

DESIGN FOR ALL TIME



Patrick Ahearn's 'Timeless' highlights the architect's decades worth of work and altruistic approach to design

BY HALEY COTE · PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF PATRICK AHEARN ARCHITECT

BEFORE BECOMING THE accomplished architect he is today, Patrick Ahearn first had dreams of a career in automotive design. (That dream was serendipitously deferred a generation: His son, Conor, is a car designer.) Ahearn has instead exercised his passion for cars by collecting them, one of which is a 1953 Studebaker Starliner coupe. He considers this model to be the most important automotive design in the 20th century because of its classic, timeless appeal.

Classic and timeless are ideals at the foundation of Ahearn's architectural work. From Boston's Back Bay to Edgartown, Martha's Vineyard, his distinct architecture is historically driven and designed to stand the test of time. Ahearn's efforts to revitalize the aforementioned areas have proven successful, as he is guided by his design philosophy centered on the greater good.



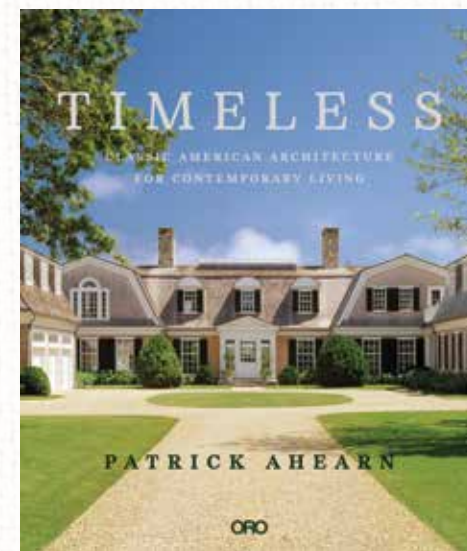
“MORE THAN FOUR DECADES INTO MY TIME AS AN ARCHITECT, THESE PLACE-MAKING VENTURES CONTINUE TO KEEP ME EXCITED AND INTRIGUED, AND MORE ENTHUSIASTIC THAN EVER ABOUT MY CRAFT.”



Circa-1890 image of the John Coffin House, one of Edgartown's most historic residences. Ahearn's renovation of the old blacksmith's house is featured in "Timeless."

“The role of an architect can really influence a whole society, in terms of improving how people live and how they view themselves and their environment,” Ahearn says. “It’s really about looking at the world with a different set of eyes, and that’s what I do. The outcome is different, and it’s timeless—hence the name of the book.”

That book, “Timeless: Classic American Architecture for Contemporary Living” (Oro Editions), showcases how Ahearn has expertly ascribed the greater good theory to his work. Released last December, “Timeless” features 18 homes designed by Ahearn along with the stories behind their design, as told by Ahearn. The homes—a mix of historic restorations and new construction—are divided into six categories: History Preserved, History Enhanced, History Modernized, History Imagined, History Re-Interpreted, and On The Water. Ahearn and his team put together the 316-page collection in under a year, a challenging feat in itself before taking into consideration Ahearn had four decades worth of work to choose from.



Top: Akin to a luxurious boutique resort, the outdoor living area of this Ahearn-designed Wellesley home provides a private oasis. Above: In restoring Edgartown’s Captain Rufus Pease House, Ahearn preserved the tiny door—now in the middle of the blue backsplash tile—connecting the kitchen to the mudroom. Historically, the cook would have used it to see who was arriving at the home’s service entrance. Right: In Ahearn’s own Edgartown home, he sited the family room in what was once the old barn of the c. 1790 Federal-Colonial-style house. See more in “Timeless”

Above: Ahearn designed this master bath to take advantage of the enviable views of Edgartown Harbor. Top right: Thanks to its oversailing eaves, intricate lattice work, and arched carriage doors, this companion building to an Ahearn-designed home in Edgartown combines the concept of a gatehouse with that of a carriage house. Right: Ahearn’s use of extensive glazing allows the walls of this large kitchen to all but disappear, making the space feel like it’s part of Edgartown Harbor beyond. See more in “Timeless”

“I started with probably 400 houses, breaking it down and deciding what houses match up with the essence of the story of the book,” Ahearn says. “I didn’t want it to be overly intellectual, but I also didn’t want it to be a picture book. I really needed people to understand me and where I came from and what my views are, but also educate them on a different way of looking at things. It’s not about ego, it’s not about the latest

trend—it comes back to history, it comes back to human scale, it comes back to things you touch and feel that are memorable in your psyche.”

To Ahearn, the spaces between structures are just as important as the structures themselves, a concept he explores in the book. “Views, even if it’s across private property, can be meaningful in terms of enjoyment,” he says. “Viewing into a wonderful English garden as you walk down the sidewalk, or seeing the harbor in the distance and that special sailboat catching the sunrise—this is all part of the human condition that architecture can really influence in a positive way.”

“Timeless” also details the story of Ahearn’s life and career. A native of Levittown, Long Island, Ahearn moved to Boston in 1973, after completing graduate school at Syracuse University. By the late ’80s, he had restored hundreds of historic buildings in the Back Bay, breathing life into the previously run-down neighborhood. Ahearn then set his sights on Edgartown in the mid ’90s, once again taking on the role of community steward and reimagining residential and commercial properties in the area.



Ahearn’s career-long dedication to designing for the greater good—to respect the surroundings he creates in, and to respect the needs of the people whom he creates for—culminates with “Timeless.” But Ahearn’s work is far from done. As he notes in the book, “More than four decades into my time as an architect, these place-making ventures continue to keep me excited and intrigued, and more enthusiastic than ever about my craft.”

“Timeless” by Patrick Ahearn is available for purchase from Amazon.

Haley Cote is the assistant editor for Cape Cod Life Publications.