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OCEAN HOME

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DESTINATION NANTUCKET
ONE-OF-A-KIND HOTELS, SOPHISTICATED ARCHITECTURE, INSPIRED INTERIOR DESIGN, AND LOTS OF SUMMER FUN
OUT ON MADAKET BEACH

On the western end of Nantucket, there’s no shortage of design restrictions, to be sure. But in designing a family’s summer retreat there, architect Andrew Kitchens, a partner in New York’s Workshop-AVS, responded deftly to them all. And he did it with style and restraint, while drawing on the island’s history.

Let’s start with Nantucket’s Historic District Commission (HDC). On the island, every home, every landscape, and every detail of the built environment must be reviewed by this elected board of architects, builders, and preservationists. And they’re picky.

“It’s not a limiting board—it’s just part of the process,” says Kitchens, who designed 100 homes on the island. “You have to do your homework to know what you can do in the local context. There’s a mini-regional aesthetic to the island.”

On Nantucket, clapboard cladding is the de rigueur window style, and stains are prescribed by the commission, and color choices are subject to approval. “They want it to be the quintessential Nantucket that it’s always been,” says builder Bob Field, who’s lived on the island for 35 years, working with Kitchens on 30 homes during much of that time.

For the architect, that meant research into the island’s early legacy as a Quaker fishing village. The Quakers lived and worked in a series of stripped-down 18th-century fishing shacks with a look that designers today might call modern. It was a simpler form of architecture—a style that Kitchens and his firm have emulated and evolved over the years.

“I’m not sure everybody embeds all of that into their architecture,” he says. “But only when you take a deeper dive do you see the details, and that’s where the sweet spot is.”

Doing his homework for this project paid off in spades for Kitchens. It was approved at its first and only HDC meeting, which is rare. Usually, as many as eight sessions are required before a home is green-lighted for construction. “This one is respectful of its context—it deals with the landscape effectively,” he says. “It’s a one-story home that’s a series of pavilions, with only one two-story portion. When things are smaller and simpler, the board responds well.”

SITE RESTRICTIONS

Even after it was approved, the architect and his landscape designer had to deal with wetlands boundaries where the 2.6-acre site meets the waters of the Atlantic Ocean. “The hardest part of the project was to work with

PARED DOWN

A FAMILY RETREAT ON MADAKET BEACH LOOKS TO ITS 18TH-CENTURY SHAKER ROOTS FOR DESIGN GUES.

WRITTEN BY J. MICHAEL WELTON | PHOTOGRAPHS BY DONNA DOTAN
Landscape materials and plantings were kept to a minimum, with bluestone for pavers and exposed concrete for walls. Ahern selected heather and beach grass for the sand dunes, using pines and hawthorns for screening. "The simple collaboration of elements helps create an elegant and unique seaside landscape," she says.

On top of challenges from the HEC, the wetlands, and the landscape, the house's orientation had to complement future construction next door. "Another, adjacent new house was to be built, so we had to make sure that it wouldn't be looking into the private pool space or impact the views," Kochen says. "We positioned the house, guest house, and garage/shed so that the neighboring house was never going to be in that place."

The site absolutely drove the design, the architect says. There are views to the ocean and to a nearby pond, so every room enjoys waterfront. "That's a large part of how we oriented the house to the site, the houses are lined up to maximize the views," he says. "We're pretty keen on that for all our projects, but this is an extremely site-specific home."

The three buildings are clad in white cedar shingles from New Brunswick and a western red cedar roof from British Columbia, Canada. They total 4,900 square feet—seven bedrooms and eight and a half baths—and are all connected by a wooden boardwalk.

"We were limited in materials, so the question was how to connect them," says Kochen. "The boardwalk is like a dock running through the landscape of dune and beach grass. We sculpted that contextual, beach-like setting."

A MODERN INTERIOR
The architect sculpted the interiors of the three pavilions too, unleashing a contemporary aesthetic. "He really embraces the modern look inside, because he's so limited with what he can do with the exterior," Reid says. "There's a lot of hands-on creativity, rather than bolted plate; it keeps the interest up from a contractor's standpoint."

The floors of seven-foot beams, reclaimed from a barn in Maryland, were laid out to be deliberately less than perfect, with some roll to them. Countertops and floors in the kitchens and baths are black Italian marble called Pietra Grigio.

"The ambiance and modern flair look really simple, but they are actually very complex," the contractor says. "That makes it stand out for me."

From a color palette standpoint, the flooring is the dominant feature, with its grey wash standing out against white plaster walls. Living spaces feature one color accent—a tool for wallpaper, tile, and fabric—while custom-designed rugs and tables harmonize perfectly with one another. Each
bedroom has its own color accent, and is numbered.

"Restrained is absolutely the right word that we strive
for," says Kotchen. "Clients don't always buy into that, but
here they did. We thought about how to move the eye
through the architecture in a very simplistic way."

Just as Ahrens sought to reflect the site's beachiness in
the landscape, Kotchen sought to bring it inside: "I love
Nantucket so much, and I've focused on making sure the
outdoor conditions are woven into the house by pulling
exterior colors and tones in for a very soothing
environment," he says.

Kotchen's been housing his honest, pared-down aesthetic on Nantucket for the past 20 years, and he's
began to exert an influence elsewhere on the island. "I can
see in others' work a shift in the past seven to 10 years," he
says. "I've seen the change happen, and it's great—a lot
of people are doing modern."

But in Matheka, his "beachside modern" retreat offers a
touch of history too.