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New England Roots • On a Maine island, summer folks keep a low profile • Writer Carol Gilligan finds a new voice in her Berkshire garden • Coastal fishing shacks inspire a modern guest complex • A serial renovator settles down in an urban penthouse with roof terrace 



BUILDING ON MAINE'S
Vinalhaven is not for
the faint of heart, but
a view like the one
from the porch of a
new summer retreat
is its own reward.
Story, Page 90

PHOTOGRAPH
BY BRIAN VANDEN BRINK

AT HIS CLIENTS'
insistence, architect
Jacob Albert designed
the Vinalhaven cottage
to be as unobtrusive
as possible by keeping
it close to the tree
line yet still commanding
an ocean view.





GOOD NEIGHBOR

On a
Maine island
where
fishing
boats
outnumber
yachts,
architecture
requires
a low-key
approach

WRITTEN BY
Edgar Allen Beem

PHOTOGRAPHED BY
Brian Vanden Brink



A CUSTOM-MADE mahogany door and striped floors in fir and walnut define the cottage entry (ABOVE). The landing's built-in bookcases make optimum use of the stairway tower. Deep roof overhangs allow the cottage (RIGHT) to appear to hunker down on its site high above the shore. In the dining room (FACING PAGE), woodwork and star-detailed sconces accentuate the wide archway to the country-style kitchen.



VINALHAVEN

is a remote and quarry-pocked island in Penobscot Bay, 12 miles and an hour and 15 minutes by ferry from Rockland, Maine. It has a population of 1,200, except in summer, when 5,000 men, women, and children occupy its 25 square miles of rock, moors, and beaches as owners from the mainland flock to their vacation getaways. Because Vinalhaven is still far more of a working lobster port than a summer colony, the community has managed to retain its hardscrabble, working-class personality, which is, in fact, part of the island's appeal. So the last thing any sensitive summer folk want is an ostentatious home.

"My wife wanted a house that would snuggle down and not stick up," says the owner of a cozy island cottage designed by Jacob Albert of Albert, Righter & Tittmann Architects in Boston, "but we didn't want a long, motel-like house, either."

Albert had the advantage of a decade's worth of familiarity with the client and the site — a steep, rocky slope on a remote back shore. He had designed a one-room cabin there in 1993 and subsequently designed a guest cabin and then a barn with studio office. All three structures are located closer to the shore and are subordinate to the new main house, a fairly simple three-bedroom, 2,850-square-foot home with living room, dining room, game alcove, kitchen, laundry, and master bedroom suite on the first floor and a pair of guest bedrooms with baths on the second. It is, says Albert, "a picturesque composition that is irregular but balanced."

Clad in cedar shingles, the cottage is a hybrid design defined by deep roof overhangs that serve both to filter sunlight and to make the house appear to nestle onto its site, such that the two-story building almost looks to be one level. "Bringing the eaves lower makes the house sit down on the ground, not sit up on the horizon," says Albert.

Because of the challenges of building on an

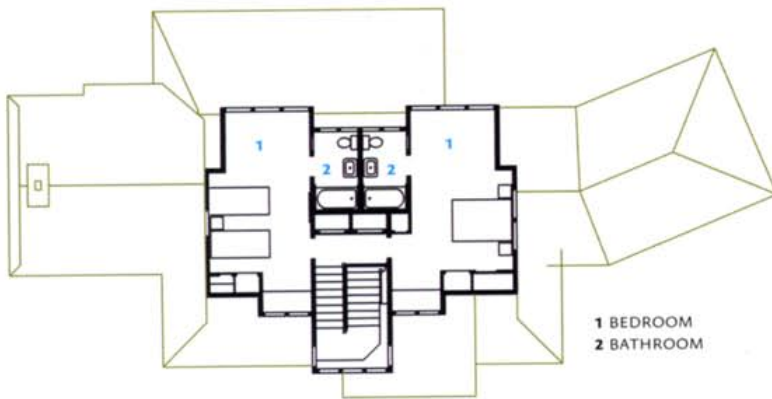
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ARCHITECTURE
ALBERT,
RIGHTER &
TITTMANN
ARCHITECTS



First Floor



Second Floor



BUILDER Peter Codella

island, the wall sections were constructed on the mainland, ferried over, and assembled in place by Vinalhaven builder Peter Codella and his crew, who also executed the fine finish work that gives the cottage its sense of quiet quality.

While the exterior is handsome and reserved, it is the thoughtfulness of the interior that distinguishes Albert's design, starting with the front door, which was custom-made of solid mahogany by North Star Woodworking of Portland, Maine. Though most flooring throughout is light fir, the floor in the entryway alternates fir and dark walnut in a distinctive striped pattern that, along with the stunning William Morris willow bough wallpaper, completes a lasting first impression.

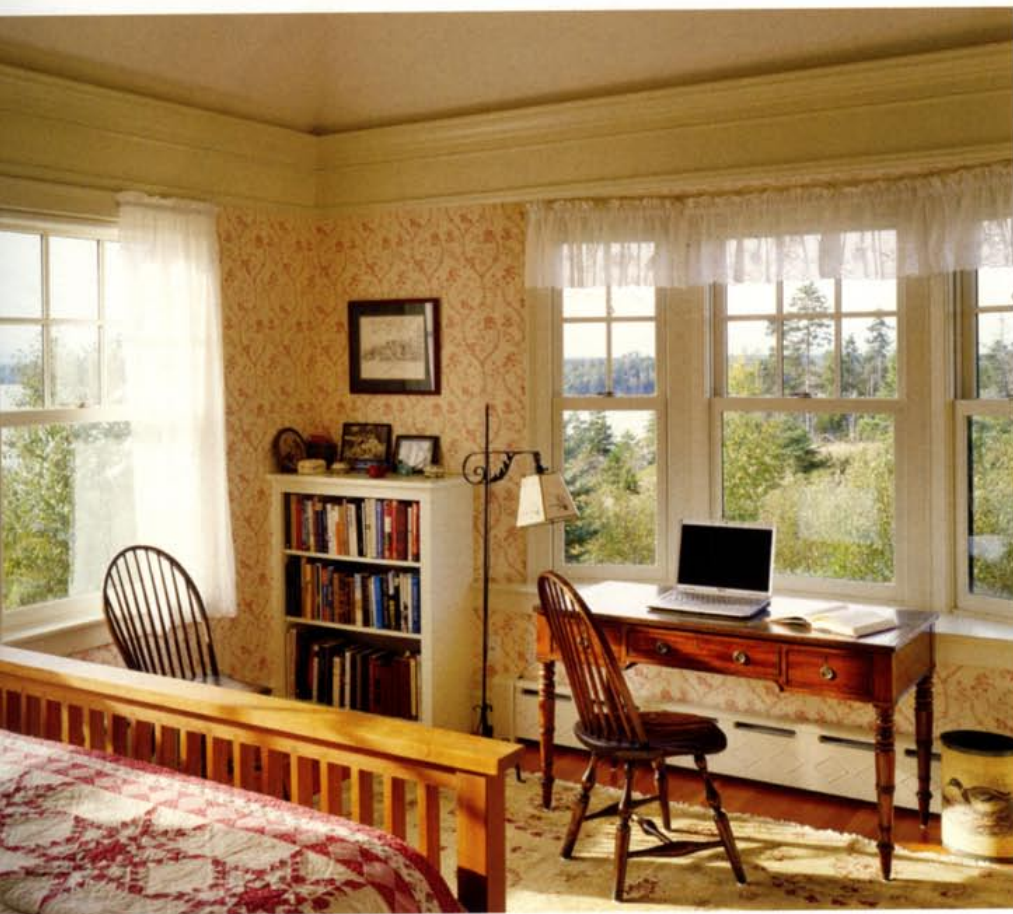
Rather than frame the view upon arrival, as many waterfront summer estates do, the cottage reveals its spectacular vista across the bay to the Camden Hills gradually, allowing visitors to discover it as they find their way into the main living space. In many ways, the cottage seems the behind-the-curtain area for the grand porch that runs along the back of the house and is the stage upon which the family lives all summer.

Living room, dining room, game alcove, and kitchen are one fluid space, but Albert has created definition with a variety of ceiling

THE BRACKETED FIR tray ceiling and stong cornice bands contribute to the feeling of intimacy in the living room, which has 10-foot-high ceilings.







DESIGN DECISION

Island Complexities

"Vinalhaven is the most challenging location we've designed for," says Jacob Albert, whose firm, Albert, Righter & Tittmann Architects, has designed cottages on Fishers Island in New York, Martha's Vineyard in Massachusetts, and Mount Desert Island and Islesboro in Maine.

For the Boston architect, the three-and-a-half-hour drive followed by an hour-and-15-minute ferry ride meant that he could make site visits only about once a month during the construction phase.

Then there's Maine's winter weather and the logistics of ferry transport. "Getting material there was a challenge, especially concrete," says Albert.

"The ferry does create a real complicated dance to get people and materials here at the same time," confirms island contractor Peter Codella, who built the house.

When timely reservations for heavy loads aren't available on the Vinalhaven ferry, for example, Codella might have cement mixers sent via barge from the neighboring island of North Haven.

So, too, the idea of panelizing the wall systems, having them built on the mainland, and then ferried over was prompted by island exigencies. "In the end," says Albert, "it would have been just as easy to do it out there stick-built."

Codella estimates that building on the island adds a 5 percent premium to the cost of a project. But that's OK with the owner of the cottage, who acknowledges, "It's not a casual commitment to go to Vinalhaven." Then adds, "It's one of its saving graces."

treatments. The bracketed fir tray ceiling in the living room, for example, gives the space a nautical feel. Strong cornice bands make the room seem intimate despite its 10-foot height.

A much lower ceiling defines the dining room. "There," says Albert, "you're sitting at a table so the low ceiling goes with the seating. We believe in emphasizing special details in special places," offering as examples the built-in bookcases in the living room and on the stairway landing and the built-in desks in the dormered upstairs bedroom. Made by Tidewater Millwork of Woolwich, Maine, which also crafted the kitchen cabinets, the built-in furniture adds to the solid, well-made character of the cottage.

The owner, an international real estate developer, might have been a tough client to please, but he says Jacob Albert and Peter Codella, along with his crew, achieved the casual, understated elegance he and his wife were after in a summer home.

"My expectations, which were high, were exceeded," he says. "We really have appreciated their attention to detail, which is prodigious." ■



NESTLED INTO THE hillside, the studio barn (THIS PAGE AND FACING PAGE, BOTTOM) has views across Penobscot Bay to the Camden Hills. The third of four buildings on the site, it features a tower that houses a light-filled office. In the main house, bedrooms (FACING PAGE, TOP) have the timeless charm of New England seaside cottages.

