

An oasis

IN THE DUNES

Designed by Patrick Ahearn, Trelawny House is a majestic family gathering place on Martha's Vineyard

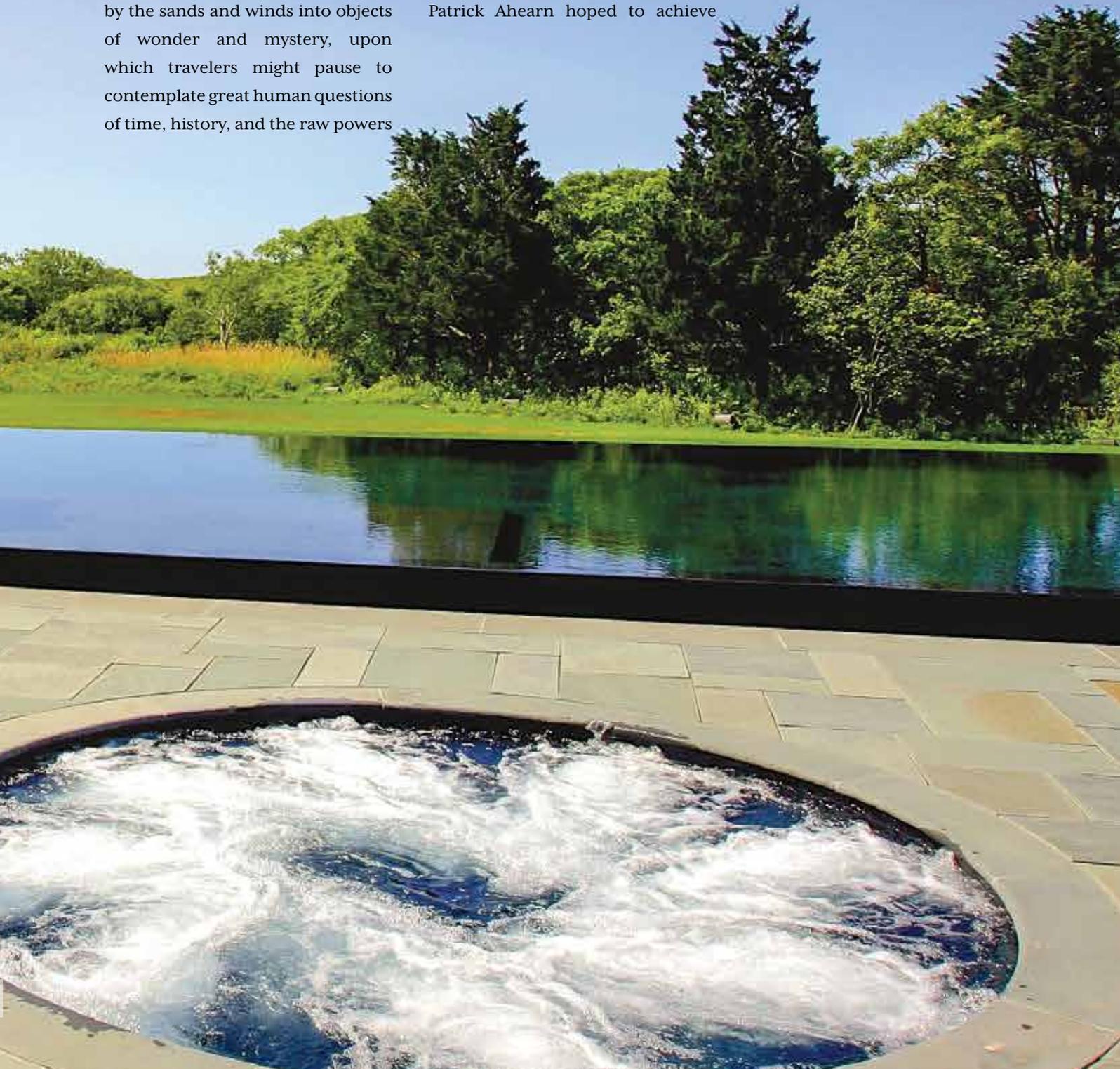
BY CHRIS WHITE • PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF LANDVEST

IMAGINE EXPLORING VAST GRASSLANDS nestled behind ocean dunes and coming upon the remains of a home that's centuries old. At first the structures may appear like a mirage of lone trees, shimmering in the summer heat, but upon approach, they would take the clear form of abandoned chimneys. One might imagine an ancient farmhouse lost to the elements, or to fire, with only these monoliths remaining, worn by the sands and winds into objects of wonder and mystery, upon which travelers might pause to contemplate great human questions of time, history, and the raw powers

of nature. Meditation complete, one would continue deeper into the wild lands of seafowl amid the sounds of rustling breezes and crashing Atlantic waves. Though the remains of the brick chimneys would endure, they would fade once again into invisibility in the sweeping landscape, remaining but a dream in the traveler's mind.

This is the concept that architect Patrick Ahearn hoped to achieve

with Trelawny House, built in 2009 on Herring Creek Farm, near Martha's Vineyard's South Beach. Along with builder Gary Conover, Ahearn worked closely with brother-and-sister owners Paula Williams Madison and Elrick Williams to create a modern home built upon a traditional structure, one that would disappear into its surroundings like a ghost into the





past. Ahearn illustrates one's arrival to Trelawny in terms that seem to defy physics. "You're on a farm," he says, "and as you drive closer, the house becomes transparent. It's pretty magical, and even more magical at night."

Madison concurs, as the galaxies of stars visible from this corner of the island, free from the light pollution of both her hometown of New York City and current residence of Los Angeles, help to complete her experience of serenity at Trelawny. "I wanted a home that blended with the flora and fauna," she says, "rather than being a disturbance to the landscape."



Located near South Beach on Martha's Vineyard, Trelawny House is an island oasis and a great family gathering spot for the homeowners.

Ahearn further describes the home as a "modern twist on a Cape Cod cottage. It's basically glass, a series of pavilions that are linked together. These suites are like free-standing pods centered around a communal gathering house, like a Wampanoag long house." This description may lead one to believe that Trelawny is actually a collection of separate buildings, but this is not the case, for one of the home's highlights is the tremendous sense of continuity and flow. Ahearn, the owners, and the design and construction





teams involved with the project achieved this by building from the concept of freestanding chimneys. Exaggerating the chimneys for visual effect, Ahearn says he “inserted the house around the ruins.”

While the idea behind the home is meant to conjure up the deep well of time, Trelawny is, in fact, a showcase of modern design and art. Ahearn, who has designed more than 200 homes on Martha’s Vineyard, is renowned for more traditional styles, though, and says this type of modern house is much different than his usual work. For example, other homes he has designed within Herring Creek are two large gambrels and a farmhouse.

For Trelawny, Ahearn used traditional forms such as shingles and gables, but because of the home’s location, he was also bound by “special covenants,” including one that required the house to be no taller than 19 feet. This stipulation necessitated a mostly one-story dwelling, but it also allowed for incredibly airy cathedral ceilings. Madison says other modern touches include the absence of mullions in the windows, the use of earth tones of soft blues and grays, wood-toned flooring that matches the ceiling, and the avoidance of crown molding. Outlet





The house is a gallery for various art mediums. Homeowner Elrick Williams captured this photo of the Temple of the Emerald Buddha in Thailand.

fixtures, and regulators for the air-conditioning, match and blend into the wood as well. The entire home can open up, and Madison reports that “the cross breezes are fantastic. We have screen curtains that come down to keep insects out but allow us to hear the waves from across the dunes.” In total, Madison says all of these details contribute to the “overall sense of serenity” she had hoped to create at Trelawny.

Owners Madison and Williams are descended from Jamaicans of both African and Chinese heritage. Because the family celebrates its Chinese cultural roots, concepts of *fengshui* were important to the overall design. Abutting the entranceway, two gentle reflecting pools establish the element of water. Madison reports that her “original goal was to enter over a bridge, and to have fire, wind, air, and earth all part of the vibe of Trelawny House.”

Walking directly through the great room from the front door, one can step outside to view the hot tub, then the infinity pool. Beyond that, Madison says, “We intend to build another large circular structure to contain a firepit.” To underscore the way the house flows, Ahearn states, “It’s pretty special in terms of sequence and arrival.”

The overall layout of the home is in the shape of a gigantic “H” with the “long house” in the center position, though this was extended to about the same length as the side wings. This central, communal portion of the home includes the great room—both a living space and an art gallery—as well as the dining room, the kitchen, a workout room, and a stainless steel spiral staircase that leads to a modern take on a widow’s walk.



There are two dormitory-style rooms in the home where the children sleep during visits: one each for the boys and girls.

The art in Trelawny is on scale with the home itself: grand and impressive. Two massive woodblock carvings adorn the dining room walls, each as large as a table. Williams explains that these works were created by well-known New Orleans artist John T. Scott, a cousin of Paula's husband, Roosevelt Madison. Most of the paintings throughout Trelawny are originals by Roosevelt Madison; Williams reports that Roosevelt is "in the process of creating more pieces for each space." Williams, himself, has contributed a number of massive photographs to further beautify the home.

Williams, who lives in Chicago part of the year, says one of his favorite things about Trelawny House is the fact that the bedrooms are actually five master suites. "We didn't want a traditional home with just one master suite," he says. Because of this feature, the house shares

more in common with the boutique resorts of Thailand and Bali than it does with a Cape Cod residence, despite its superficial resemblance to the latter. In fact, one of the guest suites features a Thai theme, with rich silks and Williams' photo of Thailand's famous Temple of the Emerald Buddha (Wat Phra Kaew) as the central piece of art.

Each of the suites includes a spacious bathroom with a soak tub; a private outdoor courtyard and garden; and a bedroom/living area with a freestanding platform bed, a flat-screen television, and furniture that matches the room's theme. All of the courtyards boast an outdoor shower that is enclosed mostly by a massive palm trunk, and one features a soak tub carved from one piece of black granite so heavy that it took five grown men and a forklift to install.



In addition to the suites, two dormitory-style rooms are designated for children. Nestled in a space above the entranceway, the boys' room inhabits one wing and the girls' room the other. Each has four freestanding twin beds, and the area in between mimics the adult great room; "It's a kids wonderland," says Madison, with chair swings, art supplies, board games, and a television with a gaming system.

Williams explains the benefits of the overall layout, stating, "We've had as many as 20 family members here at one time; the house can soak them all up without us feeling crowded." His sister agrees, sharing that while at Trelawny, "You can have as much or as little social interaction as you want. I sat in my garden one day and fell asleep for two hours; when I awoke, my grandson told me that he'd been looking all over for me and couldn't find me."

The home's social center is also the piece that first saw completion: the infinite-edged swimming pool, which the family modeled after one at a resort in Sandton, South

Africa, where they stayed while on a safari vacation. Both pools include a very shallow area with mounts for umbrellas. This allows for shade, but also makes it so that, as Madison says, "the entire family can enjoy the water, from infants to the elderly." The greater pool area also includes the hot tub, living spaces, a bar, and a full-sized outdoor kitchen complete with grills for entertaining larger parties; the space can easily accommodate 200 guests.

The name Trelawny pays homage to family history; Williams and Madison recently discovered an

even deeper connection than they had first imagined. Trelawny Parish is next to St. Ann Parish, in Jamaica, where their African-Jamaican grandfather was born. "There was also a governor called Trelawny," Madison says.

The Chinese side of the family had also lived in Jamaica; the owners learned more about this heritage in 2012, three years after their home had been completed. While shooting a documentary about their Chinese grandfather entitled *Finding Samuel Lowe*, Madison located their family in China. "Samuel Lowe" was the



English name that their grandfather had taken when he established his business in St. Ann Parish, but the family descends from the Hakka people of China.

Madison and Williams are the 151st generation of this family, and they discovered that their ancestral compound has been turned into a museum. It turns out that the Hakka people were known for their architecture, specifically for creating compounds called “Hakka Tulou,” which featured a number of smaller structures enclosed within an exterior wall. “We learned that the design of Trelawny was actually quite similar to that of our ancestors,” Madison states. “It has great meaning and symbolism to our family.”

A unique dwelling that blends East and West with island cultures and urban sophistication, Trelawny is a masterpiece of—and a gallery for—modern art and functional design. From the widow’s walk that allows viewers to take in four separate fireworks displays on the Fourth of July, to its all-season readiness that permits solitary weekends of winter seclusion, the home meets a wide range of needs and provides tranquility amid a quiet piece of Martha’s Vineyard’s wilder reaches. Williams offers a conclusion in far simpler terms: “We’re thrilled with the way the house turned out for our entire family.”

Chris White is freelance writer who teaches English at Tabor Academy in Marion.

