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ARCHITECTURE

## James V. Righter

It's been said that "art imitates life," and that's exactly the case in the work of Boston-based architect James Volney Righter. | Righter is the senior partner of Albert, Righter and Tittmann Architects and has been designing inventive, irreverent, thoughtful, practical houses in New England for some thirty-six years. "Like his houses, Righter makes any person comfortable, through his modesty, graciousness and youthful freshness and wonder," says Kim Lovejoy of *Traditional Building*. "He has



NICK WHEELER

a zestful appreciation for individuality."

Righter's extremely varied and often unconventional body of work, which critic Robert Campbell has called "astonishingly beautiful" and "familiar enough to be liked, but strange enough to stay interesting," has been recognized nationally as being at the forefront of residential design. The dozens of houses Righter has built across New England and the Northeast are not distinguishable by any common style or formula. Instead, each represents a fresh, artful, very individual response to its site,

context and owners' wants and needs.

Righter's work has appeared in national publications such as *House and Garden*, *House Beautiful*, *Architectural Digest*, *Progressive Architecture*, *Metropolitan Home*, *Traditional Home*, *The New York Times*, *Town and Country* and *Esquire*, as well as in New England-based publications such as *Boston Magazine's Home and Garden* and *The Boston Globe*. He has also been featured in more than twenty books, from Charles Jencks's *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture* (Rizzoli, 1977) to fellow inductee Jeremiah Eck's *The Distinctive Home: A Vision of Timeless Design* (Taunton Press, 2003).

A Fellow of the American Institute of Architects and longtime member of the Boston Society of Architects, Righter is the recipient of numerous honors, including some ten AIA regional awards, and he was chosen by *Progressive Architecture* as one of five

architects whose work represents an important direction in house design. "Above all," says fellow architect James H. Crissman, "there is a freshness and individuality to Jim Righter's design, which is the mark of all first-rate architects." Righter has received two Boston Society of Architecture awards, a Builder's Choice Design Award, and three honor awards from the American Wood Council. His work has also been exhibited and published by the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) in New York.

Righter's commitment to original conceptions of



PREVIOUS PAGE: AN EXTERIOR VIEW OF A HARBOR COTTAGE ON THE NEW YORK COAST. ABOVE LEFT: MARINE BOUYS HANG FROM THE ROOF OF THE PINWHEEL HOUSE IN CAMDEN, MAINE. ABOVE RIGHT: THE DRAWING ROOM IN A PENOBSCOT BAY, MAINE, HOUSE. BELOW: STABLE HOUSE IN HUDSON RIVER VALLEY, NEW YORK.

architectural design has been matched by a commitment to teaching and community involvement. He was on the Yale faculty for many years as a visiting critic in architectural design and was named as one of the university's "Ten Best Teachers." He continues to mentor younger architects, several of whom have gone on to create successful firms of their own, and intentionally keeps his firm small so as to foster collaborative design.

At the core of Righter's work is the idea of "simple materials, artfully treated"—taking the same care with ordinary objects that others lavish on fancier materials. For one project, he studded mantels and lintels with Italian 500 lire coins. He festooned another house with marine buoys picked up from the local hardware store. Roxana Robinson noted in

*House and Garden* that "ideas, ruminations and fantasies play an important part in Righter's work. Much of his design functions in the realm of intuition where things seem half-known but deeply felt."

Sometimes it's poetry, sometimes it's a pun. Righter delights in both.



ROBERT BENSON