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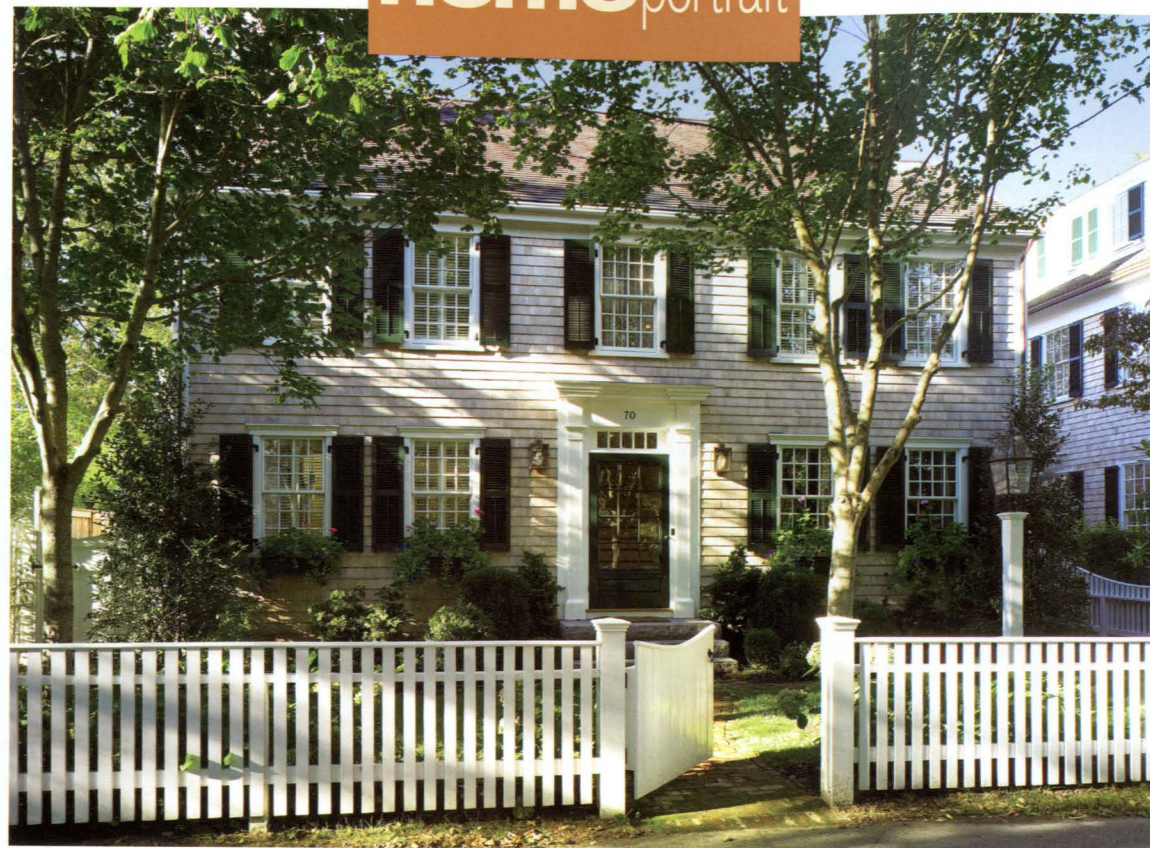
From Latkes  
to Gingerbread

This Old  
New House  
Architect

## Patrick Ahearn

Tricks  
the Eye,  
and  
Tames a  
Tricky Lot





## This Old New House

Architect **Patrick Ahearn** Tricks the Eye, and Tames a Tricky Lot

Profile by John Budris    Photography by Greg Premru

ARCHITECTS CAN TALK A GOOD GAME about scale, context, and deftly fitting their handiwork into landscapes and neighborhoods. Most are fluent in the au courant rhetoric that applauds the scaled-down practical home and scoffs at the garish trophy house.

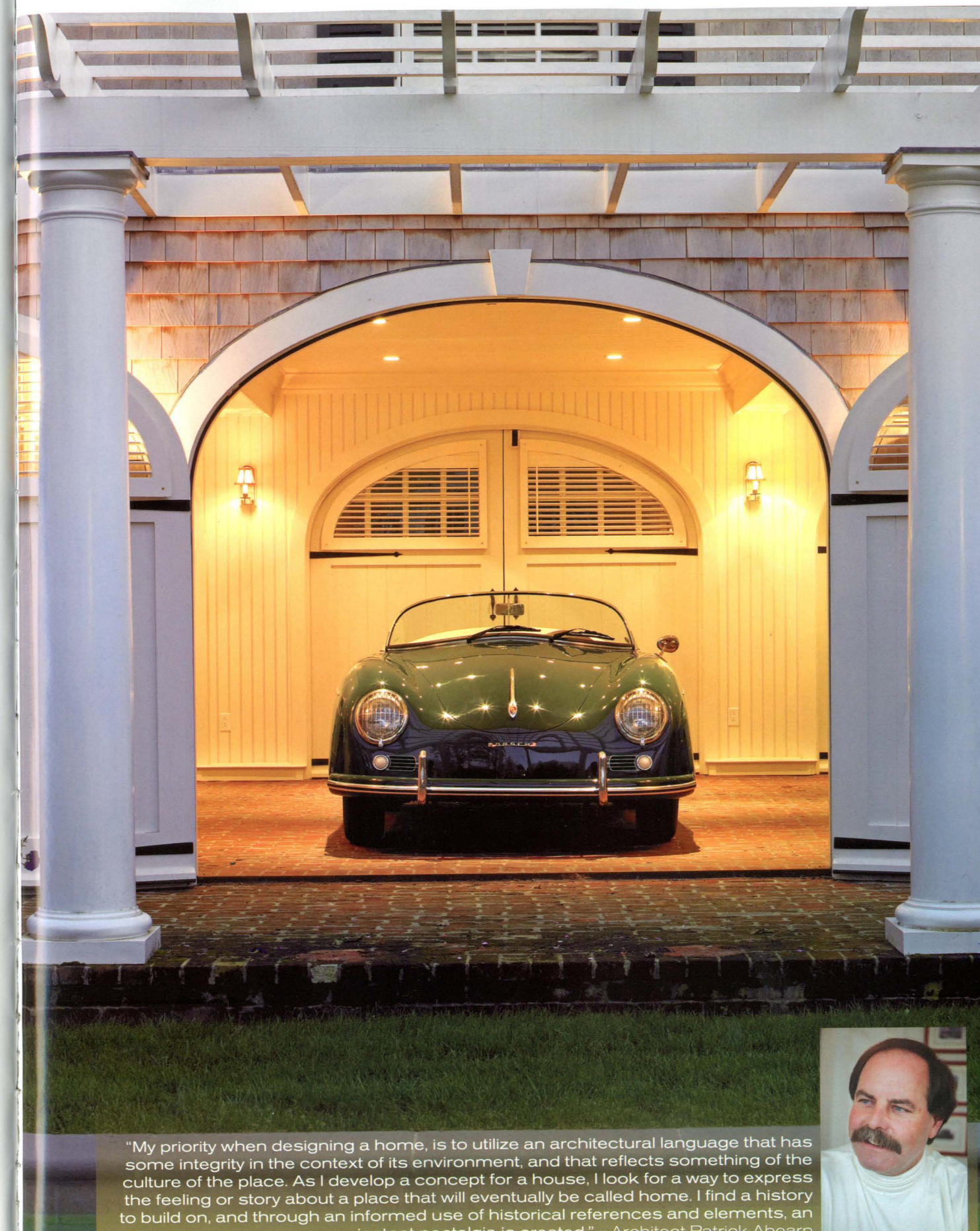
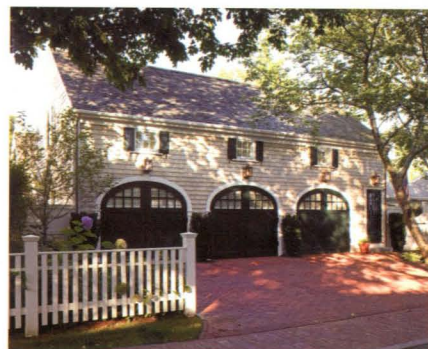
But the true tests of all architects' core convictions are revealed in the homes they design for themselves.

On a little swath of land between two Edgartown

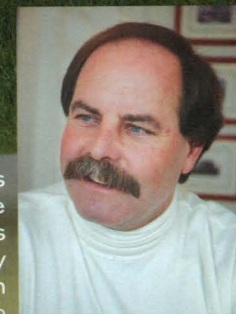
back streets, someone could have built a vaulted Colonial that stretched across the entire property like a cargo ship run aground. Someone could have raised a very unneighborly giant box that obliterated the view and overwhelmed the perfectly proportioned antique houses for which the town is famous. Someone could have built as high, wide, and wild as budget and building inspector allowed.

Someone could have. Patrick Ahearn chose not to.

*continued on next spread*



"My priority when designing a home, is to utilize an architectural language that has some integrity in the context of its environment, and that reflects something of the culture of the place. As I develop a concept for a house, I look for a way to express the feeling or story about a place that will eventually be called home. I find a history to build on, and through an informed use of historical references and elements, an instant nostalgia is created." — Architect Patrick Ahearn







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"Historical neighborhoods have no real blank canvas by their very nature," says the Boston and Vineyard-based architect. "So, the ultimate client I design for is really the greater good of the neighborhood, and that applies when I am my own client."

Ahearn's belief in designs that harmonize with the home next door may have come from an uncanny source: his childhood neighborhood in Levittown, New York.

To some, the 17,000 cookie-cutter homes built on Long Island's potato fields in the 1950s are no more than the "Little Boxes" of the satirical ballad made famous by Pete Seeger. To the 58-year-old Ahearn, however, the post-World War II development embodies a design wisdom beyond providing affordable, practical shelter.

"Levittown homes were designed to accommodate expansion across the years as families and income grew. And they did," says Ahearn. "So



Ahearn built the great room (opposite) using massive timbers from a 19th century Connecticut barn. Keeping with the Edgartown historical theme of a 1700's Federal Colonial, Marsha Ahearn decorated the home with a farm and nautical touch.





The gourmet's kitchen (above) faces into the great room and features a breakfast and work island with a cherry countertop whose polymer finish is impervious to moisture. Though both kitchen and laundry room (left) have the feel of antiquity, the appliances and countertops are high-tech and low maintenance. Ahearn's use of medium density fiberboard beadboarding throughout the home ties together the open spaces.



much so, that few are left that have not been expanded. And they fit together as well now as when first built."

And therein Ahearn found not only a subject for his master's thesis at Syracuse University, but a guiding principle he brings to his home designs - including his own on a shaded lane in the heart of what was once a neighborhood of working whalemens. He calls his approach "scripting," whereby he imagines a history of architecture and buildings on the site that could have survived the centuries

and mariners. The homes were not the grand waterfront mansions of captains and shipmasters, but modest homesteads for blacksmiths and shipwrights.

"So, for my own house, I imagined this was a 1700s Federal Colonial house that at one point had a barn built, which was later attached to the main body of the house. At some point in time, the owners converted the barn into living quarters as the family grew, and they built a livery stable and carriage house at the rear of the property as a means of income," says Ahearn. "And some 200



restoration of this historic property."

Of course Ahearn's homestead is actually brand new - circa 2005, not 1720 - a pod of structures with the deliberate patina of age combined with contemporary creature comforts, including a swimming pool, home theater, and gourmet kitchen.

He designed the compound principally as a summer retreat for his blended family, which includes his wife, Marsha, their children, Conor, 15, and Taylor, 18, and Marsha's older children, Ted, 23, Robin, 24, and Ben, 26.

Each has staked out a favorite area. Ted and Ben are out of earshot with their own bedrooms, bath, and laundry ("and, coincidentally, with the big-screen televisions," says Ahearn) in the basement.



In the tavern room (above) Marsha Ahearn found an authentic decorating touch by using actual heirloom books from her large collection. In the master bath (left), MDF beadboard provides resilient, water resistant surfaces, while the cherry countertop with a catalytic finish sheds water and alcohol. The oversize mirror reflects sunlight flooding through the shuttered



Patrick Ahearn  
continued



In keeping with the style of flooring in a modest 1700's Edgartown home, Ahearn chose wide white pine, but finished it with a durable polyurethane. The archway leading to the small study is a typical detail of the period.



story apartment over the carriage house. The two younger children have their bedrooms and bath on the third floor.

The master suite, which includes a cozy sitting room, is on the second floor. "But," says Ahearn, "our favorite spot is a nook by the kitchen, where we can sit and look out to the pool and watch the kids gradually gather around in the morning."

Although the family's primary home is in Wellesley and the main office of Ahearn's firm, Ahearn Schopfer and Associates, is in Boston's Back Bay, his many Vineyard projects keep his Edgartown office buzzing and draw him to the island more and more in the off-season. "And the house works as wonderfully in those months, too," says Ahearn.

The most understated building, the 2,000-square-foot carriage house, features brick floors with radiant heat, air conditioning, and an apartment on the upper level. "That's one floor for my antique cars and the other for my kids," says Ahearn.



The master suite (top) is airy and sun-filled, featuring a walkout balcony. In the base-



Patrick Ahearn  
continued



The second floor landing features what Ahearn calls his Romeo and Juliet balcony overlooking



main house, creating a private patio garden and pool area. "Take out the cars and open the doors to the patio, and we can have a dinner party for 75," says Ahearn.

In the 38-foot-wide main house facing Cooke Street, Ahearn has crafted 5,000 square feet of living space on four floors, including a full basement with a nine-seat home theater, recreation and media room, laundry, bath, and sleeping quarters. A 10-foot-high foundation allowed ample room to hide the ducts and conduits for the electrical, mechanical, and air conditioning systems above the 8-foot basement ceiling.

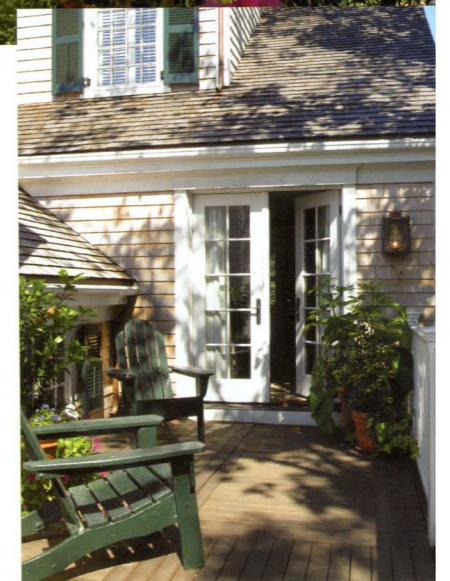
At the rear of the main structure is Ahearn's showpiece of implied history, the attached "barn" that, according to his script, evolved into living space over the years. The massive exposed rafters, barn beams from an 1810 Connecticut tear-

and dining area with a Rumford fireplace. Above the hearth, an oversized cupboard hides a plasma-screen television.

A grand staircase Ahearn built with re-sawn lumber from the same Connecticut barn leads to the second floor, where there are two guest bedrooms with baths in addition to the master suite and a balcony that overlooks the great room.

"The best compliment I have when I take visitors through the house is the moment when I am invariably asked, 'When did you finish the restoration of this old house?'" Ahearn says. "And I have to convince them it's really brand new.

Patrick Ahearn creates the patina of age without sacrificing the benefits of modern materials. Antique-looking bead board, for example, is composed of medium-density fiberboard, which is easy to



A view with a pool: Marsha and Patrick's favorite spot inside the home (top) is a breakfast nook that looks outside to the pool and carriage house. Another outdoor patio (above) makes a perfect spot for the morning coffee.



Patrick Ahearn  
continued



The basement level recreation room (above) is adjacent to the home theater, making the entire level a place for all the family to congregate. The wet-bar with the handsome high-back stools (right) is spacious enough for relaxing, entertaining or dining.

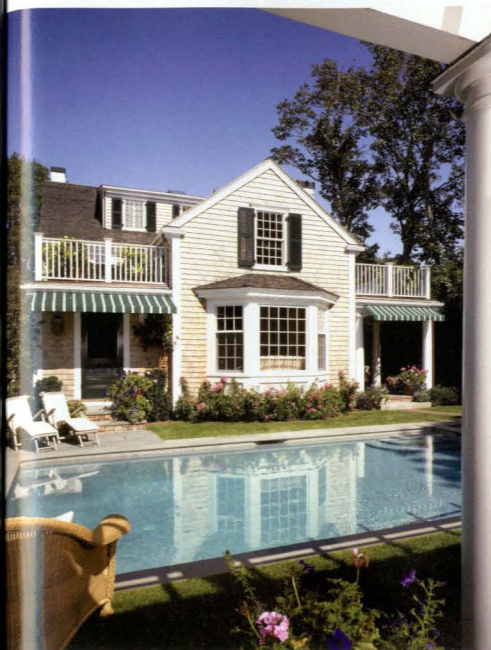


shrink and swell with changing temperature and humidity. What's more, it can be bought in lengths of up to 14 feet, painted off-site, and installed faster than wooden bead board.

Fiberboard also replaces finicky wood-paneled doors. "In addition to looking virtually identical to old wood, the fiberboard has sound-deadening properties that are superior," says Ahearn. For historically accurate moldings that don't separate with the seasons, he uses composite materials.

In the kitchen, pantry, and bathrooms Ahearn seals cherry and other wooden countertops with catalytic finishes impervious to water and alcohol. "That way, a counter is as durable as stone but much more accurate to the historical period," says Ahearn.

In what Ahearn calls his "tavern room," he simulated centuries of good



The swimming pool (above) is strategically placed between the main house and the garage/guest apartment and helps to unify the "compound" feel of the tow buildings.

ing, he "distressed" quarter-sawn white-oak boards with deliberate floggings with a chain. A few randomly placed scorch marks and nail holes add to the illusion. Instead of finishing the result with urethane, he chose a natural, low-

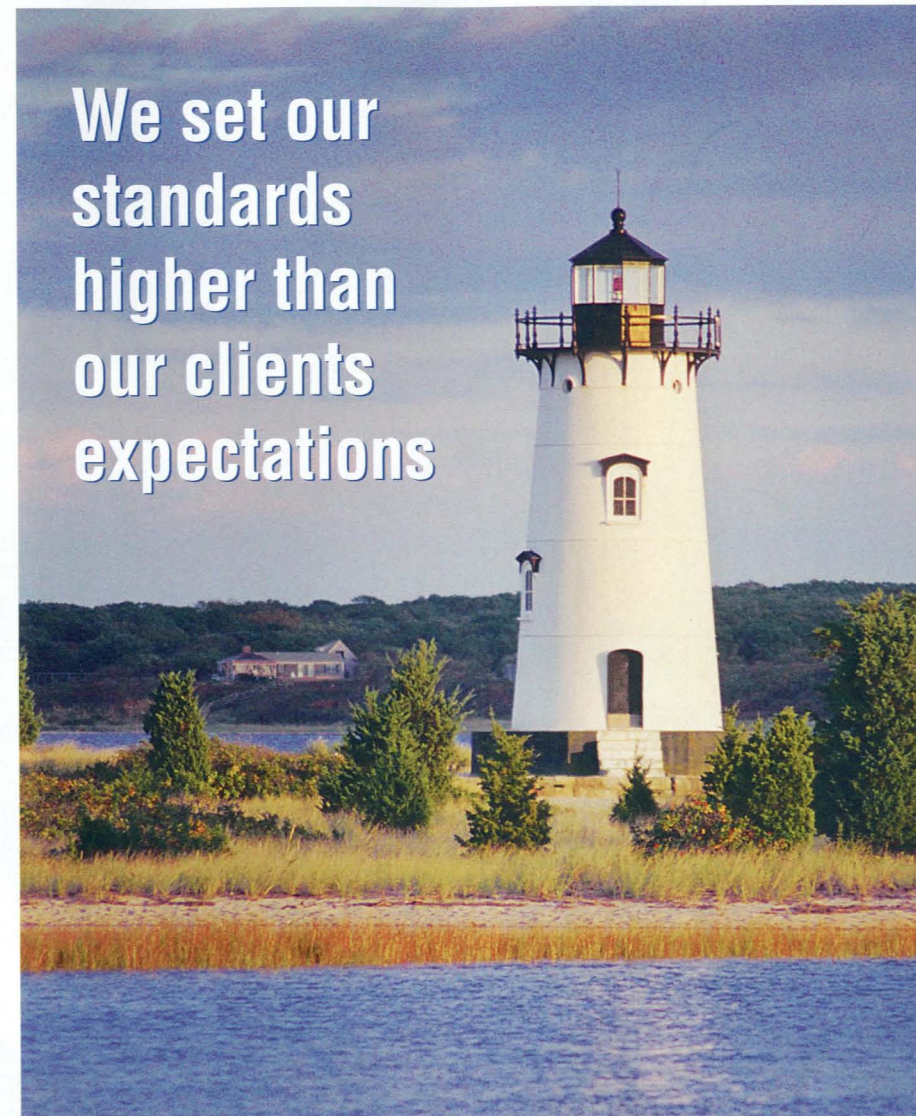
"The purpose is not to create replicas of period houses — each house has its own unique variations based on its site and owners' desires. But, the careful use of historical elements and allusion evokes a sense of belonging, heritage, and romance. The intention to create that romance is what makes the house special, and it is the driving force behind my designs."



sheen wax. "Matched up against the actual 200-year-old timbers in the room, the paneling looks as if it's been there right along," he says.

The interior decorating of the home is Marsha's handiwork, and again,

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