New England Home CELEBRATING FINE DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURE

JULY/AUGUST 2009

SUMMER JOYS SWIMMING IN A SEA OF WHITE A QUINTESSENTIAL CAPE COD HAVEN LET-COLOR HEAT UP THE SEASON

PLUS: A MATTAPOISETT COTTAGE GAINS FRESH SOPHISTICATION



Three-Part Harmony

Borrowing an idea from old New England farms, an architect converts his ramshackle cottage in Mattapoisett, Massachusetts, into a trio of small, connected structures for an easygoing summer getaway.

TEXT BY CAROLINE CUNNINGHAMPHOTOGRAPHY BY NAT REAARCHITECTURE: JIM RIGHTER, ALBERT,RIGHTER & TITTMANLANDSCAPE DESIGN: SUSANNAH DAVISCONTRACTOR: RICH NEAL, R.F. NEAL AND SONSBUILDERSPRODUCED BY KYLE HOEPNER



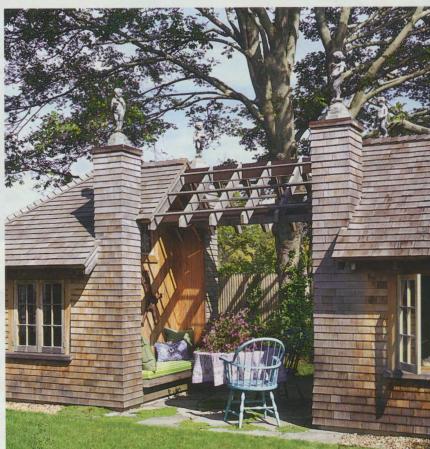
First time visitors to Mattapoisset would be forgiven for thinking they'd inadvertently wandered into a perfectly realized stage set, but even the most elaborate Hollywood production couldn't capture all the details of scale or setting that make this charming Massachusetts village overlooking Buzzard's Bay so special. Streets in the town center are

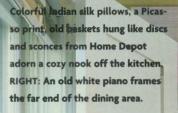




CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: The porch, with its rug, framed Braque poster and reading lamp, feels like a room; statues representing the Four Seasons top the playhouse; the master bedroom has a decorative barn door; a pergola in the garden invites summer dining.







organized on a grid and lined with small houses, many of which bear plaques that give the name of original owner from the nineteenth century, and graceful homes once occupied by ship captains ring the harbor. Residents gather throughout the summer in Shipyard Park on the waterfront for concerts performed in a white wooden bandstand, but these idyllic scenes aren't restricted to the warmer months: the town is vibrant, flourishing and very real, all year round. hen architect Jim Righter and his wife, Sandy, decided that they wanted to create what Righter calls "a laboratory for a different kind of life," away from their busy Boston home but close enough for quick weekend getaways, they found what they were looking for right here, first in the village itself, which was welcoming and neighborly from the start, and then in a ramshackle house. "It was the smallest and most run-down place on the street,"



says Righter with unmistakable pride. This assessment was shared by their contractor, Rich Neal, who described the post-and-beam frame of the old structure as being "out of level, out of plumb and out of square," which is carpenter speak for a complete disaster.

But for Righter, this was part of the challenge and part of the fun. He's not one of the most respected and admired residential architects around for nothing; he and his partners, Jacob Albert and John Tittmann, have been de-

Righter borrowed a motif from old New England farms.

signing houses along the East Coast and beyond for decades. With help from architect (and nextdoor neighbor) Libby Turowski, Righter

brought his usual imaginative and exacting vision to the task of building a space here to accommodate a very specific dream of how he and Sandy felt that life should be—



simple, lovely, comfortable and easy to share with family and friends.

Righter borrowed a motif from old New England farms, which often followed a pattern he describes as "big house, little house, back house and barn" in their buildings. Ambiguous grace notes reflect Righter's lighthearted, intelligent perspective.

But, as he cheerfully admits, there was no room for a big house, so he just ignored the first part altogether and went with the final three components in his master plan. The "little house" in front incorporates the original post-andbeam frame and contains the library as well as upstairs guestrooms. The kitchen and dining area, along with a woodpaneled room that feels like the cabin of a small boat and provides a quiet space for television and reading, sit in the "back house." The "barn," defined by a decorative barn door on the exterior facade that is just that—purely decorative—holds the spacious master bedroom that is filled with diffused light from an oculus in the ceiling.

ighter always includes ambiguous grace notes in his work, details that reflect his lighthearted and intelligent perspective and that make his projects sing in an individual way. These unexpected details are everywhere in his Mattapoisset home, but perhaps best realized in the hallway that runs the entire length of the house, from the front door to the master bedroom. The long passage, which includes ersatz doors along the stairwell, is punctuated by a white upright piano, the placement of which seems idiosyncratic and slightly confusing, until one ventures forward and discovers that the piano also defines one wall of the dining area.

It's a design conceit that is subtle and clever, and it exemplifies Righter's idea that every room should be multipurpose, with myriad places to curl up with a good book or to share a long and laughter-filled meal. For example, the master bedroom is also a book-filled study that has accom-

A Robert Motherwell drawing hangs above shelves filled with favorite novels and art books, pottery and a small sculpture of two dancers that Jim fashioned from driftwood. FACING PAGE: The Righters often begin and end the day reading by the fire.

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The blue-and-cream quilt came from Jim's grandmother, but looks modern and chic. Shelves displaying favorite books and collections stand in for a headboard.





The entire house, inside and out, is infused with the vibrant and creative spirit of its owners.

modated cocktail parties on cold winter nights, as well as a place for cozy sleepovers with grandchildren. An office for the computer sits concealed behind what looks like a closet door. The

architecture, along with the chic and deliberate—though still casual—interior design (for the most part, an arrangement of furnishings and objects that the Righters have collected over the years against a backdrop of soothing neutrals and pale greens punctuated with spots of bright color) makes the home feel light and expansive throughout.

The interior tells only half the story. The gorgeous garden is also an essential part of the narrative. The porch, with its sturdy outdoor rug, reading light and framed prints along the wall is a favorite gathering spot. A rustic pergola, only steps away from both the porch and the street, feels very much apart from the main house, and is used all summer long for al fresco dining. An extraordinary pavilion, named "Devilla Delilah" in honor of a granddaughter (whimsical names for traditional areas are a Righter trademark) is a shingled confection, pulled apart to create three distinct spaces: two small buildings and a central seating nook that is irresistible for reading, talking or an afternoon nap. Landscape designer Susannah Davis worked closely with Jim and Sandy to organize the garden's varied textures and colors in what she describes as "a wonderful collaboration to which we all brought the very best we had."

> he entire house, inside and out, is infused with the vibrant and creative spirit of its owners, showing off Sandy and Jim's sense of fun and possibility

at every turn. *Dum Vivimus Vivamus*, the Latin phrase carved above the piano, means, "While we are living, let us live"—a perfect motto for the house, and for the way Sandy and Jim live here in Mattapoisset, which is to say, beautifully and well, every day. **NEH**

RESOURCES For more information about this home, see page 180.