

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

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U.S. | NEW YORK | NY REAL ESTATE COMMERCIAL

A House Made for a Sailor

A nautically themed Westbrook, Conn., home is on the market for \$1.975 million



1 of 13

Leo Kroes has always loved the water. After retiring from his job in the Netherlands at the age of 55, he decided to retire in the U.S.. He also bought a 42-foot boat and sailed across the Atlantic

By **ERIN MCCARTHY**

May 20, 2015 5:44 p.m. ET

When Leo Kroes retired from his job in the Netherlands in 1999 at the age of 55, he had big plans lined up: “I wanted to get in some serious time for serious sailing.”

So he bought a 42-foot boat and became a trans-Atlantic sailor, navigating around Europe with his wife and crossing the ocean from the Canary Islands to the Caribbean in 1999.

But those plans also included buying a home in the U.S. that would easily accommodate his love for the water. Sailing is in the blood of Mr. Kroes, a former executive at consumer-goods company Unilever.

“My grandfather was a captain of a canal boat,” he said. “I got his genes.”

Mr. Kroes, now 70 years old, and his wife, Anne Rose Kroes, 69, bought a property in Westbrook, Conn., for \$760,000 in 1999. It was about 100 yards from where his boat was berthed at the local marina and was surrounded by water: the Long Island Sound and a channel that connects the sound with the neighboring marina.

“I wanted to have the boat at least a walking distance from the house,” Mr. Kroes said.



Beyond the pool, there's Long Island Sound. PHOTO: WILLIAM PITT SOTHEBY'S INTERNATIONAL REALTY

They tore down the existing property and hired Dutch architect Peter van Gijn to design their new home. For Mr. van Gijn, designing

the property required not only making the best use of the water views, but combining Dutch architectural style with American building customs.

“It made sense to do as [many] things the American way without changing the European look,” Mr. van Gijn said. “It was a bit of puzzle.”

That meant building the home with a steel frame, even though American builders typically use wood frames. He also left the walls either completely closed or completely made of glass, rather than “punch holes” in walls to fit in smaller windows.

As a result, the home is filled with floor-to-ceiling windows, drawing in light and the water's reflection. Both the master bedroom and dining room have semicircular, 180-degree bow windows, creating a panorama of the water stretching from the south and to the west.

“When you walk through the door, you get a bit of wow factor with the magnificent views,” Mr. van Gijn said.

The home consists of two identical rectangular “boxes,” or wings, that sit at a 120-degree angle to each other, allowing for simple construction yet with a modern design.

Outdoors, the architect added a semicircular terrace with stainless steel railings reminiscent of a boat-deck hardware. “It gives a really nautical look to it,” he said.

While the home was being built, Mr. and Mrs. Kroes had a very nautical lifestyle as it was. They lived on their boat—which they would sail to the Caribbean for winter—and in their other home in upstate New York. They moved into the Westbrook home in 2002, and in 2006 bought a larger boat—a 48-footer—that they used for trips to the Caribbean.

For Mr. Kroes, the functionality in the home's open design and large windows extends outside. He now owns a smaller, 33-foot boat that he uses for day sailing—and can get to in a matter of minutes.

“When the conditions are right, I walk to my boat and sort of sail in front of my house for a few hours,” he said. The Westbrook home is listed for \$1.975 million with William Pitt Sotheby's International Realty.

Mr. and Mrs. Kroes recently bought a property in Hilton Head, S.C., where they will spend their winters instead of sailing to the Caribbean, and they also still spend time at their home in upstate New York and in Europe.

But for a sailor at heart, the Connecticut home's location can't be beat.

“It's right next to the boat and it has a 180-degree water view,” Mr. Kroes said. “As a sailor, that's the place where you would like to be.”

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