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Like a *ghost* in the Night

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Houses designed by Patrick Ahearn, AIA, are intriguing in that it's nearly impossible to speculate when they may have been built. Because his well researched creations blend so beautifully into their environment and neighborhood, they look as though they've always been there.

When Zenus and Susan Crocker of Wellesley, acquired a parcel of land in Osterville they immediately knew who they wanted to design their summerhouse. "Patrick designed a new kitchen and an addition for us at our Wellesley home and there was absolutely no question in our mind that we wanted him to do our Oyster

Harbor home," Zenus Crocker said.

The couple knew they wanted a classic two-story New England shingle style house, but because the land is bordered on three sides by roads, it was going to be a complicated project. "We knew we'd have a hard time finding the right house for that land, but Patrick worked it out beautifully," Crocker said.

By his own admission, Ahearn says he's like a ghost who comes in the night and leaves little trace that he was ever there. "A good architect will be sensitive to the elements that dictate the style of a property. The location, theme, and character of the environment are important considerations,"

Ahearn said.

The Wellesley resident opened his firm, Ahearn/Schopfer and Associates in Boston's Back Bay in 1978. While Schopfer specializes in hotel, commercial interiors, and contemporary residential work, Ahearn is the firm's residential traditionalist. "I knew from the time I was just a kid that I wanted to design either cars or buildings," he said. During his tenure in Boston, a city teeming with period architecture, Ahearn has had the pleasure of renovating over 350 properties. Places like Back Bay, the South End, and Bay Village may have his stamp but few in the neighborhood are the wiser. Ahearn said he thrives

on working with the classic styles that can be found all over Boston.

In addition to his urban designs, he has also done numerous projects in several of Boston's more exclusive suburbs including Dover, Sherborn, Wellesley, and Weston. "The majority of my clients are very successful business executives or high profile individuals who are very particular about what they want. I have a good reputation in the high end market," he said.

When he's not directing his staff of 14 architects at his Commonwealth Avenue office, Ahearn can be found working at his second office on Martha's Vineyard. Since 2000, discriminating residents of the popular island have hired the Boston architect to design or redesign their exclusive island retreats, many of which line Edgartown Harbor. His New England shingle houses are so authentic they even pass muster with the island's stringent building commission.

"We were hired to build a two story waterfront home in Edgartown that proved particularly challenging. The lot was very small (50 ft. wide) and we also had to deal with height restrictions. In the end, we built a 3,300 square foot house that looks like it's always been there and all involved parties are very happy," Ahearn said.

Being a graduate of Syracuse University, Ahearn's respect for period architecture has earned him kudos from peers and clients. It isn't unusual for him to just sit and think about a house he's building or renovating, almost time-traveling to the period in which the home was built. Ahearn explains that at the start of a new project he asks himself lots of questions such as; what kind of materials would have been used? What kind of finishes or windows would have been available at the time? What's the best way to make this house blend into its environment? "Every house has its own romance and style and when I design or renovate a home it's very important to start out by asking myself those questions. There are many architects who build what I call ego driven homes and in the end they just don't look like they belong. My goal is





always to build something that's right for its location," Ahearn said.

While trying to describe how he arrives at a finished product, Ahearn said he compares his drawings, ideas, and plan to writing a movie script. "A lot of thought and discussion and very detailed drawings go into every project, and as long as we stay true to the script we're fine," he said.

The Crocker's Oyster Harbor house lot would require a unique structure but the challenge didn't stop there. Ahearn spent time listening to the couple's needs and worked to design a house that would suit them and their lifestyle. "We wanted a country front porch and we really wanted the house to look like an old Cape Cod house and it does," Crocker said.

The Crocker's also wanted a lot of specific detailing inside the house. Features including period moldings, built-in bookcases, and a slate fireplace surround were custom designed and replicated. Ahearn said he has a network of suppliers across the country enabling him to put his fingers on the right materials for every house he designs.

Ahearn also designed a carriage house, with a complete apartment for visiting guests, that compliments the main house beautifully. The Crocker's say they got exactly what they wanted and best of all, looking at the house it's difficult to tell if it was built at the turn of the last century or last year.

"Not only did Patrick come up with a house that was perfect for us, but he came in right on budget and on time. Patrick is amazing because he has total recall of period features. He's a good listener and can start sketching exactly what you have in mind during a simple conversation. He's passionate about what he does and I would definitely recommend him to a friend," Crocker said.

Whether it's New England shingle, English country, Greek Revival, Federal, or Victorian, Ahearn is at his best when working with classic form. "A well designed and planned house should be timeless," he said.

Ahearn said he's currently mar-



keting heavily on the Vineyard but he has projects going all over the country. Santa Barbara, California, The US Virgin Islands, and an island off Bar Harbor, Maine are just a few. He currently has a client in Denver, Colorado who is having New England fieldstone shipped to Denver to complete the look he has in mind for his house.

“When you’re dealing with high end clients, changes in the economy or market don’t really affect business,

and real estate is usually a solid investment at any rate,” he said.

Residential designs in his elaborate portfolio range in price from \$200,000 to \$8 million and he said the sky is the limit. Whether it’s a Back Bay townhouse, summer home, or primary residence, all clients receive the same undivided attention and end up with exactly what they had in mind and maybe more.

Ahearn said he has no plans to retire any time soon. He regularly

attends architecture and related classes and workshops and said each project he completes is as exciting now as it was when he first started. “I very much enjoy what I do and I look forward to many new design challenges on Martha’s Vineyard. In fact, I’m building a summer house there for my own family,” he said. •CRM•

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