



31 SOUTH  
WATER STREET



#### Preserving History

**Renovation and expansion of a vintage 1860s Edgartown Captain's House looking out on Edgartown Harbor. This project was in the heart of the Historic District in downtown Edgartown so the permitting process was extensive and very specific. The home underwent a complete overhaul. The old stone foundation had crumbled and had to be replaced and the house needed to be completely gutted. The project involved rebuilding old walls, floors and adding on new additions - all while retaining historic integrity and conservation efforts as this is a waterfront site.**



## GOING IT TOGETHER

### Colonial Reproductions Builds Relationships

**Story by Gwyn McAllister  
Photography by Greg Premru**

Norman Rankow, owner of Colonial Reproductions, Inc. is clearly a people person. He's open and friendly, someone who listens and is enthusiastic about offering an opinion but with an open mind and sensitivity to his listener. His tone switches easily, depending on the topic, from conversational to professional, from informal to technical. A very slight accent, as well as a directness and a sly sense of humor betrays his New York upbringing. Mr. Rankow was born in Manhattan and raised in Queens. However, he's lived on the Vineyard since 1978 and raised three daughters here.

Given his charm and affability, it's not surprising that Norman, or Norm as he is known to many, has made a lot of friends in a business that can often find emotions running high.

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# FEDERAL COLONIAL



As one of the premiere general contractors on the Island, Colonial Reproductions has built or renovated hundreds of Vineyard homes, a number of which have been featured in national design magazines.

Most of Norman's high-end clients have become close friends. He's kept in touch with many of them and been invited to stay with former clients in their other homes in New York City, Beverly Hills and elsewhere. On display in the newly renovated Colonial Reproductions offices in downtown Edgartown is a Boston Celtic's jersey signed by Larry Bird—a gift from a client who knows of Mr. Rankow's obsession with the team.

Norman went to college on Long Island and got his degree

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## Homage to Tradition

When it came to designing his own home, architect Patrick Ahearn wanted a look that was historically correct for the village and that would suit the character and scale of the street. The style is that of a Colonial era midshipmen's home. While completely new construction, the look or story line is that it echoes a period house that has been added on to and lovingly restored over time. The house was designed by Ahearn as a Federal Colonial true reproduction. It incorporates authentic old barn beams and flooring as part of the construction techniques and a custom paneled dining room of antique reclaimed oak. The separate three car carriage house is fully complete with bead board ceilings and walls and authentic Boston city pavers on the floor. Above are guest quarters for family and guest overflow.





in Automotive Technology in 1974. “I wanted to design cars or work in R & D” says Norm. After graduating he got his start in the construction business working for Contractor’s Supply Inc. as a sales rep covering all five boroughs of New York City, Nassau and Westchester Counties.

After visiting the Vineyard for a number of years in his teens, Norman fell in love with the Island and decided to move here permanently in 1978. He built his first home on land owned by his parents and launched his own business on a very small scale. “I started out as a one man show with a pickup truck, no dog” he says. “I think I was charging \$5 an hour.”

From those early beginnings, Norm has built up a business employing a staff of six full time employees and utilizing dozens of local subcontractors—framers, electricians, roofers, landscapers, etc. Colonial Reproductions manages and oversees projects ranging from totally new construction to

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**Respecting our Rural Roots**  
This is new construction designed to emulate an old farmhouse that had been added onto over the years. This home is located on picturesque Herring Creek Farm – former farmland with expansive ocean views. The Quaker style house includes many rustic details—including a car barn—and features reclaimed pine floors throughout. The formal dining room opens onto an expansive patio, perfect for outdoor dining and entertaining.





## SQUIBNOCKET COMPOUND



### Honoring the Past

The clients purchased 3 acres on a spectacular site overlooking Squibnocket Beach in Chilmark. The plot included a historic Wampanoag ancient burialground. Construction was confined to a very tight footprint due to the scattered gravesites. There were also height restrictions of 18 feet. The challenge was dealing with these constraints while maximizing space and taking full advantage of the site's panoramic views. Architect Patrick Ahearn was able to come up with creative solutions. To gain vertical space, the first floor systems were put literally two feet below the top of the foundation. Steel

sheathing, demarcating the available construction area was driven 20 feet down to retain the existing grade, then removed after construction. The home features a central core two story main entry and living-family room, 6 bedrooms, 7 bathrooms, reclaimed Southern Yellow pine floors throughout, Custom Southern Yellow pine paneled Library, fully built out lower level with media room, pool table-bar-rec room, 2 attached garages separated by a center pedestrian and porte-cochère style entry.

additions, including partial and full renovations. The company's specialty is historically motivated architecture. Some of the most interesting examples of their work include both complete historic preservations and homes designed to emulate period buildings.

Colonial Reproductions' new location at 140 Cooke Street, Edgartown—an office building, purchased and remodeled just this past year, offers a good representation of some of Norm's

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### Builder & General Contractor **Norman Rankow** In His Own Words

“ In 1978 my wife Margaret and I, along with our two year old daughter Angela moved full time to the Vineyard. I was starting my construction company Colonial Reproductions, Inc. and this was a new beginning for our soon to be expanding family. The Island values its history and traditions and I embrace that. It's one of the things that I love about the Vineyard and I feel fortunate that I can be part of the process of preserving the aesthetics and character of such a unique place. We're sensitive about preserving our past and maintaining the integrity of our landscape and streetscapes.

As a General Contractor my job is to keep the ship on course as each project that I undertake presents its own challenges. It's always about finding the right balance between the client, the architect's vision, and the often very specific demands of the property and its surrounding environment. Working with close neighbors is also often part of any successful project. Building consensus is key to a gratifying end result.

My work often involves coming up with creative solutions to preserve and upgrade an existing historic structure.

One of the great joys of my job is working alongside my daughter, Melanie who not only manages me, but as head of Client Relations manages our clients, their decorators and keeps the projects on task. We have a family friendly environment that helps us keep life in perspective in a sometimes high stress industry.

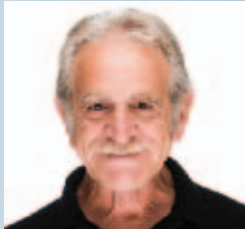
That's what I've been doing for 38 years, working as a partner with architects and my clients to find that perfect balance and using my experience, skill, ingenuity and attention to detail to not just build houses, but to build friendships and a better community.

”

### THE TEAM



**Norman Rankow**  
President



**Bucko Dello Russo**  
Project Manager



**Sean O'Sullivan**  
Project Manager



**Melanie Rankow Prescott**  
Client Relations



**Rebecca Rabeni**  
Client Relations & Marketing



**Malgosia Thompson**  
Office Assistant





signature design elements including coffered ceilings, antique beam detail, mahogany wainscoting, custom panelization and built-ins. It's a very attractive workplace, that provides a spacious and pleasant working environment for the whole team, who Norm is clearly very proud of.

"I try to surround myself with the best team I can," he says. "We all enjoy working on a project—from getting it out of the ground to turning it over to the owners. We enjoy the process—working with our clients and the architect. Our clients are very discerning. It's always about the details from start to finish. Our goal is to not just meet, but to exceed our clients' expectations. I look to the support of our entire team, our staff, the architect that we work with, and our longstanding subcontractors. I've been using pretty much the same trade




companies for over 30 years. The members of my office team have mostly been with me for more than 10 years. We are family."

Norman is firmly entrenched in the community and his involvement with the Vineyard extends to his philanthropic work. His civic contributions include memberships on countless local boards and committees. He has a reputation for providing financial support to many other Island organizations including the Preservation Trust, MVYouth and high school sports teams. Affordable housing is a cause which Norman has targeted and supported enthusiastically over the years. Colonial Reproductions, Inc was a major sponsor along with Plum TV and Comcast for the *Houses on The Move* telethon initiative.

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Rescuing a Landmark  
This colonial era home's location - on one of Edgartown's most venerated historic streets - included an ancient Pagoda tree which needed to be preserved. The tight footprint around the tree made for multiple issues moving equipment into and around the area, but both the tree and the house, which was crumbling and facing complete ruin, were saved. Much of the home's design and purpose was restored to its original splendor, including the handsomely paneled office, off the entryway foyer.



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## HARBOR RESTORATION

### Restoring a Classic

This is a 1682 vintage Harbor-front house restoration along Edgartown Village's Historic South Water Street. The interior of this 300 year old home had been thoroughly decimated by termites and beetles. It required a complete surgical renovation. The difficulty was in keeping the structure intact while completely rebuilding the house from the inside out, including a post-by-post and beam restoration of the original frame, Norman considers this preservation of an important piece of Edgartown history one of the biggest challenges of his almost four decade career.

"When I'm asked, I get involved, certainly in those issues that are germane to what I do," he says. "Housing is critical to the Vineyard. It's a really important aspect of our Island culture. That's how I was raised—anything you can offer back to the community whether financial or in-kind is important. Every bit helps."

Award winning Architect Patrick Ahearn who, as Norman puts it, "has been influential in capturing the Vineyard vernacular and making the older homes and properties great again" has designed many of the houses built by Colonial Reproductions over the years. The two men have become close friends. "I grew up on Long Island. We come

from similar backgrounds," says Mr. Ahearn. "That commonality between us shows in our approach to business. Cut to the chase and get the job done, but make it perfect."

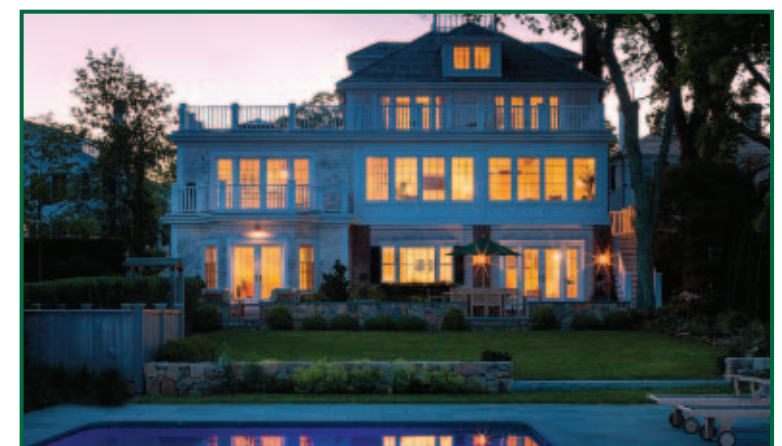
Mr. Ahearn favors Norman's work particularly for historic renovations, something that both architect and contractor have established a reputation for. "These have involved a lot of issues that have made managing the projects very difficult," says Mr. Ahearn. "Norman has the patience for this kind of work. There are a multitude of decisions to be made on an hourly basis. It's complicated. Not everyone has the stomach for that. It's what separates the men from the boys."

As a final word of praise for his

friend's work, Mr. Ahearn says, "When it came to building my own house I could have used anybody. I used Norman."

After all these years, Norman continues to display a rare enthusiasm for his work. "I still love what I do," he says. "I plan to still be here 20 years from now. I've surrounded myself with good people. We've worked hard to position ourselves in this great place we can call our home." **VS**

For more information on Colonial Reproductions, visit their new offices at 140 Cooke Street, Edgartown, by phone: 508-627-5100 or find them online at: [www.ColonialRepro.com](http://www.ColonialRepro.com).



PATRICK AHEARN ARCHITECT

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