

WHEN ARCHITECT PATRICK AHEARN SAW THE EDGARTOWN house he was preparing to restore, he didn't see what most other people would see: a family home, set on a peninsula that juts into Eel Pond, waiting for a much-needed update. In his mind's eye, Ahearn saw the original roots of the structure, a 1920s fishing camp. A century ago, as today, fishing camps were spectacularly simple, in construct and in message: People stole away to the waterside camps to escape, disconnect, tromp through nature, and return home feeling renewed.

Ahearn, a principal of Ahearn/Schopfer Associates, located in Boston's Back Bay and Edgartown, also saw the water, of course—a saltwater inlet known as Eel Pond and, beyond it, the Atlantic.

Between the history of the fishing camp and the gorgeous waterfront, Ahearn knew what he calls his "script" for the project: build the gracious summer home his clients wanted, but also reflect the century-old spirit of the original working camp and, along the way, make the structure look as if it had always been there.

"I call it non-ego driven architecture," Ahearn says. "It's like a ghost in the night; you never knew I was there."

Ahearn is known for historically motivated architecture, and his Edgartown clients shared his dream. Together, they developed their home's



Architect Patrick Ahearn renovates a 1920s fishing camp on the saltwater inlet of Eel Pond on Martha's Vineyard. Ahearn created a gracious cottage atmosphere while maintaining the look of the old cottage camp.



# Updating a Classic

ARCHITECT PATRICK AHEARN OF AHEARN/SCHOPFER  
ASSOCIATES RENOVATES AN OLD FISHING CAMP ON  
THE ISLAND OF MARTHA'S VINEYARD.

BY MARY GRAUERHÖLZ | PHOTOGRAPHY BY GREG PREMURU



unique story. “We came up with this concept,” Ahearn recalls. “As you arrive, you go down a sandy lane, not quite sure where you are. Then you drop into the parking court and arrive at a collage of buildings, which could be construed as the former fishing camp, an old Vineyard cottage, and perhaps a boat shed.”

In reality, the collage consists of a four-bedroom main house, a



carriage house for guests, and a boathouse. The outdoor spaces—beautiful flower gardens that the owners dote on, an arbor, and patios with stone fireplaces—are crowned by a courtyard. These exterior spaces, Ahearn says, establish the character that he and his clients wanted to achieve: a seaside cottage blended with a workingman’s boathouse and boat shed.

Ahearn’s clients, a couple with three college-age children, also love the water and wanted to take full advantage of it without creating a large footprint. “They wanted a better relationship with the water, but something that had more of a cottage vernacular,” Ahearn says. Water views are plentiful, through large-paned windows inside the house and also from strategically placed points on the property, such as a view of the Atlantic captured



**TOP:** The kitchen is clean and bright with a center island that seats six. The commercial stove is backed in herring bone patterned brick. **ABOVE:** The stone patio offers dining and seating areas with an outdoor stone fireplace. **OPPOSITE:** The living room and dining room open onto one another. The room’s box ceiling enhances the cottage feel.



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"OUR OLD HOUSES STILL FEEL LIKE OLD HOUSES AND HAVE THE PATINA OF AGE; YET OUR NEW HOUSES ALSO HAVE A SENSE OF WARMTH, CHARACTER, AND SCALE," SAYS ARCHITECT PATRICK AHEARN OF AHEARN/SCHOPFER ASSOCIATES.

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ABOVE: Guest bedrooms are outfitted in yellow and blue fabrics, which add to the cottage feel. A French door leads to a private deck with views of the water. An antique armoire in a light pine and white wicker enhance the cottage design. OPPOSITE: The master bathroom has a soaking tub and separate shower. The color palette is gray and white to reflect the water on foggy, overcast days. The vanity with a Carrara marble countertop offers ample storage space.

by the portico that connects the main house and carriage house.

With respect for the past, Ahearn left many parts of the original building intact, while renovating and recycling some of its best features. Many of the original home's low, embellished ceilings were left as they were. The coffered ceiling in the living room is the original, embellished with trim and molding.

Several new structures blend seamlessly with the old. Ahearn added wings to the main house, and created a new carriage house, boathouse, and breezeway that connects the carriage house and main house. "It was basically building a new house on the bones of an old house," he says. The floors throughout are fir, with rich tones of honey. Some of the original flooring remains, the planks dotted with cut nails. The effect is very warm and cozy, "even if it's raining out," Ahearn says. In the summer, it converts to the easy mode of indoor/outdoor living.

The overall effect is sumptuous yet beautifully simple. It would be a challenge to guess where the original house ends and new parts begin, so smooth are the transitions.

Ahearn takes pride in his firm's conviction to let houses, whether modern or antique, be themselves: "Our old houses still feel like old houses and have the patina of age; yet our new houses also have a sense of warmth, character, and scale."

The kitchen, on the first floor, was a garage in its former life. Today, it is a spacious room, its light-toned walls washed in sunshine, with shots of color provided by fresh flowers and colorful ceramic platters. The nearby living room includes a cozy study. The jewel of the first floor, though,



ABOVE: The home appears as a series of outbuildings which could be taken as the former fishing camp, an old Vineyard cottage, and boat shed. A white picket fence, gate, and arbor enclose a cutting garden. BELOW: The breezeway is decorated with a compass. OPPOSITE: Ahearn incorporated an outdoor shower into the garden, which helps define the space.

is the two porches: a four-season porch off the living room, accessible through French doors and with a deck above it, and another porch off the kitchen, with a beach stone fireplace and glass on three walls. This is the family's place for breakfast and lounging. The bluestone floor, sprinkled with pebbles, recalls the shoreline outdoors.

The stairway to the second floor is lit by irregular windows, a subtle reflection of cottage style that Ahearn had seen in the original attic. "We saw the relation of the windows and quite liked it," he says, "so we expressed the attic windows in the staircase."

"On the second floor, which was more like an attic, we opened up the ceilings," Ahearn says. Three cozy bedrooms in washes of aqua and blue are like being in grandma's house, if grandma had been a well-heeled, gracious lady of the house. All three bedrooms have access to a deck that overlooks the ocean. "They all become mini-suites," Ahearn says.





The outdoor landscape is dotted with places that are so private they are almost indiscernible. In the master bedroom is a sweet French door, mahogany with a spar varnish, which leads to a private garden with a patio, fireplace, and hot tub. The outdoor shower is in the garden. "The garden helps define the area as its own space," Ahearn says. "This is all working off the master suite." The entire area is tucked behind the boathouse, which, as Ahearn says, "acts as foil to protect the space from the parking court."

Just as the landscape has community space interlaced with pockets of privacy, the interior offers lots of choices for the comfort of alone time, or the conviviality of gathering as a group. The main house alone has six public gathering spots. "You have all these places to go," Ahearn says, "as opposed to a big great room, and everyone has to sit there."

While privacy is honored, the house is built for extended family, clearly able to accommodate a large number of people. The two-story guesthouse is perfect for visitors. Upstairs are two bed-

rooms, a large living room, an open kitchen, and stunning water views. In the garage, below, one bay houses a Ping-Pong table. The guesthouse has its own outdoor shower, as well as a small claw-foot tub from the original structure. An outdoor porch, with a stone fireplace and barbecue grille, extends off the guesthouse, a perfect gathering place.

Planned to look unplanned, the property has all the pleasing surprises of the unexpected. "Everything is done in a nonsymmetrical way," Ahearn says. "It was a fishing camp that grew, and it remains a collection of buildings that look like they have always been here. If someone asks, they absolutely believe all the buildings were right here. The fact is, there was only one." ■

**FOR MORE INFORMATION, SEE  
MARKETPLACE PAGE 134.**

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