

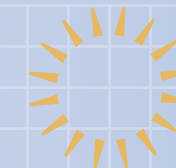
# WellesleyWeston

MAGAZINE



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FIVE DOLLARS



# TIMELESS SUMMER HOMES

## HOW TO BUILD OR RENOVATE A SEASONAL ESCAPE THAT ONLY GETS BETTER WITH TIME

PATTY LENZ BOVIE **writer**

GREG PREMUR **photographer**

**new** England summer homes have always had special appeal: shingled silhouettes tucked behind dunes on the Vineyard, Cape Cod compounds built for bare feet and beach towels, glassy New Hampshire lake retreats where mornings begin with coffee on the dock.

But today's summer homes have become more versatile. They are no longer places that you "open" from Memorial Day to Labor Day; they're now a destination for extended weekends, spring shoulder-season get-aways, and work-from-anywhere weeks that stretch well past Thanksgiving.

The best summer homes are timeless: designed for today's way of life. And tomorrow's.

### START WITH A FEELING. NOT A FLOOR PLAN

Before Sage Conti of Sage Conti Design and managing partner of Luxe & Co Accessory Dwellings talks square footage, she talks about a feeling. She starts with one simple question: "How do you want to feel in your summer home?" The response becomes the catalyst that drives her creative process. Whether it's a low-maintenance escape for "kicking back and

*right: Architect Patrick Ahearn created a backyard oasis perfectly blending into the surroundings at this Martha's Vineyard retreat.*



forgetting about reality” or a home-away-from-home for constant entertaining, Sage helps her clients make their spaces unique to them.

### DESIGN FOR MULTIPLE GENERATIONS

A summer house is rarely just for a couple. It’s for grandparents, teens, toddlers, friends of friends—often all at once. Patrick Ahearn of Patrick Ahearn Architect, an award-winning Fellow of the American Institute of Architects, says, “One of the most important things is to plan for multiple generations.” COVID made remote work mainstream and

permanently changed the way people use their properties. Today’s weekend visit might become a three-week stay. Kids who are teens now will host friends—and later, return with partners and children. Patrick’s advice is to zoom out: “Think about what you’ll want 10, 20 years down the road, not just today.”

From a design perspective Sage meets families at many different stages, which means the old formula of one guest room and a pull-out sofa no longer measures up. Instead, she creates multiple guest suites that can accommodate extended families. “Custom bunk beds, Murphy beds, convertible spaces that double as a guest room, and daybeds and trundles all provide maximum flexibility for a growing guest list.”



#### Smart Moves:

- **BUNK ROOMS** that feel intentional (not like overflow) and can house siblings, cousins, or visiting friends.
- **GUEST SUITES WITH PRIVACY**, especially if multiple family branches travel together.
- **SEPARATE HANGOUT ZONES** so adults and kids can coexist without competing for the same space.
- **CARRIAGE HOUSE / CABANA / DETACHED BONUS SPACE**, a classic New England solution that feels charming and highly functional.
- **MUDROOMS** that act as drop zones for luggage, laundry, and wet towels.
- **SCREENED-IN SUNROOMS / PORCHES** for buggy evenings and group game nights.

### BLENDING INTO THE LANDSCAPE

A New England summer home has a distinctive setting—a lineage, a streetscape. Patrick says, “One of the most important things is for the design of the house to fit into the context of place. You want it to blend in with its surroundings.”

*left: The bunk room at this Cape Cod home designed by Sage Conti also features a sliding door opening to a hangout zone for older kids.*



roundings. He says, “I’m all about non-ego driven architecture.” His work isn’t about making a statement—it’s about fitting effortlessly into a place, as if it’s always been there. For 50 years, he’s designed hundreds of summer homes, impacting the landscape with respectful vernacular architecture.

**REFRAMING SIGHTLINES**

The best renovations aren’t just cosmetic, they’re functional as well. Sage flags one of the most common missed opportunities: clients not realizing what’s possible in their own homes. They might not have a sightline to the water, or low ceilings that compress the living room, or a wall that breaks up the flow. With the right team, you can transform a property. “You just have to see the potential,” Sage says. Translation: The house you bought or inherited doesn’t have to be the house you live with.

She recalls a full gut renovation of a 5,000-square-foot house where her client said, “I want to feel like I’m inside a hydrangea.” With such an inspiring vision, Sage leaned into layered blues and greens—and created rooms reminiscent of a summer garden. But there were structural transformations as well. Sage and the builder tapped into 7.5 feet of unused attic space above the living room to cathedral the ceiling. Sage shares, “It completely transformed the room! We also removed the wall between the great room and dining room, opening a view to the water from the entry door.” The dated

*above: This Edgartown home designed by Patrick Ahearn features timeless design that blends in with today’s way of living.*

His team approaches projects by “scripting” them: imagining the property’s story like a novel or screenplay, then letting that narrative guide the architecture. He designed a brand-new home in Edgartown that’s close enough to the historic district to echo its feel but built for real family life. This Greek Revival farmhouse looks like it could have been built in the late 1800s, reminiscent of historic captain’s homes in the area. The main house is linked to a carriage house by a breezeway with a cabana and pool with all the modern conveniences today’s clients’ desire.

That’s Patrick Ahearn Architect’s secret sauce of timelessness: working with the sur-



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study became a functional bunk room, and the great room is now known as the “hydrangea” room—airy and light—with bright white shiplap throughout.

Sage adds, “Don’t wait too long to hire a designer or architect.” The earlier the collaboration begins, the more potential you can unlock including structural changes, layout improvements, and the kind of foresight that prevents expensive do-overs. Professionals see what’s possible and that often makes the difference between livable and phenomenal.

### MAKE EVERY ROOM A DISTINCT EXPERIENCE

A truly memorable summer home has range. It isn’t one-note nautical (unless you want it to be). Sage’s approach is to ensure “every room” has a distinct feel, sometimes soothing with grasscloth and airy palettes, other times vivid with bold wallpapers and patterns. It all goes back to her initial question: How do you want to feel in your home?

She emphasizes the importance of window treatments. Guests need privacy and a place to sleep in, if they want. Blackout linings, sheers, shutters, Roman shades—done thoughtfully—make a summer home feel genuinely hospitable.

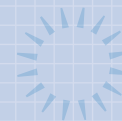
*above: This Cape Cod kitchen designed by Sage Conti is inviting, functional, and built for seasonal socializing.*

### FLEX SPACES

Some summer homes are tranquil: a porch, a book, and the hum of a ceiling fan. Others are built for seasonal socializing: dinners, cocktails, and the kind of hosting that requires a catering team and steady stream through the kitchen. Sage’s designs run the gamut, depending on the home’s footprint and the client’s wishes. “I design summer homes for ease and flow and spaces that encourage relaxation and spontaneous gathering.”

#### Smart Moves:

- A KITCHEN THAT CAN HANDLE TRAFFIC FOR LARGE GATHERINGS, including a secondary prep area, generous island clearance, and discreet staging zones.
- MULTIPLE OUTDOOR “ROOMS”—a covered veranda, a terrace, a lawn dining zone—so parties can expand naturally.
- INDOOR/OUTDOOR TRANSITIONS like an accordion door that turns a living room into a breezy pavilion.



## Timeless Summer Homes



*above: This Greek Revival farmhouse designed by Patrick Ahearn looks historic but is built for today's way of living.*

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If the mood is more restorative, priorities may shift to calming sightlines, simpler surfaces, and spaces that don't demand constant upkeep.

#### MATERIALS MADE TO LAST

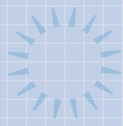
Summer homes take a beating: wet swimsuits, sandy feet, salty humid air. The trick is to choose materials that can weather the elements, and all your guests.

Sage is a fan of the new generation of performance textiles that feel soft to the touch, versus "hard and crunchy," yet stand up to real life. Think stain-resistant, sun-resistant fabrics that can survive steamy summers. "Indoor/outdoor options have come a long way," she says, especially in rugs, pillows, and patterned textiles with luxurious texture and depth of color. She's a big believer in "high-performance fabrics such as Peter Dunham, Schumacher, Perennials, and Quadrille Fabrics' China Seas that come in slipcovers, pillows, and indoor/outdoor highly durable rugs."

## Timeless Summer Homes

### Where it Matters Most:

- **UPHOLSTERY THAT CAN LIVE THROUGH AUGUST** (and still look pristine in October).
- **RUGS THAT CAN HANDLE HUMIDITY** and the inevitable parade from porch to kitchen.
- **OUTDOOR FURNITURE BUILT FOR COASTAL CONDITIONS**, finished in high-gloss, ship-grade paint engineered for sea and salt air.
- **TEAK** remains classic: let it patina to a silvery finish or maintain it with oil.



*below: Sage Conti created custom wallpaper with her client's home on the area map for an added personal touch in their powder room.*

Bathrooms deserve special attention in summer climates. Screen-printed papers may not be the best choice unless ventilation is good. In new construction, systems can make moisture less of a worry; in older homes, select hardier wallcovering lines. Sage loves to add a splash of color or whimsy in her clients' bathrooms and powder rooms. And she adds, "Outdoor showers are a must for beach/pool houses."

She created custom wallpaper with her client's home on the area map for an added personal touch in their powder room.

### BRINGING THE OUTDOORS IN

There's nothing quite like al fresco dining in the warmer months. To accommodate outdoor meals, Sage designs shaded eating areas with

"large market umbrellas and comfy, movable outdoor seating with weather resistant textiles." Most of her clients request an outdoor fire pit or fireplace, which helps enhance the ambience. Some even want a full outdoor kitchen. Sage notes, "I like to layer lots of lighting like lanterns, sconces, and string lights," for added atmosphere.

She also likes to "ground both the interior and exterior design in the surrounding landscape of the house." Whenever possible, her goal is to "draw the outdoors in, allowing nature's textures and colors to shape how my clients experience their home."

### CREATING A HOME BUILT FOR MEMORIES

The finest summer homes don't just function—they flourish. They're comfortable and resilient. They encourage lingering and longevity. And they're built to last. Sage says, "A summer home should feel like an exhale and a break from the busyness of everyday life, so designing with that feeling in mind is a huge driver for all design decisions I guide my clients on." Patrick believes the best projects are about giving a family a place to create lasting memories, not just for summer, but for year after year. **WW**

