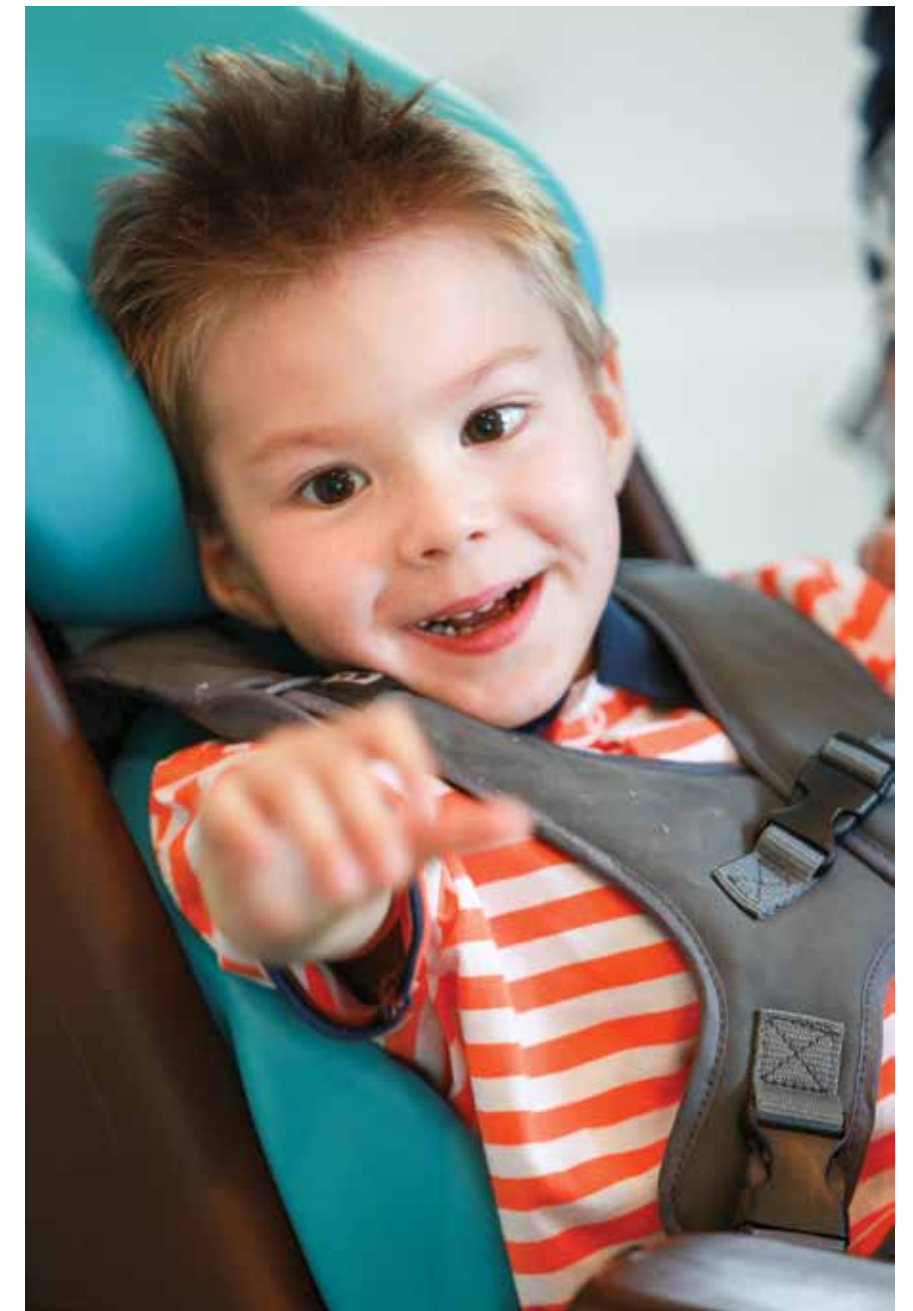




Making a Home a Haven

A Cohasset family builds a home to defy limitations

BY JENNIFER H. MCINERNEY
PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHRIS BERNSTEIN



In a sun-filled room at his brand-new Cohasset home, a boy named Boston opens his mouth wide for a spoonful of mashed-up vegetables. His parents, Lauren and Jay Pimpare, smile proudly at what might seem like an ordinary mealtime experience. But for them, each mouthful is a hard-won victory—doctors told them their son would never be able to eat without the assistance of a feeding tube. Yet here he is, now 3 years old, being spoon-fed and sipping from a glass of water held to his lips.

Boston made his way into this world amid the fanfare of the Boston Bruins' triumphant 2011 Stanley Cup win. He was born legally blind and also has cerebral palsy, a condition that causes severe muscle stiffness and immobility, among other difficulties. Though he's 3, Boston weighs only about 20 pounds and is unable to walk. Despite his impaired vision and restricted mobility, he's aware of everything that's going on around him. He can identify his mom, dad, and 4-year-old sister, Myla, by turning his head toward them and fixing an "eye gaze" on their faces.

"He's a very smart kid, but in an unforgiving body," says Lauren Pimpare.



The Pimpares' kitchen (above, left) was designed to accommodate Boston's wheelchair. Three-year-old Boston (above) was born legally blind and with cerebral palsy, but is aware of everything going on around him. Four-year-old Myla shows off her impressive artwork (left).



Eliminating the Limitations

When they brought baby Boston home to their small apartment in the city, Lauren and Jay quickly realized their living arrangements would not be adequate for raising their family of four. Given Boston's physical limitations, they worried their son would feel confined and inhibited in tight quarters.

"Our goal is for him to reach his full potential, so we needed to build an environment that would accommodate him and allow him to thrive," says Lauren. "At the same time, we wanted our daughter to feel at home and have her own special areas inside the house."

They searched the North and South Shores for houses with accessibility and a community that would fulfill the educational needs of both of their children. During the search, they happened upon a 15,000-square-foot buildable lot in Cohasset and decided to build their ideal home from scratch.

Jay, a professional engineer, and Lauren, a former operations manager for



Tufts Medical Center, spent several months exploring feasible layouts, scouring 6,000 exterior designs online, and researching the most practical materials for this unique home—the first of its kind to be constructed on the South Shore.

The final blueprint encompasses the concept of Universal Design, a functional, yet aesthetically appealing approach that's adaptable to abilities and disabilities alike.

"It was a true labor of love and an ongoing learning process for us as well as the contractors we worked with," says Jay. "We asked them to do all kinds of things differently than they'd do in a traditional house construction."

They worked closely with K&E Construction, of Hanover, and visited the site daily throughout the nine-month building process to ensure that all of their custom details were included. Naturally, they sought all the comforts of a traditional home—for the entire family. To that end, every room in the house—right down to the laundry room—has been configured with an ample turning radius for a wheelchair, so that Boston can be a part of all family activities and never feel cut off from any portion of the household. In addition, his bedroom is located on the second floor along with his parents' and older sister's rooms.

A wheelchair ramp (above) is being constructed on the back of the home for the family's use. Myla's art studio (below, left) can be converted to an elevator shaft, should a future need arise. Myla enjoys her family home's beautiful yard (below, right).





The upstairs bathroom (above) was designed for ease-of-use, with its open shower that allows for easy wheelchair clearance. A wall-mounted sink downstairs (right) has an automated, hands-free faucet. Two sets of bannisters can be found on the stairway (below). The contrasting colors will allow Boston to be able to distinguish them.

Home Sweet Home

At first glance, the Pimpares' 3,500-square-foot house resembles many other single-family homes on the South Shore—from its deep mahogany floors and granite countertops to its stone fireplaces and open floor plan.

But a closer look reveals subtle differences: 36-inch doorways with no doors, extra-wide corridors with easy-to-reach light switches, kitchen cabinets that have been raised off the floor for wheelchair clearance, and a wall-mounted bathroom sink that easily accommodates wheelchairs (instead of a pedestal sink or an under-mounted vanity).

Lauren demonstrates the hands-free, automated faucet in the downstairs bathroom, which has plenty of room for a wheelchair to turn around comfortably. "We chose this sink so that, someday, Boston can come in here and wash his hands without assistance. Turns out, it's great for our four-year-old, too. When Myla's hands are messy after painting, she can go right in and clean up all by herself."

The Pimpares' customized home has been thoughtfully designed with love and



hope built into every detail. They've considered every possibility and planned for future flexibility, depending on their son's progress. Because he's currently unable to walk, his parents carry him up and down the stairs, for now, but they hope he'll ultimately be able to take the stairs himself. The staircase has two sets of banisters, and the steps are two-toned—a trendy touch that doubles as an aid to Boston's ocular vision impairment. The tops are the same dark wood as the floors, and the vertical sections between the steps are painted a bright white. Creating this type of visual contrast will help Boston to confidently find his footing as he ascends and descends.

Of course, the house has its not-so-subtle differences, such as a space designated



Boston's therapy room (above and left) has soft, padded flooring, full-length mirrors and built-in cupboards. Here he engages in gait training, kinetic stimulation, vision therapy and daily educational lessons.

for an elevator shaft that could be opened in the future, if an elevator is needed. In the meantime, the second-story space has been transformed into Myla's personal art studio. Myla also has her own play area in a turret-style room on the first floor. A life-sized dollhouse dominates the light-filled space—and the dollhouse even has its own elevator.

Upstairs, the Pimpares have created a dedicated 14-by-18-foot therapy room with cushioned flooring, full-length mirrors, and built-in cupboards for storing learning materials and educational tools. With an eye toward Boston's ongoing development, the therapy room has been bolstered with 250-pound joists that can support a harness system to help improve his mobility. Three therapists come to the

home each week to work with him on a range of skills.

In the safety of his therapy room, Boston engages in gait training, Cuevas Medek Exercises for kinetic stimulation, vision therapy using a special light board to help strengthen his eyesight, and daily lessons derived from the Institute for the Achievement of Human Potential, in Philadelphia. His mom establishes a new theme each week, such as vehicles on wheels or vegetables, and together they focus on learning about the weekly theme from multiple perspectives, integrating mathematics, reading and word recognition and sensory experiences, among many others. For their vegetable unit, Lauren, Boston, and Myla embarked on a field trip to a local farmers' market.

Last autumn, the family went on an apple-picking excursion and collected fallen leaves.

"These are the same sort of adventures that any kid would enjoy," says Lauren.

By far, the feature that most conspicuously sets their house apart can be found down the hall in its own humidity-controlled room: the 12-by-8-foot Trainer 12 therapy pool. In fact, because of the tub's enormous size and weight, the house had to be constructed around it.

"Boston loves the therapy pool," says his father. "The 92-degree water helps to loosen his stiff muscles so that he can comfortably move his body."

While he takes part in more than a dozen types of therapy sessions each week, two of Boston's favorites are horseback



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HELPING HANDS

Throughout the process of constructing their customized home, the Pimpares relied on the expertise of several local companies to provide the appropriate materials and equipment to meet their unique needs.

"After hearing our son's story and about the house we were trying to build, many local companies provided us with reduced rates on their services or goods," Jay explains. For example, after they'd selected the flooring for the all-important therapy room upstairs, Lauren received a very helpful call from Ed McPhee, at Abbey Carpet in Weymouth.

"Our order had come in and he told me he'd found an even better product that would be more suitable. It had a thicker, more durable padding and it was exactly what we needed," Lauren says. Even though the new flooring came with a higher price tag, the company charged them the lower cost of the original flooring choice.

Similarly helpful advice came from Jean Hayes, a designer at Hingham Lumber, who recommended Medallion Cabinetry for their kitchen cabinets. This particular product line provides foot clearance for a wheelchair, and will enable Boston to roll right up to open drawers and cabinets.

Other partners in the realization of their home included: Northern Lights Landscape in Norwell; Budget Blinds in Hingham; and plumbing fixtures from Snow & Jones Showroom in Norwell.



The Pimpares' home had to be constructed around this 12-by-18-foot Trainer 12 therapy pool. The 92-degree heat of the water helps loosen Boston's stiff muscles so that he can comfortably move his body.

riding at Booth Hill Farm in North Scituate, and music therapy at South Shore Conservatory, in Hingham.

After an afternoon nap, Boston picks up the thread of conversation. At the mention of music, his adorable face lights up.

"He likes to 'tickle' the drums," says Lauren. Boston confirms her statement with a nod, and adds, "I like. I like Eve." (His music therapist at the Conservatory is Eve Montague.)

"What else do you like?" asks Lauren,

as she plants a kiss on his cheek. "I like...kisses," he replies slowly, which earns him another kiss.

"And you like riding your horse, right?" Boston bounces on Lauren's hip, mimicking riding in a saddle.

"I like...Holly," he says with a huge smile, referring to his favorite horse at the farm.

After only a month living in their new home, Lauren and Jay have already noticed considerable strides in Boston's progress.

"Moving into this house has enabled us to do so much more with him," says Lauren.

Indeed, the whole family has benefitted from an overall improved quality of life.

"This house was made for us—we're never moving," says Jay. 🍀

To learn more about the Pimpare family's story or to make a contribution to their cause, visit the family's crowd funding page: **Help Brighten Boston's Future**, www.gofundme.com/ob8vs.

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