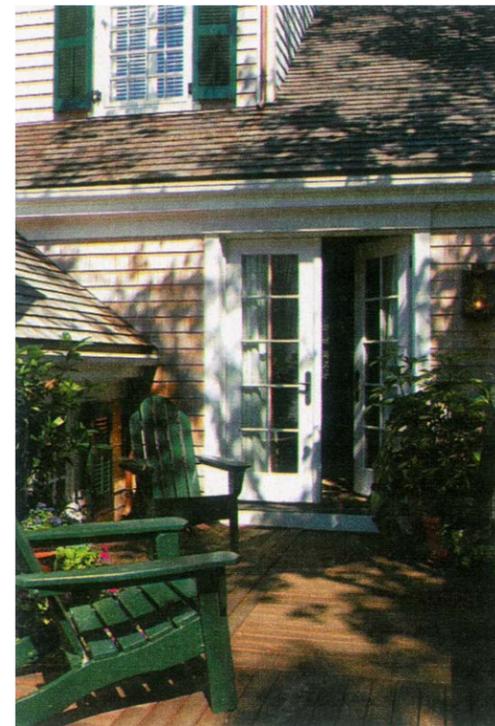




MASSIVE BEAMS, recycled from a tear-down in Connecticut, support the ceiling inside what Patrick Ahearn imagined as a converted barn. The old-style bead board is made from medium-density fiberboard. Facing page: French doors open to a deck off the master suite.



GOOD NEIGHBOR

ARCHITECT **PATRICK AHEARN'S** SUMMER RETREAT TAKES ITS CUES FROM EDGARTOWN'S HISTORIC HOUSES.



ARCHITECTS CAN TALK A GOOD GAME ABOUT SCALE, CONTEXT, AND DEFTLY fitting their handiwork into landscapes and neighborhoods. Most are affluent 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 this 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. "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'm 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 55-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 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.

BY **JOHN BUDRIS**

PHOTOGRAPHS BY **GREG PREMURU**



OLDFANGLED

Patrick Ahearn treats 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 install, holds paint well, and doesn't 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 drink and conversation on the walls. Before he fashioned the period paneling, 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-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.

Outside, simple details such as salvaged stone used as veneer on the foundation, wide corner boards, painted and distressed bricks on the chimney, and steps made of old granite slabs lend the feel of centuries. Even divided light windows with

21st-century insulating properties are available with wavy glass to suggest antique Colonial glazing.

One bane of owning an antique home is the constant maintenance of wooden shutters. Often architects and homeowners either do away with shutters or opt for generic plastic or metal substitutes. David Pritchard, a neighbor of Ahearn in Edgartown, developed a solution. His Atlantic Shutters are made of high-tech composites and are painted at the factory with an industrial-grade sealant. They are historically accurate, need no upkeep, and even from a foot away, it's hard to tell they aren't wood.

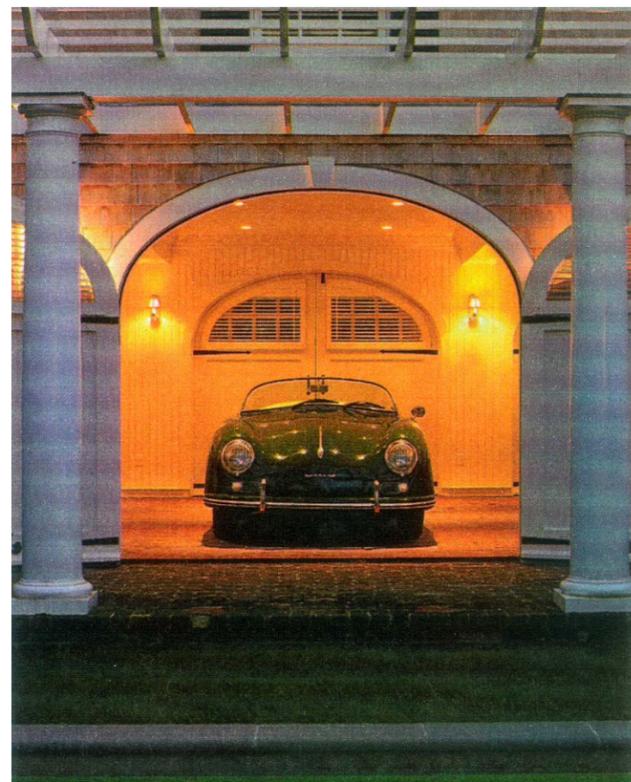
He calls his approach "scripting," whereby he imagines a history of architecture and buildings on the site that could have survived the centuries.

During the whaling era, Ahearn's neighborhood bustled with merchants 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 years later, I inherited the homestead and undertook a major renovation and 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.

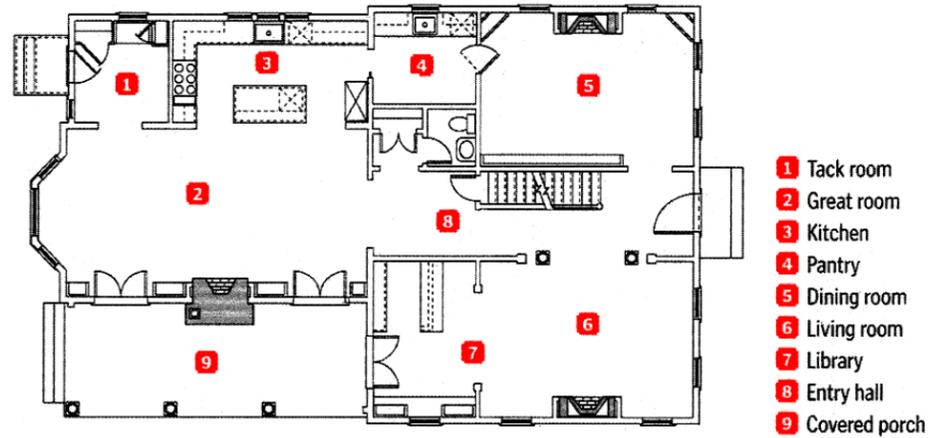
He designed the compound principally as a summer retreat for his blended family which includes his wife Marsha, their children Conor, 12, and Taylor, 15, and Marsha's older children, Ted, 20, Robin, 21, and Ben, 23.



The traditionally styled kitchen has state-of-the-art appliances and wooden countertops treated with catalytic finishes, making them impervious to spills. Facing page, top: The French doors at the left connect the porch to the family room, while another set connects to the living room. The working fireplace can take the chill off a cool evening. Take the 1957 Porsche Speedster out of the carriage house, Ahearn says, "and we can have a dinner party for 75."



THE UPSTAIRS HALL and staircase are enhanced with period details; at the end of the hall, the Juliet balcony opens to the great room. Top: Standing on the balcony are, from left, Marsha Ahearn and three of her five children — Conor, 12, Taylor, 15 (next to their dad, Patrick Ahearn), and Ted, 20. Right: The home's facade was designed as a replica of a late-18th-century Federal Colonial. Facing page: The bay window in the great room is reflected in the backyard pool.



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. Robin and her school friends have a second-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 carriage house also functions as a buffer between the back street and 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

exposed rafters, barn beams from an 1810 Connecticut teardown, support both the roof and the story line. The wing houses the informal living and dining area, with a Rumford fireplace. Above the hearth an oversized cupboard hides a plasma-screen television.

A grand staircase Ahearn built with resawn lumber from

“I imagined this was a 1700s Federal Colonial house that at one point had a barn built,” Patrick Ahearn says. “Some 200 years later, I inherited the homestead and undertook a major renovation and restoration.”

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

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 Juliet 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.”