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July/August 2010

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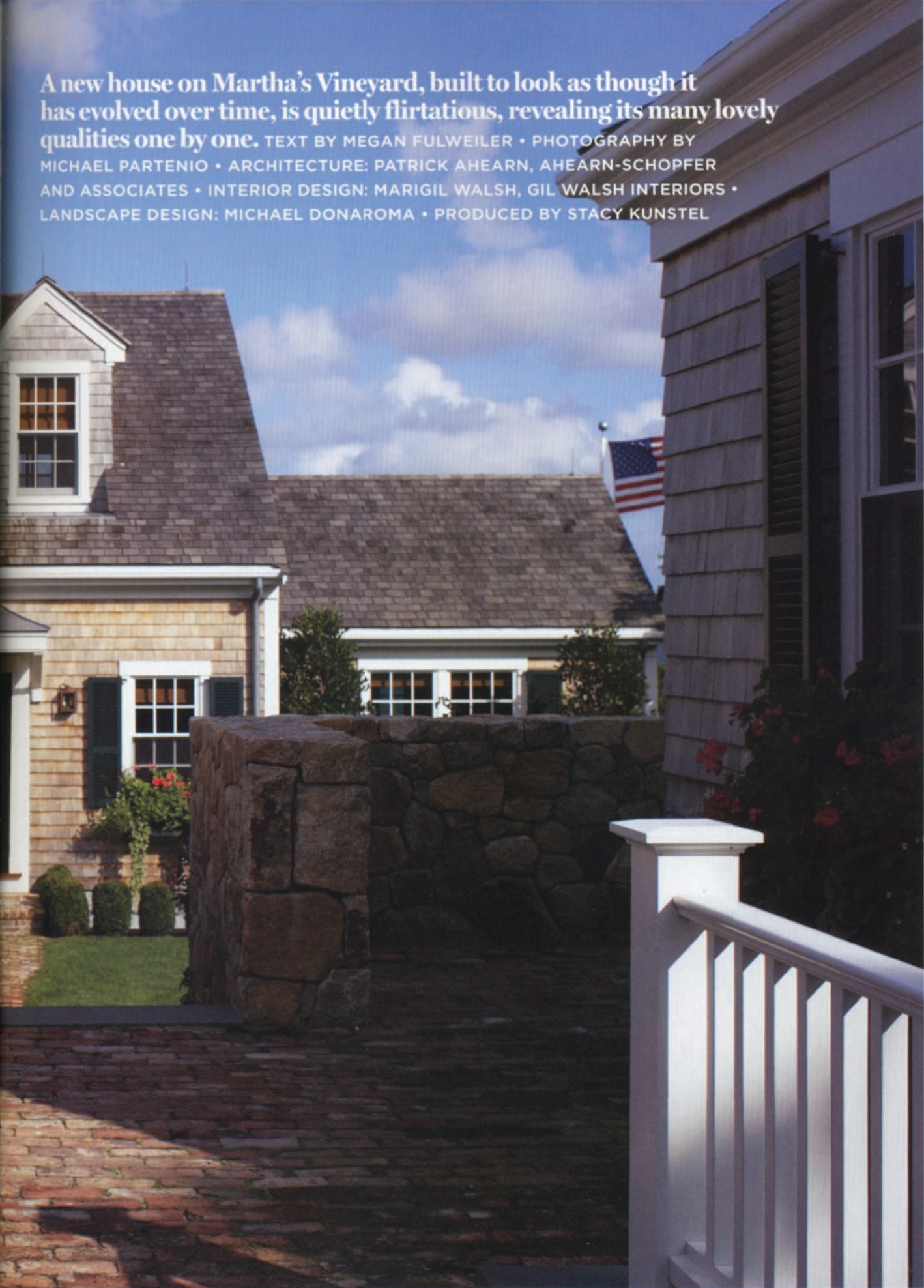
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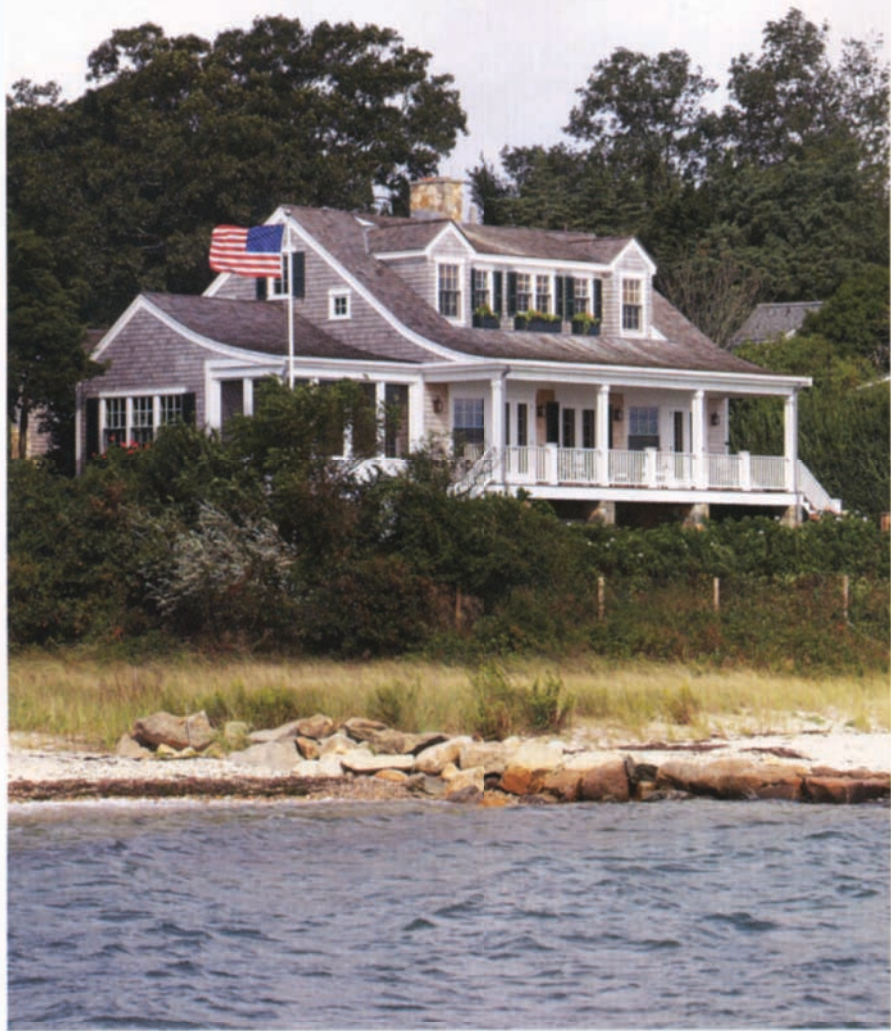


The guest house (left) conveniently links to the main house. The pottery studio sits to the right. Dry-set fieldstone walls and antique bricks help blur the home's age.

A new house on Martha's Vineyard, built to look as though it has evolved over time, is quietly flirtatious, revealing its many lovely qualities one by one.

TEXT BY MEGAN FULWEILER • PHOTOGRAPHY BY
MICHAEL PARTENIO • ARCHITECTURE: PATRICK AHEARN, AHEARN-SCHOPFER
AND ASSOCIATES • INTERIOR DESIGN: MARIGIL WALSH, GIL WALSH INTERIORS •
LANDSCAPE DESIGN: MICHAEL DONAROMA • PRODUCED BY STACY KUNSTEL





Who doesn't love a surprise? The book that ends with a twist or the gift that arrives on an ordinary day is made better by being unexpected. Savvy designers are mindful of this. That's why the most memorable garden paths wander, rather than shoot arrow-like from here to there; why the houses we love most are often those that reveal their charms slowly, rather than making a grand statement the minute we pull into the driveway. First-time visitors to this Vineyard Haven retreat have, no doubt, uttered audible sighs of delight.

Innovative architect Patrick Ahearn—well-known in these parts for his ability to devise homes that speak to the seaside vernacular—has designed a house that takes its own sweet time to disclose its charms. First, you must park, scoot beneath the pretty arbor and pass between the spacious two-



White walls reflect the light, while furnishings and accessories add color and personality. The wife's pottery sets the tone for the family room. *Facing page top:* Architect Patrick Ahearn leaves nothing to chance. "Even the flagpole site was carefully choreographed," he says.

bedroom guest house and garage (which is really only masquerading as a garage, but more on that later).

"The home's attributes aren't visible from the road," explains Ahearn. "They're made apparent as you step across the upper terrace, through the fieldstone wall, down the steps onto the grassy lower level." Only then are you treated to the Nantucket-style dormers, the classic dark green shutters and exuberant window boxes.

Befitting the architect's intent, it's the very picture of a house that appears to have evolved over time. The master suite wing to the left of the front entrance and the smaller wing to the right, which holds the study and screened porch, give the impression of being elements added over time. "Applied history," says the architect.

And there's plenty more to come. "Open the front door and the house unfolds," Ahearn says. "It's sitting on the edge of an embankment. You're look-

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ing straight through. Right away you see kids from the neighboring yacht club out in their sailboats, and the ferry cruising back and forth. All this activity makes the water feel alive."

For the owners, who've had a lengthy love affair with the area, the house and its surroundings epitomize summer. They value their Maryland and Florida homes, but only here do they enjoy bracing sea air and waves of hydrangeas.

"We envisioned the quintessential summer cottage for them," Ahearn says.

The original cape that once claimed the spectacular (but also somewhat tight) site thrilled previous summer people, too. Built in the 1950s, though, the outdated place was no match for the new owners' busy lifestyle. With married daughters, grandchildren and myriad friends expected, twenty-first-century amenities were mandatory. Ahearn used the razed cape's footprint as a base for his livable design that anchors the new house to the rock outcropping with a skillful use of stone and brick.

Interior designer Marigil Walsh was recommended to the owners and it had to be kismet. At the time, Walsh was with Astorino in North Palm Beach, Florida. During the process, however, she launched her own firm—Gil Walsh Interiors—and completed the project. As it turned out, not only has Walsh had a house of her own on the Vineyard for years, her Florida residence is mere blocks from that of the owners. "It was perfect," says Walsh. "We could meet during the winter and then also be on the Vineyard together. My clients moved in Memorial Day weekend. We spent the summer seeing to their punch list and gathering accessories."

The home's getaway-for-all-ages role—pets welcome—dictated a casual decor that reflected the owners' artistic passions and travels. "When you choose simple, functional furnishings with stand-out details it complements the architecture, which is what we wanted to do," says Walsh. "The unity creates an art form."

From day one, the wife was deeply involved. Prominent displays of her pottery—thrown and fired in her on-site studio (remember the faux garage?)—are the key to the palette. A medley of aqua, beige and raspberry tones against walls washed creamy white conjure summer.



Windsor chairs and a reproduction chandelier crafted in Vermont keep company with an Asian altar table that acts as a sideboard. *Facing page bottom:* Hydrangeas and geraniums bring a classic air to the garden.



Beadboard and stainless steel are ideal old and new kitchen contrasts. *Facing page top:* A low-set bedroom window grabs extra light and views. *Facing page bottom:* The passing ferry is a visual bonus all summer.



As planned, every setting encourages relaxation. The living room is kitted out with a hunker-down rolled-arm sofa and a rugged coffee table at the correct height for putting your feet up. "It's actually a copy of a tavern table made to coffee-table size," says Walsh, who is obviously adept at balancing comfort and style. An heirloom patchwork quilt that had been snoozing in a closet has been reborn as a throw. And an antique stand—once a shoe-polishing box—corrals books and magazines. On the room's opposite side, a weathered cupboard displays a stash of the wife's stunning pottery.

The dining room exudes a similar flavor with an antique quilt—this one from Missouri—covering the table. Reproduction Windsor-style chairs, crafted by Rhode Island's Warren Chair Works, stand ready for company. And when the guest list swells, the Asian altar table along the windows becomes a handy serve-yourself buffet. "Asian pieces go as well with American and English furnishings as they do contemporary art," Walsh says. To further a warm mood for nighttime dining, English candlestick lamps light the corners the chandelier can't reach. A reproduction American hooked rug adds a ruddy splash of color. "Every room needs a touch of red," the designer insists.

The nearby kitchen slips easily into the theme with its creamy walls, another parade of beautiful utilitarian pottery and a homey cotton runner emblazoning the floor. Furniture-like details give the cabinetry character. Dark granite countertops, a counterpoint to the pale walls, add a note of elegance. High above the cooking station, a fish plate—a friend's gift—references New England's love of blue and white porcelain.

All the bedrooms appropriately sport four-posters. But an upstairs bedroom—one of two—with a lofty ceiling has earned the most impressive bedframe. Old-fashioned beadboard paneling traces the outline of the dormers, upping the coziness. In fact, the owners like this sweet space so much they sometimes relocate here for a night. Testimony to the appealingly timeless design, every room in this harbor-side house provides a reason to linger. •

Resources For more information about this home, see page 144.



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