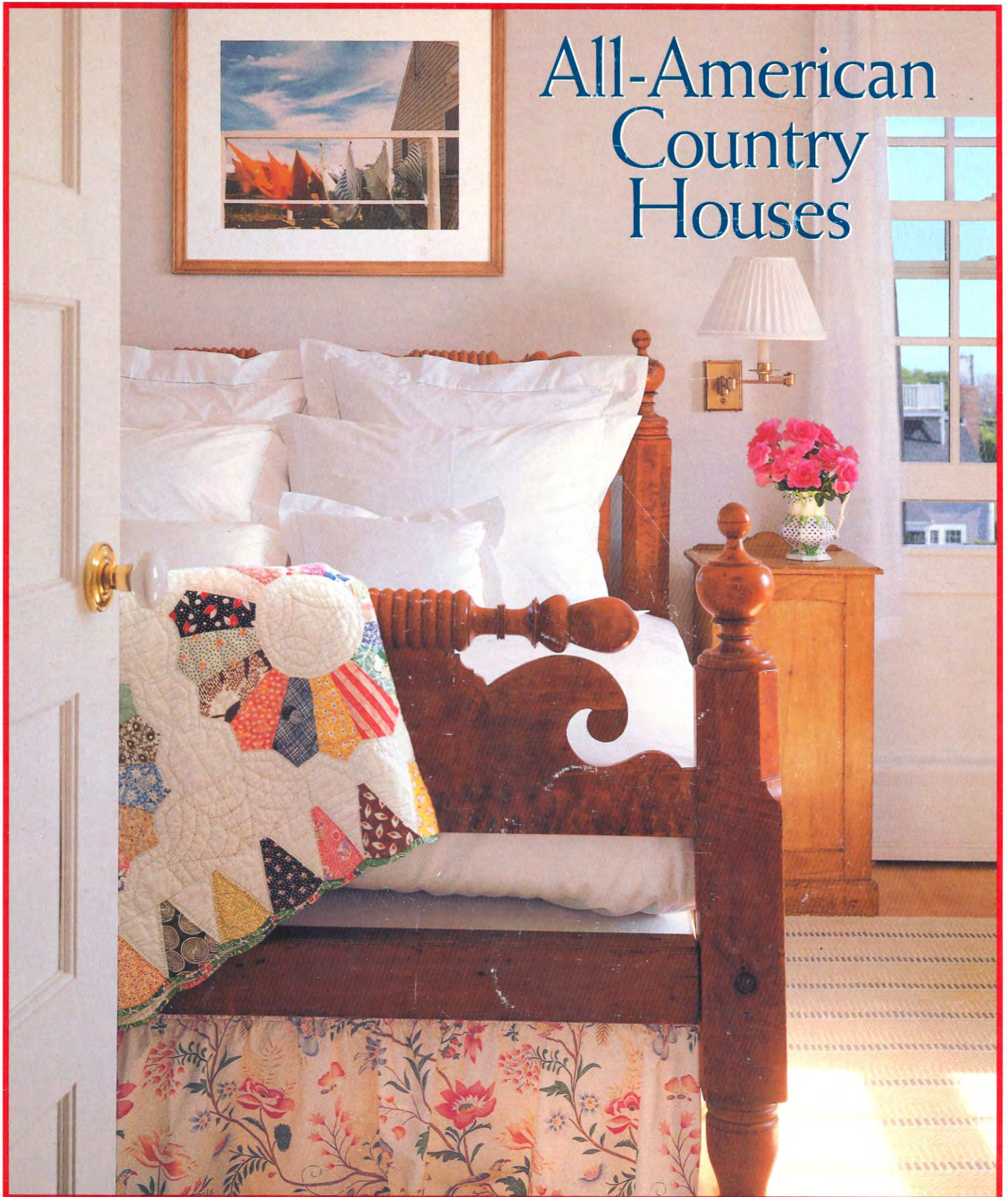


ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

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All-American Country Houses





“Sand and wet swimming suits shouldn’t faze a house,” says architect Margaret McCurry. “Breezes should blow through it, carrying the sound of bell buoys and the smell of salt air.” The principal of the Chicago-based architectural firm Tigerman McCurry is describing her mandate for a house she designed on Martha’s Vineyard, Massachusetts, for an Illinois couple. “Sunlight should cross its rooms in the summer, and logs burn and crumble in its hearths in the winter.”

The couple, who have two children, had been coming to Martha’s Vineyard for a number of years. When they decided to build a retreat there, they embarked on a design process that proved to be intensive. Indeed, they boned up for meetings with their architect as if they were about to take the bar exam: Both husband and wife read books on design and toured the Vineyard, identifying features of houses that particularly appealed to them. “Our builder, Andrew Flake, took us to houses that he had worked on, including his own,” says the husband. “We even made a videotape so that we could better analyze the local architecture.” Their field research isolated such elements as a sunny breakfast nook in one house, an expansive living room in another and window seats, Palladian windows and curved walls in still others.

Their data provided the couple with an architectural vocabulary that they could use with McCurry. Essentially, they were able to communicate to her their desire for a house that had, as the husband puts it, “presence, with some eccentricities and surprises that delight.” “The house should have its own persona,” McCurry agreed, pointing out that the architecture should nonethe-

“We wanted it to be unique without standing out to the point of oddness,” says Margaret McCurry of a summer house she designed on Martha’s Vineyard for an Illinois family. The trellised entrance of the cedar-clad structure is to the right of the central stair tower, which takes its cue from a nearby lighthouse. “A little playfulness offsets an ordered façade reminiscent of nineteenth-century antecedents.”

ARCHITECTURE:
MARGARET MCCURRY
NAUTICAL ALLUSIONS ON
MARTHA'S VINEYARD



in the trees. "Michael's suggestion of the plinth adds just the right note of formality to an otherwise casual, woody setting," comments McCurry.

In spite of its placement as a free-standing structure in a clearing and its overall stateliness, the house does exude a certain informality. This is largely due to the distinctively asymmetrical entrance façade, where a lighthouse-like form wraps the main interior stair. "Since it was a summer house, we wanted it to have a playful sense about it," says the wife. "We thought it would be fun to create a lighthouse similar to the ones on the island."

At the rear elevation, which faces the garden, the marine allusions dis-

LEFT: "This is an island house, all about the sea," says McCurry. The "imagery of a beacon" was the design determinant for a cupola and widow's walk/observation deck atop the stair tower.



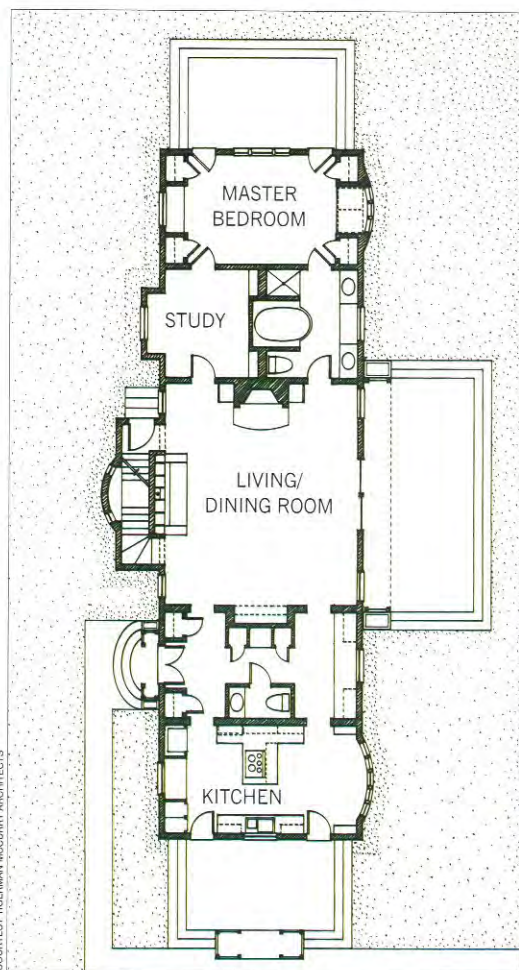
"It's an interesting combination of cleverness and art that produces architecture of a high level," remarks McCurry (left), adding that "part of the cleverness of this house is that everything fits into three thousand square feet." RIGHT: The first-floor plan shows McCurry's device of eliminating corridors. "The space had to be maximized; it was more important that it be for habitation than for transportation."

OPPOSITE: Forming the central axis of the house, the stair tower is also the dramatic focus. The painted steel fan treads lead to the roof cupola, filtering light down to the main living area. "Marine references abound," McCurry notes. "The stair has a spiral like that of a chambered nautilus shell, and it could be rising from a ship's galley as well."

less be deferential to the island's well-established vernacular of weathered cedar-shingled houses with white trim.

Out of this dialogue emerged a capacious house with classical proportions and a symmetrical organization. Located on a one-acre wooded site near the water, the residence rises on a grassy plinth, where oak and pine trees are kept at a slight remove so

that the major living spaces receive adequate sunlight. "We love the dappled light of the Vineyard," says the husband. "We wanted to bring that quality of light into the house." Accordingly, the owners and McCurry worked with Cambridge landscape architect Michael Van Valkenburgh to arrive at a solution that would allow the house to be shaded but not submerged





“The house’s interior is more classically traditional than the exterior,” says McCurry, who collaborated with designer Jean Hogan on the furnishings. “The formality and prudence that are such a part of early American style are very evident.” Local artisan Larry Hepler fabricated the Chilmark Windsor chairs (“They have that great upright, Shaker quality,” McCurry observes) for the main living area. The fireplace surround is bluestone, a material commonly found in Vineyard houses.

appear. There, a gently arched trellis (soon to be covered with climbing vines) frames the doors opening to the living room. “The owners like curved forms—which you see in the trellis and in the walls of the bays,” McCurry says. “And they wanted a pronounced rhythmic pattern in the windows. The husband actually talked about the design in musical terms. ‘It needs to be more *andante*,’ he would say.”

The garden effect continues inside the house, where the commodious living/dining room—twenty-four feet wide, with a ten-foot ceiling—focuses

on the view of the landscape through wide glazed doors. Simplicity prevails in the interior design, which evolved as a three-way collaboration between McCurry, the wife and Concord interior designer Jean Hogan. The gridded pattern of the McCurry-designed fireplace wall, bookshelves and dining buffet articulates the living/dining room and forms an underlying relation to the proportions of the windows. “The grid is meant to look like a lattice,” she says. “It gives the room more of a country feeling.” Hogan, meanwhile, used colors and

fabrics that maintain the aura of tranquillity inherent in the architecture.

Because the couple preferred to have the master bedroom on the first floor, McCurry designed the bedroom, bath and study to occupy a wing past the living room. “We feel as if we’re part of the outdoors here,” says the wife. “The sunlight coming through the trees is the house’s charm,” the husband adds.

Beyond the dining area, at the other end of the house, is another one-story pavilion containing a kitchen, pantry and playroom wing. While there are no distinct hallways be-



LEFT: The living/dining room forms the core of the house; each of the other first-floor rooms flows from it. McCurry designed the arms of the built-in sofa, which extends from the bookcase, to be used for additional seating. Brunswick & Fils fabric covers the sofa cushions.

tween the rooms, McCurry designed the plan so that two circulation paths are located on each side of the house. "Sliding wood doors can close the living room off from the vestibule and the kitchen; at its opposite end, the living room can just as easily be closed off from the study and the master bedroom," explains the architect. "I like the notion of a long space that can be compartmentalized or opened up," the husband says. "It adds a certain mystery to the interior."

Linking the first floor's main living areas to the upstairs bedrooms is a stair that functions as the architectural linchpin of the house. Encased in



LEFT: In the breakfast area of the kitchen, the ceiling follows the angles of the double-hipped roof. The room's L-shaped configuration was designed with circulation in mind: "It's a space pattern purely intended to engage the family," says McCurry. Country Floors tiles on the counters and backsplash. Kohler sink.

the lighthouse form, the cylindrical metal stair spirals upward, where it terminates in a widow's walk on the roof. The filigree of delicate steel steps topped by the skylight gives the volume a dematerialized quality that is visually and spatially arresting.

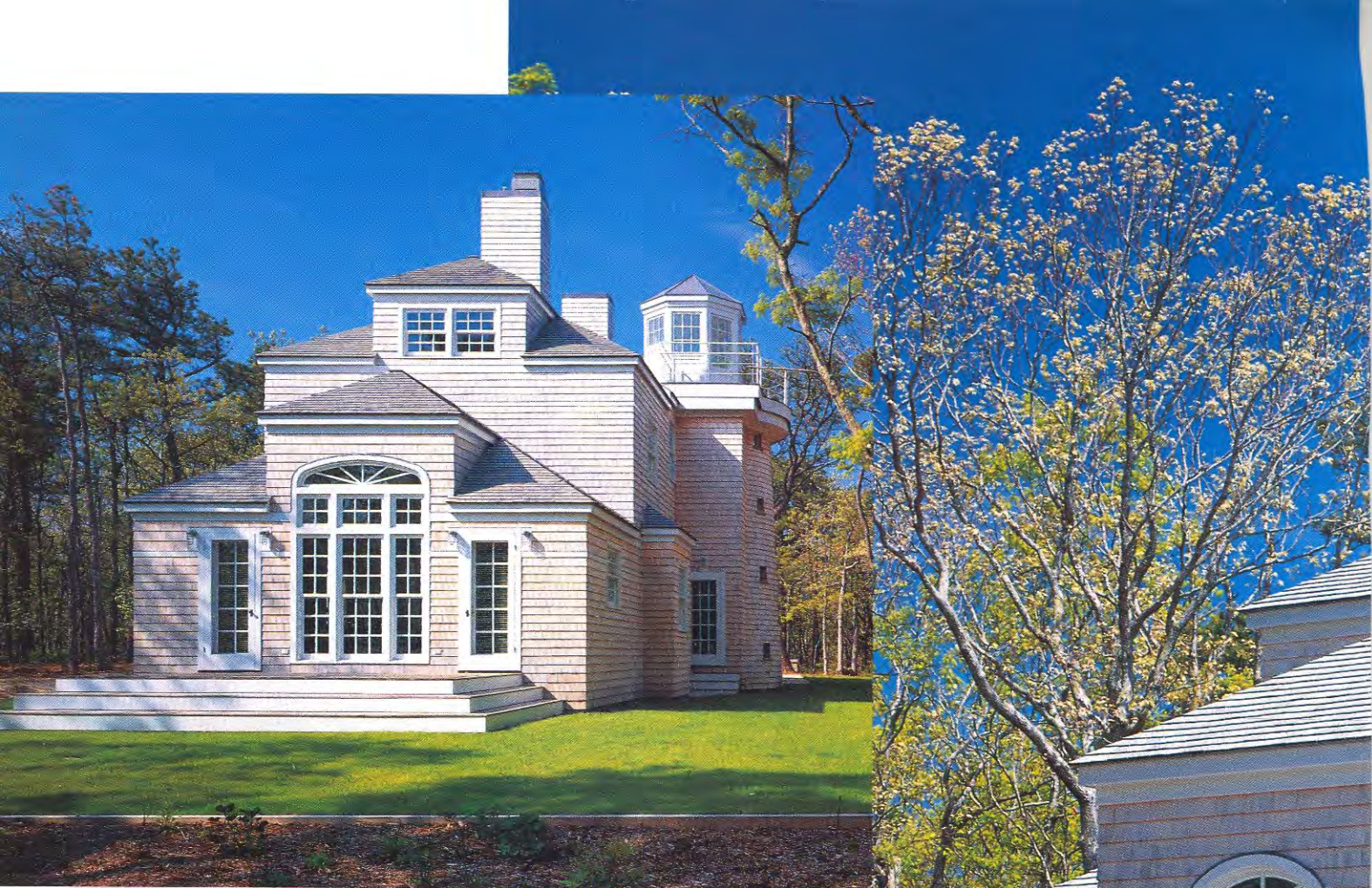
The widow's walk, inspired by ones the owners had seen on old New England houses, has its own allure. "Climbing onto the roof is special," says the husband. "It almost seems like something you're not supposed to be doing."

"The owners really pushed the no-



LEFT: "My clients wanted a house with nooks and crannies, and I conceived this entire room as that," says McCurry of the master bedroom. Transomed windows capped with a fanlight ("an eighteenth-century form they found particularly pleasing—it said history to them") allow views of the forest. Karastan carpet.





ABOVE: At the northeast elevation, the stepped hipped roof of the master bedroom wing is echoed on the second story, where a pair of dormer windows marks one of the children's lofts.

RIGHT: On the rear façade, planter boxes for climbing vines flank the arched trellis. Outdoor shower structures wrapped in canvas panels lie beyond the kitchen wing, at left, and the master bedroom wing at the opposite end of the house.

tion of adventure in this house," says McCurry. The high hip-roofed configuration of the house's central portion, for instance, allowed each child to have his own "tree house loft," with a ship's ladder leading up to it. "Most people make the mistake of designing summer houses as if they were main residences—making the children's rooms too large, forgetting that they should be magical little spaces to escape to. We never lost sight of the fact that this was a place for indulging dreams." □



