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Matthew MacEachern designs a quintessential Nantucket vacation house. Opposite, The photograph of the four flowers is by James Ogilvy.

# S N U G I S L A N D

Nantucket's distinct historic setting becomes the backdrop for a cozy summer house for a family from St. Louis.

BY MARY GRAUERHOLZ // PHOTOGRAPHS BY NAT REA





## IF EVER

there was a snug island, it is Nantucket. With its narrow roads lacing through small clusters of houses and threading along stunning ocean vistas, the island has kept an air of intimacy amid its historic setting, despite its popularity as a summer retreat.

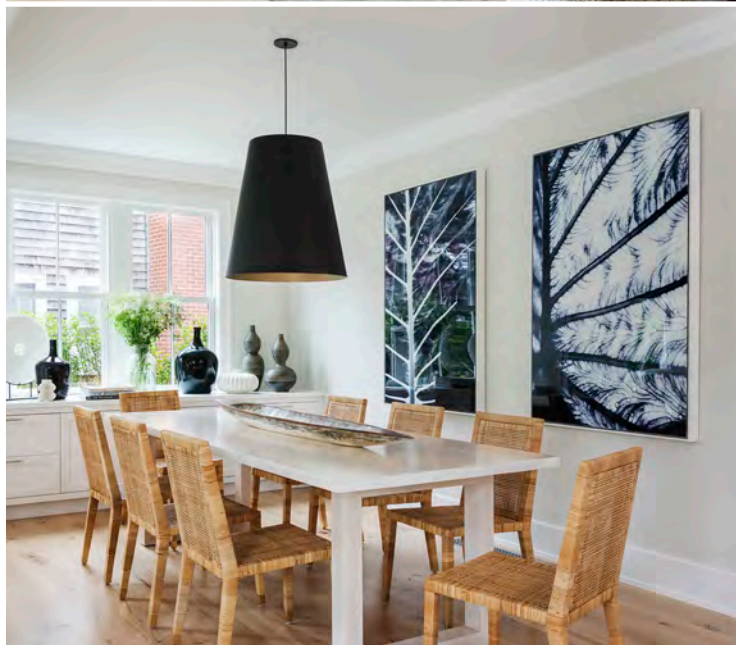
So it's no wonder that visitors from cities often find their summer roots here. One couple from St. Louis, with several children ages 13 to 22, fell in love with the island off the Massachusetts coastline. Now they have their own snug retreat in a fetching neighborhood on the island's north shore. In the time it takes to sip a cup of coffee, they can amble to a spectacular beach or Nantucket's downtown.

The house, designed by the architecture and design firm of Emeritus, Ltd., sings a clear Nantucket song. The natural materials, quiet palette, and graceful lines are a sublime blend of history and subtle modernity.

Matthew R. MacEachern, associate AIA, the founder and principal of Emeritus, has long been soaking up the island's spirit, as a resident of Nantucket and Boston, where his firm has offices. "Nantucket architecture is fascinating," MacEachern says. "To an outsider it can look benign, somewhat plain. But looking at the details, you can see a very specific style."

Dubbed neo-Shingle style, the exterior of the home—measuring just over 3,000 square feet—is filled with elegant details that take advantage of the island's natural surroundings: two-over-two double-hung windows peeking through high ceilings, cedar shingles fully wrapping the exterior, a gabled roof





Opposite, MacEachern draws on the vernacular style of the island's original homes. Cynthia Hayes designs soothing interiors with hints of the island's natural surroundings. Above, The dining table was custom-made by Scott James Furniture.

with substantial rake boards.

Balancing time periods on a history heavy island is a fine line, MacEachern says: "We try to utilize historic details in a slightly contemporary way. With these techniques we're taking away some of the fussiness, celebrating the purity of the materials."

Inside there is the same blend. In the casual living room, the wall around the wood-

burning fireplace is reminiscent of shiplap, originally a method for constructing a water-tight hull on a ship. "We played with scale and increased the gap of the shiplap," MacEachern says. "It has a weight, heaviness, and stature, but it's also casual and modern."

MacEachern was immersed in the nuances of classical design early on, when he took a fellowship studying culture in China and, later, was educated in urban planning in France, amid cities with architecture going back to the 1500s. It gave him perspective and a way of communicating his firm's identity, which he considers to be "graphic interpreter."

The other side of interpretation is listening carefully to his clients. "I try to check my ego at the door," he says. "Our profession sometimes makes it 'all about us.' I think it's a combination of factors, but ultimately we're in the service industry. We have to realize the clients' vision. Then we bring in the artistic piece, the language, to make it as beautiful as possible."

Though this home was built as a spec house, it beautifully fits the clients' needs. Most of the bedrooms are on the second floor. (One of two master suites is on the first floor.) The first floor is a natural gathering place for



the family, especially the kitchen, sunporch, and casual living room.

The family spaces have an easygoing style, yet there are spots of drama and sophistication. The kitchen's dramatic cathedral ceiling draws the eye toward reclaimed wood beams studding the ceiling, as well as transom dormers and clerestory windows, which bring in oceans of soft light and a view of the backyard, elevated cedar deck, pool, and cabana. "Morning light turns to sunset light," MacEachern says. "We tracked the sunlight to animate the space."

Cynthia Hayes, the home's interior designer, offset the artful rooms with wall treatments in a range of white shades for a summery feel. Her goal, hand in hand with the family, was to create "a fresh, fun, kid-friendly, and not too serious atmosphere." The neutral shades of the wood and light walls presented an alluring backdrop for Hayes, the owner of Cynthia Hayes Interior Design in Providence, to create organic textural layers and pops of green and lustrous black.

Every room has objects of interest. The dining room is simple, dominated by a table set on a shining oak floor that varies in texture and hue. Chairs of woven rattan contrast with a glossy black light fixture and prints of large-scale leaves by photographer Ron Royals.

When MacEachern assembled the team to create the house, he ended up as one member of a triad of people all deeply familiar with Nantucket. Hayes spends most of her summers on the island. The building contractor, Ed Toole of Altest Ventures in the village of Siasconset (who happens to be Hayes's brother) has lived on the island most of his life. Toole, who holds an architecture degree from Yale, has worked with Hayes and MacEachern on many Nantucket projects. "We speak the same language," MacEachern says.

It is a language that dovetails with Nantucket's very special identity, built on an architectural spirit of comforting familiarity. "No other place in the world has that same consistent feel," MacEachern says. "I think it's what makes it Nantucket. The similarity, purity, and austerity." ♦

Second floor interiors are kept simple with built-ins—almost Shaker-like. The four-poster bed was made by Scott James Furniture.

Opposite page, A pool house doubles as a guest cottage. A barn door divides the living and dining rooms. Large timbers are left exposed for a rustic feel.

