

# New England HOME

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# Joining The Fun

*A creative husband and wife enlist a team of Martha's Vineyard design pros to create the perfect island home for the couple's blended family.*

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Hiding in the middle of Edgartown on Martha's Vineyard, the family home lies tucked behind a carriage house with an arched passageway, out of sight from passersby. FACING PAGE: Layers of antiques and flea-market finds fill niches such as this one in the entryway.

“Sometimes I would come in and Lew would just be staring at the fireplace, figuring out where the next piece would go,” says Celeste.



The large living room, outfitted to accommodate the homeowners and their six children as well as plenty of friends, has multiple seating areas scattered around a fireplace conceived and built by stone artist Lew French.



The homeowners chose a reclaimed wood table built in Ohio for the dining room, which sits just beyond the living room and opens to the backyard; interior designer John Murphy surrounded the table with a mix of upholstered and Windsor chairs to lend extra interest.



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hat deep-blue ring of water that surrounds an island offers a sense of separateness from the world. Away from mainland troubles, anxiety dissipates, leaving the giddy feeling of freedom. That's one reason so many people who visit Martha's Vineyard never leave, or at least end up staking a claim they can return to as needed.

For Christopher Celeste and Nancy Kramer, two high-achieving creatives based in Ohio, the island rep-

resented something more substantial. It was the place where their two families could come together as one.

As single parents, each with three children, Celeste and Kramer vacationed on the island together for a few years, eventually marrying at a house they rented in 2007. Back in Ohio, they continued to live apart for another five years as they ran their businesses and their kids completed schools.

"While we lived in two different cities 150 miles



Wood beams and painted beadboard emphasize the vaulting of the kitchen ceiling; the design team took down walls, allowing the kitchen to flow into the breakfast area and living and dining rooms. A sink base picked up at the antiques show in Brimfield, Massachusetts, finds a new home in the first-floor powder room. FACING PAGE: A fun mix of seating around the table gives the breakfast area its relaxed feeling.

apart back in Ohio, the island became the place where we blended our two families together," says Celeste. "We realized we wanted to build a family home that would be here for generations and be part of the community."

They started with someone they knew, Maggie White of Hob Knob Realty, who had found them the houses they rented. White, who is also a developer and the founder of Hob Knob Construction, introduced them to her chain of contacts and decades-long friends—all island based—who helped the couple create a home to suit a family of eight.

One of the properties White showed them, a lot of almost an acre in the middle of Edgartown, proved the perfect place to begin. Wanting to pay architectural homage to the historic nature of the village, the couple turned to local architect Patrick Ahearn. "Patrick really acted as a steward and a guide," says Celeste. "We showed him a photo of a farmhouse we

liked and right there he sketched it on a napkin, adding porticos, and that was it."

Taking full advantage of the size of the lot, Ahearn placed the house toward the center, far from the activity of the street. In fact, it's nearly impossible to see the Greek Revival-style house unless you're looking for it. A carriage house blocks the view to the main house, ensuring a high level of privacy. "The carriage house becomes the foil for the street and creates a romantic passageway that lines up with the front door," says Ahearn, of the disguise. "It acts like a portal to the hidden jewel beyond."

**PROJECT TEAM**

**ARCHITECTURE:** Patrick Ahearn  
**INTERIOR DESIGN:** John Murphy, Tracker Home Decor  
**BUILDER:** Hob Knob Construction  
**LANDSCAPE DESIGN AND INSTALLATION:** Donaroma's Nursery and Landscape Services



“It’s not a cocktail party house; it’s a blended-family house where friends can come in and relax,” says Celeste.



Nestled among mature trees, the main house, pool cabana/guest house, garage, and carriage house all relate to one another through a series of gardens designed and installed by island landscaping company Donaroma’s.

“It’s all about the scale,” says Ahearn. “In Edgartown, the spaces between buildings become as important as the buildings themselves. They create hidden gardens and passages throughout the village. That’s exactly what happens on this property on a smaller scale.”

While the formality of the village is reflected in the crisp white clapboards and graying shingles of the exterior, Celeste and Kramer knew they wanted an

The study, where Kramer and Celeste often take their morning coffee, shows off Murphy’s deft blending of the couple’s tastes—her preference for traditional and his for a more bohemian look. Colorful rugs, patterned pillows, and grass textures throughout the house make it feel like a year-round family home rather than strictly a vacation destination.

interior with a more relaxed feel. “It’s not a cocktail party house; it’s a blended-family house where friends can come in and relax,” says Celeste. “We’ve got six kids. No matter what plan you draw there are going to be twelve to fourteen pairs of shoes lying on the floor inside the door.”

An open plan on the first level supplies the required



informality. A wide entryway offers a view through the living room, into the dining room, and to the backyard beyond. Stairs to the bedrooms are tucked unobtrusively to one side, while a short hallway leads to the kitchen with its vaulted ceiling and a breakfast area. In the opposite wing lie a mudroom, office, and a small sitting room where Kramer and Celeste like to read the papers and take their morning coffee.

“We tweaked the interior layout of the house, but didn’t deviate too much from the floor plan,” says White. “At the time it was like the Brady Bunch,

because it was their first house together. They looked at that house as their family home. It was exciting to see a family merge like that.”

The large, sprawling living room, with its mix of sofas, chairs, love seats, and loungers, offers a seat for everyone in the house. At its center is an almost literal piece of the island—an asymmetrical fireplace by stone artist Lew French. “It’s a conversational piece, a focal point,” says Celeste. French installed the piece, a mix of fieldstone and massive granite plinths, long before the furniture was placed. “Sometimes I



would come in and he would just be sitting there staring at it, figuring out where the next piece would go,” Celeste recalls.

Kramer and Celeste both had ideas for island-based designer John Murphy. Kramer wanted the floors to remain natural, and she wanted to work with Connecticut-based Elizabeth Eakins to create rugs for the living room and the master bedroom. The couple’s other guidelines for Murphy included no blue and white, no boats, nothing nautical, and no overdecorating. “It’s not a yacht club,” Celeste jokes.

The bed was one of the last things the couple found while working on the decoration of the house. A multicolored woven blanket and pillows by John Robshaw are finishing touches. FACING PAGE: Soothing blue is one element that gives the master suite its getaway feeling. A cozy sitting area in front of the fireplace and a large balcony overlooking the backyard are other bonuses.

“They had a vision for the house,” says Murphy. “We hunted and gathered in Columbus, Ohio, and used things from Nancy’s mother’s house. We met at Brimfield, where we found the stand for the sink in the



A pool cabana further screens the house from the street and offers extra bedroom space for guests. **FACING PAGE, TOP:** Surgical precision was required to site the house among the mature trees. Donaroma's Nursery and Landscape Services created an inner courtyard rimmed with plantings. **FACING PAGE, BOTTOM:** Around the side of the house, the gardens form outdoor rooms that make perfect spots for play or relaxation.

powder room and the metal chairs and cocktail tables in the living room. Christopher really got into it."

While the look is a mix of traditional (a nod to Kramer's tastes), slightly bohemian (reflecting Celeste's love of pattern and having lived in India), and modern (in layout and pared-down woodwork), ultimately it's an island retreat. "More than anything,

this is a Martha's Vineyard house," says Celeste, noting that all of the art on the walls is by Martha's Vineyard artists, from local galleries. "The process introduced us to a community of wonderful creatives," he adds.

The couple has gone on to collaborate with some of those same talents again, in their work on four other houses as part of their company Facing West, which provides funding for community development projects worldwide.

Islands can be funny things. As much as they geographically separate us, they are awfully good at bringing us together. •

**RESOURCES** For more information about this home, see page 140.



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