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ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

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Landscape Architecture by Michael Van Valkenburgh/Text by Jean Strouse

Photography by Brian Vanden Brink



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Over 30 years ago, in one of his "Wood, Field, and Stream" columns for *The New York Times*, Nelson Bryant wrote about surf casting on Martha's Vineyard in the fall:

The hour before dawn was black, a cold northwest wind helped to flatten the rolling combers, and when the sun rose it no longer shone, as it has all summer, on bright sails and beach umbrellas.

Summer was gone. The nymphs and their consorts had departed, leaving the great stretch of Martha's Vineyard Island's South Beach to a few patient fishermen with their long surface rods.

"New England farmhouses are the historic model," architect Mark Hutker says of the Martha's Vineyard compound he designed for Warren and Megan Adams. ABOVE: The entrance courtyard. Landscape architect Michael Van Valkenburgh used native trees and plants throughout the grounds. Marvin windows.

LEFT: The master bedroom's deck offers views of the barrier beach. OPPOSITE: In the great room, "a timber frame composed of a series of arch forms was made by cutting and integrating curved trees into the assembly," says the architect. The Adamses collaborated with designer Jerry Twetten on the interiors.





LEFT: A lantern purchased in Paris hangs in the cedar-and-glass conservatory, which links the adjacent great room to the landscape facing the ocean and can be used all year. The limestone floor allows easy plant maintenance—it can be soaked with water. Amdega conservatory.

The rolling waves and cold northwest wind on South Beach have not changed in three decades, and neither has the annual departure of “summer folks.” But increasingly, summer people who have fallen in love with this idyllic island off the Massachusetts coast are finding ways to live there year-round—and not only writers, artists, retirees or the disaffected young who would rather do carpentry than go to law school.

Megan and Warren Adams did not intend to live on the island when they bought 15 acres of land on South Beach in 1999, the week they got married (on the Vineyard). They had both gone to Harvard Business School and were working at Amazon.com in Seattle at the time of their wedding. (Warren Adams had sold a software company he founded to Amazon in 1998.) From Seattle the couple made several cross-country trips looking for a Vineyard vacation house that would accommodate their extended families. They saw houses they liked in locations they didn’t, and vice versa. Then one day, at a real estate agent’s office, they noticed a photo of virgin land fronting the ocean and a pond. Soon the acres, carpeted with bayberry bushes and gnarled scrub oak, belonged to them.

Early in 2000 they chose architect Mark Hutker, who works out of Vineyard Haven and Falmouth. “We strongly wanted an on-island architect,” says Megan Adams, “and realized that many of the houses we’ve always admired had been designed by Mark. He asked us to keep a diary of how we envisioned living through a day in our future house. When we turned in a three-ring notebook, with pictures, Mark laughed.” Hutker says, “I ask all my clients to write out their ideal day, but no one has ever done it before!”

The couple also hired landscape architect Michael Van Valkenburgh, who says he was “dazzled by the property’s wonderfully strange and wind-tortured trees.”

The whole team wanted the house to fit into its context, with colors, mate-

RIGHT: Located in the guest wing, the recreation room’s exposed timbers, wide-plank floors and weathered paneling suggest a converted barn. A secret door, disguised as a bookcase and built on a steel frame to swing open effortlessly, reveals Megan Adams’s art studio, a powder room and stairs to a loft.



To take full advantage of the sun and views of the 15-acre property, Hutker sited the master bedroom at the front of the residence. “The spaces within the house are focused on the various exterior spaces, which frame the landscape—the house breathes in the landscape,” he notes.

Part of Hutker's brief was to design a residence to accommodate his clients' extended families and guests. Of the guest wing's bunk room, he remarks, "The cousins can sleep in a hayloft every night and wake up with the waves lapping the beach." Marvin windows. Velux skylights.



materials and a New England agrarian style that complemented the woodland seascape. And although the house would be large—10,300 square feet—the plans called for a series of linked spaces, indoors and out, that diminished the sense of scale.

With most of the planning complete and construction about to start, the couple left Amazon and took off on a 15-month trip around the world. "Poor Mark!" recalls Megan Adams—"he had to fax us plans in Vietnam and Argentina." When she and her husband returned, in the summer of 2001, they stayed on the Vineyard for a couple of months and got hooked by the building process. Hutker told them, "Once you've hand-selected antique nails for the floorboards, you can't step back and turn decisions over to others." He was right. The couple moved to Boston that fall but spent so much time commuting to the site that they decided to live on the Vineyard full time.

Their compound, finished in 2004, is a sequence of low, handsome structures that takes full advantage of the spectacular South Beach views. A long driveway leads to the cedar-shingled main

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house, which has three wings in roughly the shape of a wide S. The structure faces the entrance courtyard on one side and Van Valkenburgh's naturalistically landscaped pool terrace on the other. Coming through the front door, you find yourself in the great room, the house's principal living space, with plastered ocher walls, a rustic fieldstone fireplace and a vaulted oak-timber frame. The curved sections of this cruck frame are made from naturally bent trees hand-harvested in New Hampshire. The frame had to be assembled on the ground, "so you couldn't really see it," recalls Gerrit Frase, the project architect. "A crane was used to pick it up and put the sections in place, which took eight hours. When it was finally upright, all we could



"The subtle shadow-play from one wood structure to another animates each façade, creating strong lines, not unlike an Andrew Wyeth painting," Hutker observes. LEFT: A pergola marks the western edge of the pool courtyard and leads to the living areas of the main house.

All of the guest rooms have "shed roofs—a typical method for adding space to gambrel-roof buildings—and exposed-stud structures," says the architect. BELOW: Collections from beach trips and expeditions fill shelves and top ledges in a guest room.



Flanking the pool courtyard are the pergola and guest and main wings of the house. With his practice based on the island, Hutker believes his "understanding of Vineyard agrarian landscapes and building types led the composition of the site to a grouping of linked small forms rather than a single structure."

The whole team wanted the house to fit into its context, with colors, materials and a New England agrarian style that complemented the woodland seascape.



"Creating roof shapes that vary in height gives relief to the visual impact from waterside vistas," Hutker points out. ABOVE: Hidden behind a fieldstone fireplace, an outdoor bath opens onto the beach.

do was step back and say, ‘Oh, wow!’”

Upstairs at the south end of this wing, the master bedroom has a painted V-groove cathedral ceiling, exposed rafter collar ties and wide-plank white-oak floors. It faces the “sweet spot” views, east and south, with its own deck and outdoor shower, and it anchors the east-west axis of the house. The axis contains another large family room and leads to the gambrel-roofed bedroom wing, with three children’s rooms upstairs and a nanny’s room and a master guest suite downstairs. (The Adamses have a two-and-a-half-year-old daughter, Annie, and are expecting twins this summer.) A pergola connects the main house to the guest barn, which has cypress board-and-batten siding and large sliding barn doors, which open onto the pool courtyard.

Warren and Megan Adams were equally engaged in building their house, but in different domains. He wanted to combine “modern and organic living.” He grows fruits and vegetables, catches fish

“We realized that houses we’ve always admired had been designed by Mark.”

and keeps alpacas and bees. And he worked with a company to design a fully integrated “smart” house: Computers control every light switch and electrical plug, the heat, air-conditioning, alarm and audio and video systems, telephones,

intercom and satellite TV. Now in the private equity business, Warren Adams does international work from home, taking occasional trips to Chile or Malaysia—and if he forgets to turn down the thermostat in the bedroom, he can do it via computer from Santiago.

Megan Adams describes herself as chiefly concerned with the “end-user, finishes, flow” of the house. She worked with interior designer Jerry Twetten—he chose some light fixtures and colors, designed built-in pieces, helped “tweak” the early plans—but she did most of the furnishing.

In a scene that would please Nelson Bryant, Twetten recalls visiting the site on a cool fall day: “Warren disappeared over the dunes with a fishing rod and came back with bluefish for dinner.” □