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## Edgartown via Levittown

The Evolution of  
an Architect  
and the Homes  
He Builds

MENEMSHA'S  
BIGGEST BITE

# JAWS

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MASTER CRAFTSMAN

## John Thayer

OUTDOORS

## Tashmoo Schoolies

NEW EXPANDED CUISINE

## Herbal Delights





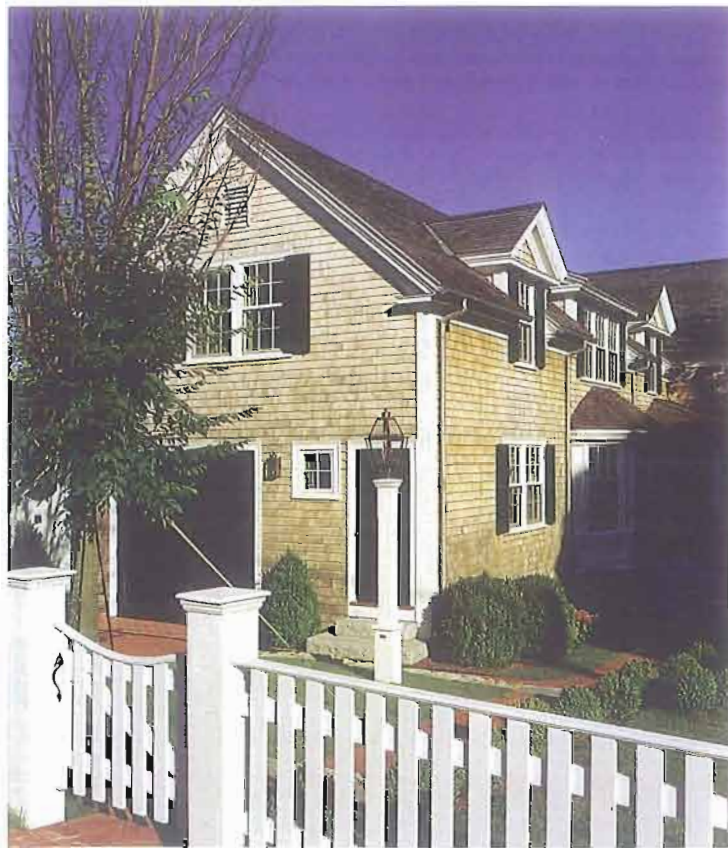
**Surgical insertion:** With barely a grass blade disturbed, Ahearn's placement of what appears to be a carriage-house-that-grew (center home) is a testament to his neighborhood friendly designs. The sprawling lawn

remains intact with the existing topography gently sloping to the harborfront. The walk-out porches are reminiscent of the Charleston style. The lower level workshop has the bonus of a water view.



# Edgartown via Levittown

The Evolution of an Architect  
and the Homes He Builds



By John Budris

Photography by Greg Premru

**H**istorical neighborhoods have no real blank canvas. An empty Edgartown waterfront lot may appear an inviting temptation on which to build as high and wide as inclination and inspector may allow.

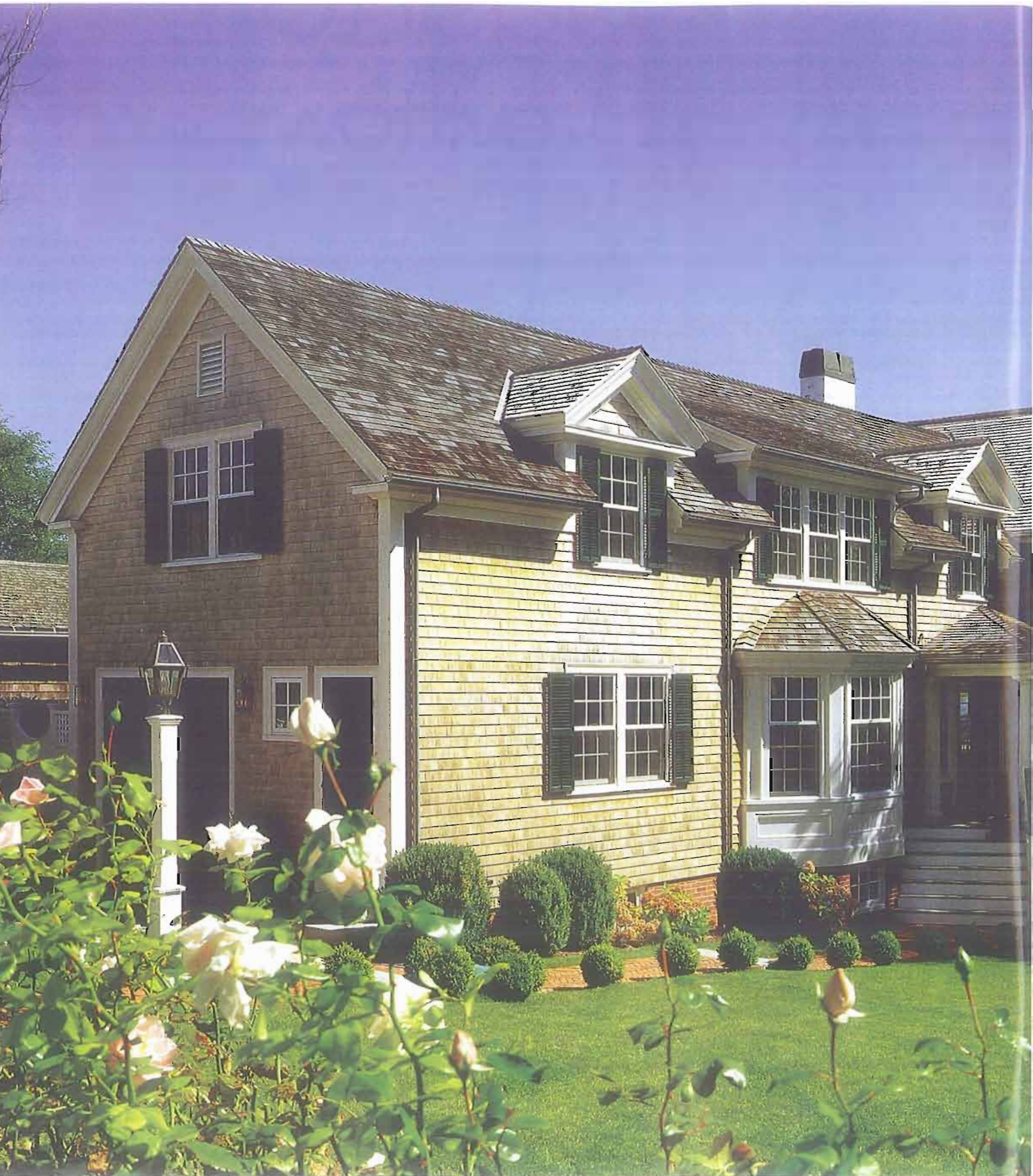
But don't ask Patrick Ahearn to design it.

The *fiftysomething* architect may

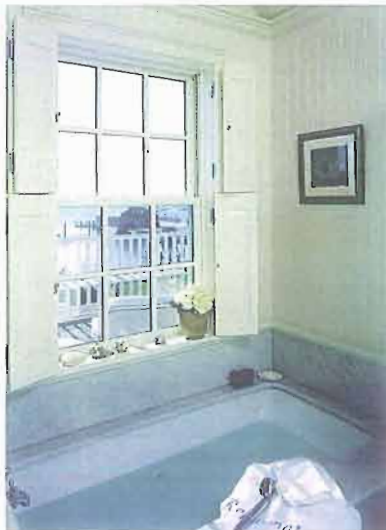
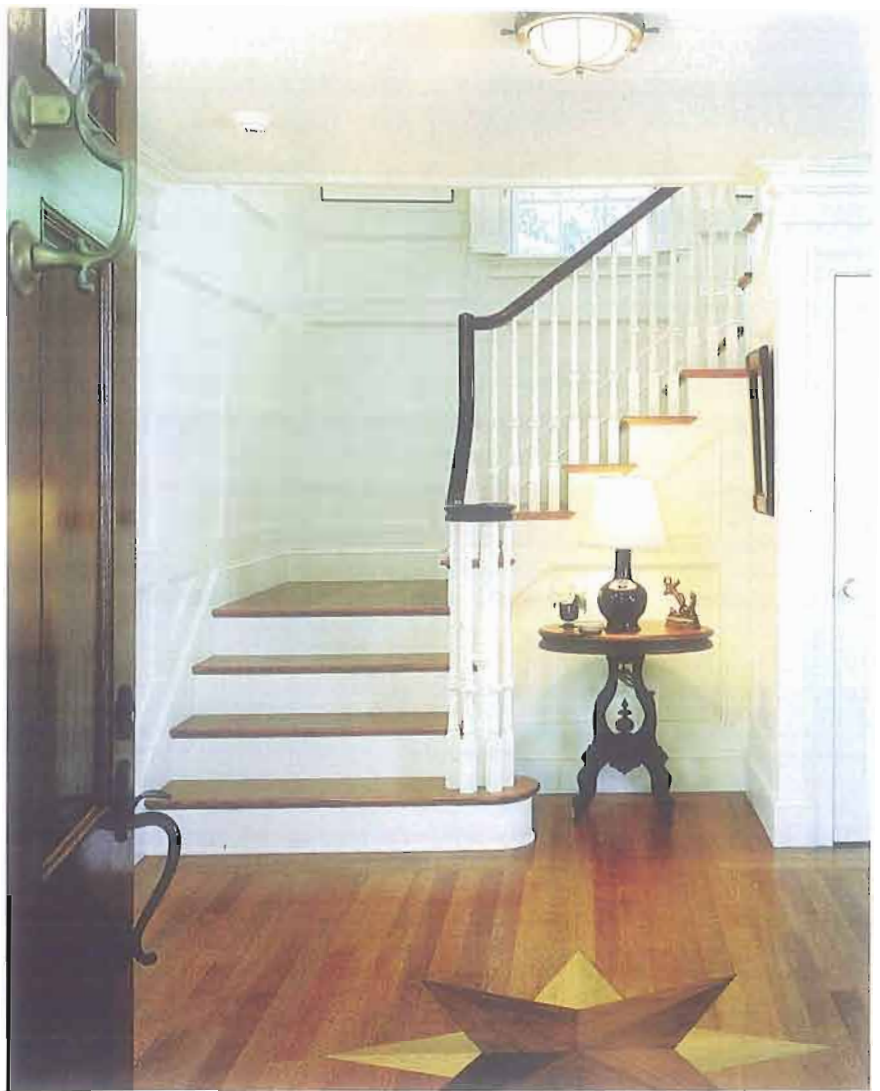
have signed contracts with clients with names, but in every one of his designs, the ultimate client is the greater good of the neighborhood.

"My belief in designs which harmonize with the home next door may have come from a rather paradoxical source, my old neighborhood in Levittown, New York," says Ahearn. *continued on next page*









**The compass rose (top) invites guests to pause in the entryway. The master suite bath includes a lush soaking tub (above) with majestic water views. Paramount to Ahearn's design plan (left) was maintaining a clear view corridor to the harbor and waterfront.**

To some, the 17,000 cookie cutter homes built on Long Island's potato fields may appear the sarcastic subject of Pete Seeger's satirical ballad, *Little Boxes*. But to Ahearn, the 1950s development built on the GI Bill possessed a hidden wisdom beyond immediate shelter.

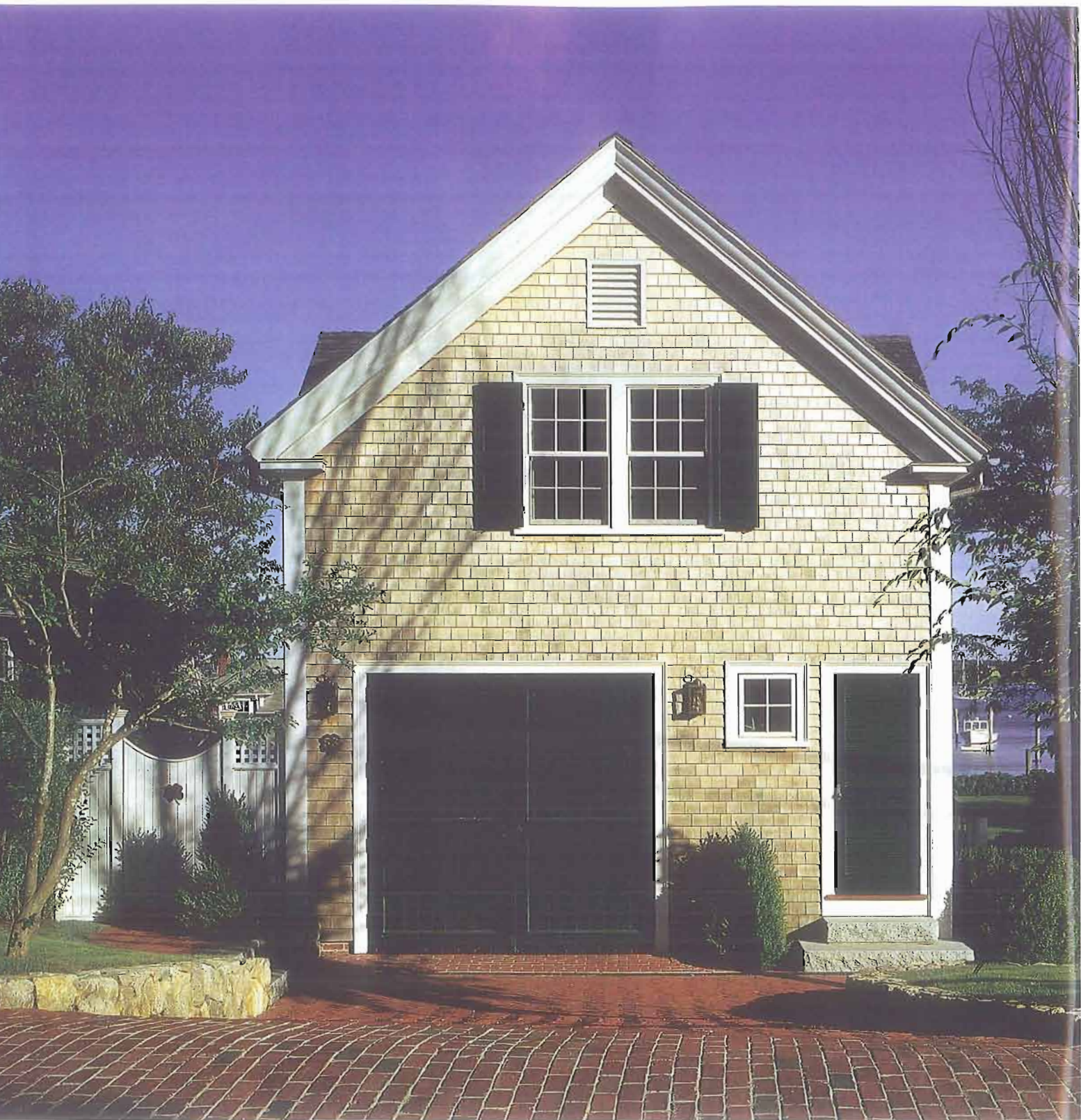
"Those homes were designed to accommodate expansion across the years as families and income grew. And they did," says Ahearn. "So much so, that few are left that have not been expanded. And they fit together as a whole as well now and when first built."

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 from Wellsley Hills to Water Street in Edgartown.

One instructive example is camouflaged on Edgartown Harbor, a home Ahearn surgically inserted into an existing historical neighborhood

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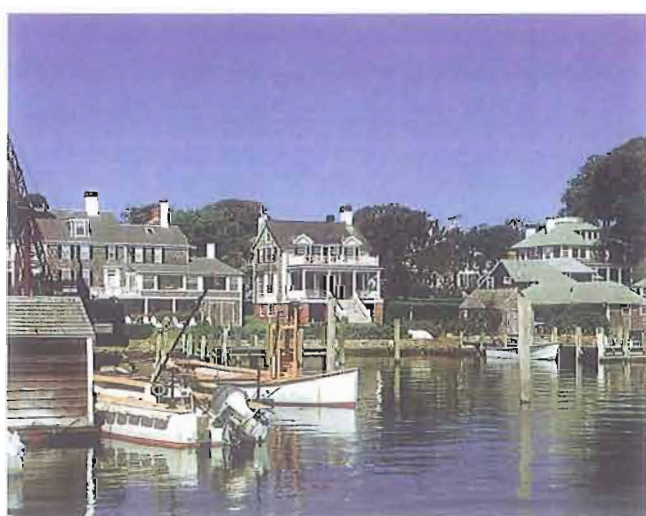
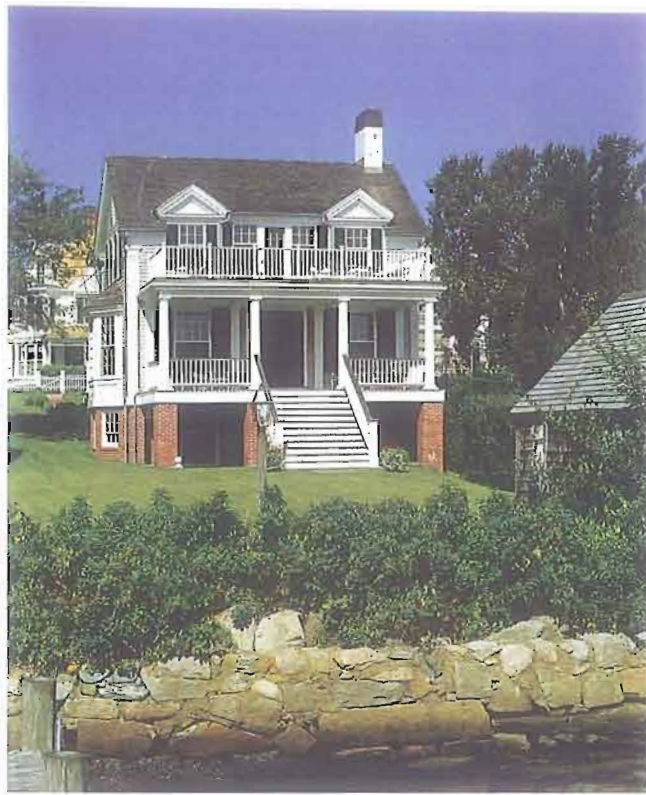




**Street smart:** From the vantage point of passersby, the demure profile of the home suggests that a century old carriage house had grown across the decades. Antique bricks and consistent fence details further blend the new

home into its old surroundings. **Water wise:** From the water side, (right) the home perfectly harmonizes with the neighborhood's existing architecture and ambience.





architect  
**Patrick Ahearn**  
in his own words

**T**he role as an architect that I have chosen to play in creating romantic and intimate houses of character is based on what I refer to as “implied history.” My goal in designing either a new home, a major renovation or restoration is based on the premise that the house should look and feel as though it has stood for a long time. The house should feel rooted in its site and be in scale with its surroundings and have a sense of place.



My approach to creating architecture is very much like the role of a novelist, filmmaker or storyteller. Before I begin to think about a specific style of architecture, I create a “script” or story line that weaves the to be created “history” of the house, how it may have grown over time or what may have caused the particular style of house to be created. The concept of “scripting” allows one the opportunity to embrace the client’s more utilitarian program with a sense of history or timelessness, that results in houses that look as natural and authentic as possible. I do not copy classic architecture in a strict sense, but rather interpret historical models to create what I refer to as “implied history.”



As a result of this approach, I believe that the houses that I design integrate classic architecture with how people want to live today, and still be respectful of the past. I view the tradition of vernacular architecture as a source of inspiration and ideas rather than a straitjacket. Innovation will always have a place when interpreting historic styles, as long as it is not disrespectful, “you can get very playful,” however, as long as you take it seriously.



with such precision of design and deft application of exterior décor, that even the chimney bricks were scuffed to imitate the burnishing of age.

Ahearn began with what can only be called a lawn, one that gently rolled to water’s edge and divided two existing homes. This was no ordinary strip of grass but a potential political noman’s land. Neighbors had grown accustomed to the rare open patch as a view corridor to the water. Preserving as much of that familiar alley to the shore would become paramount in his plan.

He then moved to the *script*, which he describes as his vision, his story, of what kind of home *would* be there had one the chance to evolve during a century or more.

“All the best examples of wonderful New England architecture already existed in this village,” says Ahearn, “You just have to look around, and choose the elements that make the most sense. And that’s what I did.”

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Home Portrait  
*continued*



The carved  
spindles and  
mahogany banister  
are consistent with  
a home more than  
a century old.





To maximize interior ceiling height and still conform to exterior height restrictions, Ahearn stepped down the living room and dining room areas. Mahogany pilasters and columns (above) add to the restored feel of the home.

The positioning of two larger homes like bookends flanking the lot suggested to him that a carriage house might be the logical structure that served either or both in an imagined times past.

“Instead of this being a grand captain’s house, this was the outbuilding, the carriage house, the garage that grew,” says Ahearn.

Following the expansion model, as the need grew, so would the carriage house. Such a building, owing to the function of shelter for equipment, would logically hug the street. As a carriage house would not be proud and tall 100 years ago, nor would Ahearn’s contemporary design.

“So the neighbors still got a view corridor, we really shrunk the scale of the house from the street side, to the absolute minimum,” says Ahearn. “And then let the house grow to the harbor in the Savannah style with New England overtones.”

The dormer details Ahearn borrowed from the adjacent house, a strategy that further helped tie the

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# Home Portrait

continued

actual new with the actual old while blurring the margins of age.

"This is a house people can touch and feel, they can walk right by, drive right by, bike right by, something they can see from the harbor, and think it's been here forever," he says. "They'd never know it's brand, spanking new."

Inside, keeping to the concept of an exquisite restoration, Ahearn used columns, pilasters, storms, doors and transoms crafted from mahogany as period detail devices. He had antique light fixtures rewired to further suggest that slow transformation across time. The entryway was accented with a compass inlay floor, and the master suite spiced with an Irish rose window, all strategies that create an antique feel. To maximize the height inside without reaching blatantly skyward outside, Ahearn stepped down the living and dining room.

In fact, the house does not "feel" its 32-foot height at all because by using the foundation line, the home sits on a podium. The podium and the porches



suggest the style of Savannah or Charleston, explains Ahearn.

"The master suite has a private terrace overlooking the whole world, and still from below, in the workshop, you

have great views out," he says. "And you can see how the lawn never changed, all the existing topography is intact."

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**Light touch:** The upstairs master suite (left) features an Irish rose window. The downstairs living area includes period touches of mahogany trim, painted, boxed beams and transom glazing.

and a glove-fit into a neighborhood can, and most often does, run into a hotbed of political issues. "But this historic district was very responsive to direction, of theme and style, and its members made some good comments and offered solid guidance," says Ahearn.

That careful collaboration, which approaches, but does not cross the line of design-by-committee, is what makes Ahearn's work ensemble pieces rather than ego-driven architecture.

"And I had a wonderful client, very appreciative and open-minded about

what we could do here, and he truly loves his house," says Ahearn. "He's always there, always around tinkering with it, as if the place were his Ferrari."

On this little swath of Edgartown, someone could have designed and built a vaulting Colonial that stretched across the whole property like a cargo ship aground. Someone could have designed and built a very un-neighborly giant box that obliterated the view and overwhelmed the antique homes just out of reach.

Someone could have. But not Patrick Ahearn. **v s**



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