

Storybook Charm

A fairy-tale setting and a similarly fanciful history inspired the artistic design of this sunny and welcoming Shingle-style cottage on Martha's Vineyard.

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Sight lines extend from the detailed dining area through the open balcony above. A band of layered millwork breaks up the soaring space.





LEFT: The fit-stone fireplace draws the eye and lends texture and earthy color to the living room. Beaded board stretching 8 feet high leaves no doubt about the room's cottage-style pedigree. RIGHT: Multiple French doors allow views of the backyard pool. A sizable porch provides a spot to enjoy warm summer and fall days.



Patrick Ahearn takes a novel approach to designing houses. "I like to write the story of a house before we start its design," the Boston-based architect says. So when clients asked him to build a getaway on Martha's Vineyard, Ahearn plotted the tale of "a romantic country cottage in the woods that someone fell upon and lovingly restored."

Inspired by the site his clients had chosen in an early-20th-century enclave of Shingle-style houses, Ahearn says, "I imagined the cottage as a companion piece to the grand structures nearby—an outbuilding or a smaller home built at the same time."

His narrative included a happy ending where visitors, assuming the cottage had been restored, would marvel over the preservation of its many charms.

True to the story line, the new house effortlessly bridges past and present. While its exterior upholds a classic New England style, its interior offers an element of surprise. "As you approach the house, it seems very intimate in scale, but once you're through the door the interior opens up," Ahearn says. "There's greater volume than you'd expect," he adds, speaking specifically of the 1½-story living/dining room and the upper-level balcony that overlooks it.

Equally unexpected is the easy traffic flow among rooms and the home's modern take on indoor-outdoor living. The house also exudes nostalgic warmth, conveyed through detailed wainscoting, paneling, and beaded board, which climb walls throughout. Antique timber beams reclaimed from a Connecticut barn lend additional patina. Fireplaces, too, are crafted from reclaimed materials, and cabinets, nestled into niches alongside windows, recall cupboards from a simpler time even as they camouflage state-of-the-art electronics. Even the antique pine floors are pegged with cut nails, grounding each room in chestnut-stained accuracy.

But far from being a slave to authenticity, the cottage borrows the best from period detail and discards the rest. The country kitchen, for example, is clad in beaded board, yet the stainless-steel range feels right at home. "It's all part of the story," Ahearn says. "The details ensure someone visiting the house will never be able to tell it's new."

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OPPOSITE: A classic farmhouse-style sink and nickel hardware amplify the kitchen's country character, as do the clean-edged profiles of the granite countertops. A door around the corner opens to the home's side entrance and mudroom. ABOVE LEFT: The intimate proportions of the front entry establish the home's cottage essence, while a deft fusion of trimwork hints at the fine architectural detailing that runs throughout. ABOVE RIGHT: "We treated the staircase as part of the whole millwork ensemble," architect Patrick Ahearn says, "as opposed to covering it in plaster." The stair treads, like floors through the house, are antique pine. LEFT: An island detailed with furniture-style legs gives the impression of a repurposed family heirloom, albeit one with a prep sink. A plate rail accents the hood over the retro-look range.



OPPOSITE: The upper level sitting area is open to the living area below. LEFT: The main-level master suite allows for one-level living and showcases the home's rich millwork, which plays into its country spirit.

Floor plan



space
 TOTAL SQ. FT: 3,958
 BEDROOMS: 5
 BATHROOMS: 3 full, 1 half