

Builder/Architect

Greater Boston Edition

November 1996

Our
59th
Year

Andrew A. Flake, Inc.
A Formal Approach to a
Changing Environment

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Andrew A. Flake, Inc.

A Formal Approach to a Changing Environment

Andrew A. Flake was in a predicament when he graduated from Northeastern University. What does one do with a bachelor's degree in aviation science when the airlines are hiring from the glut of pilots available at the end of the Vietnam War—and the country is in a recession? Andrew did what any other intelligent young man would do. He found a different way to

earn a living.

That was in the early '70s. Today, Andrew is a well-known, highly respected builder on Martha's Vineyard, but back then, he began working with older carpenters in the restoration of old wooden boats. He progressed into work on homes, always allying himself with established people. Absorbing ideas, techniques and the traditional way of doing things

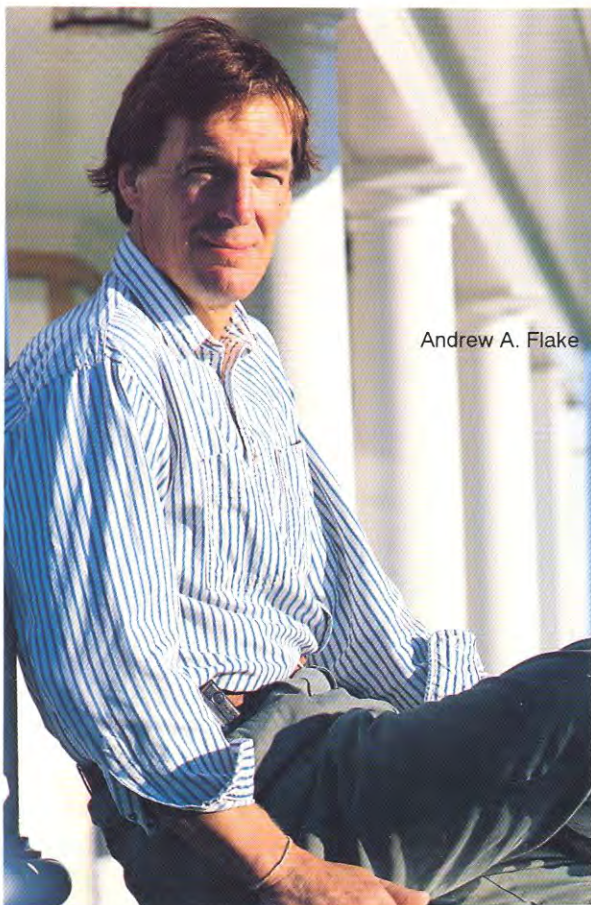
produced growth, skill and satisfaction. In 1975, Andrew founded Andrew A. Flake, Inc. as a small, employee-based construction company on Martha's Vineyard in an office overlooking Vineyard Haven Harbor. "In the early years," Andrew relates, "much of our work was based on the renovation and restoration of period homes. Working on 'old houses' presents a very different challenge than

Andrew A. Flake, Inc. Mark Hutker & Associates, Architects. Photography by Bob Gothard.





Andrew A. Flake, Inc. Mark Hutker & Associates, Architects. Photo by Alex Beatty.



Andrew A. Flake

new construction. It is often more difficult and requires patience.” Martha’s Vineyard is a unique environment for a builder, bringing together a highly eclectic mix of influences. The New England aesthetic—now more than 350 years old—is strong here, and homes range from early period houses built by farmers and shipwrights to contemporary designs by some of America’s best-known architects. Today, Andrew A. Flake, Inc. is involved in both restorative and original projects.

In 1979, Andrew and a close friend, Sam Dunn—a Washington, D.C.-based architect—bought an old commercial building on Main Street in Vineyard Haven. “Those were recession years,” he recalls, “and the building had been on the market for four years. The interest rate on our loan was 23.5 percent! We gutted the building and renovated it into small shops.” The last unrented space in the building became home to a joint office for Andrew and his friend. Collaboration with architects was to become a hallmark of Andrew A. Flake, Inc.

The design/build approach used by the two friends was the first such effort on the island, and marked the





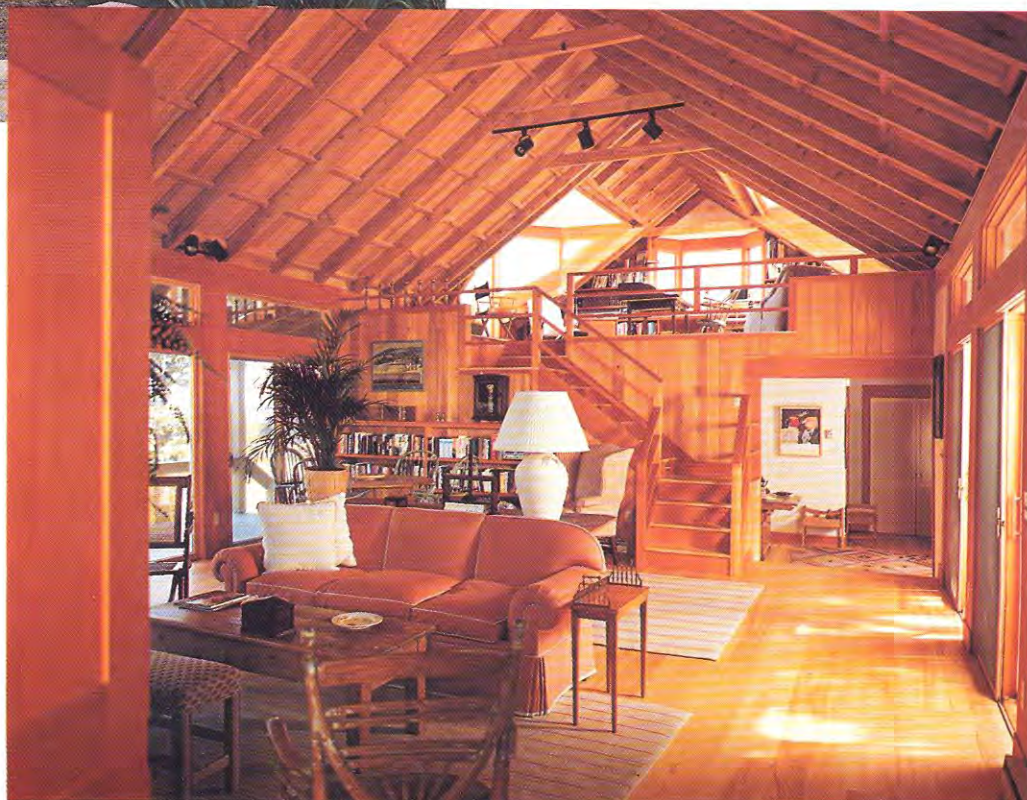
Andrew A. Flake, Inc. Thompson & Rose, Architects. Photo by Peter Vanderwarker.

expanded my knowledge and understanding of architecture and the use of different materials. His aesthetic approach remains a strong influence in my work today.”

Andrew opines, “Too often, architects, builders, designers and decorators get too ‘fussy’ and lose sight of what the client really wants, or what works and is appropriate. Ben’s approach might seem complicated, but is a careful process which reduces details to their simplest form.” Having worked with architectural firms and clients from various parts of the country, Andrew feels the success of any project ultimately is determined by the nature of the architect/builder relationship. “Some of the projects we take on may require two to three years, from initial conception through completion,” he adds. “Our clients today are more knowledgeable and sophisticated. It’s often very personal, and expectations run high. It’s important to anticipate

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beginning of a more formal approach to the changing Vineyard environment. In 1981, Andrew met Ben Thompson, principal of Benjamin Thompson & Associates, Architects in Cambridge, and the two collaborated on a unique cottage-style house on the water. “This was a defining moment in my career,” Andrew declares. “It was a wonderful opportunity to work closely with a great architect, who’d recently rescued Quincy Market in Boston and Harbor Place in Baltimore. Ben



Andrew A. Flake, Inc. Benjamin Thompson & Associates, Inc., Architects. Photo © Steve Rosenthal.

their expectations, and of course, there is no substitute for good design, quality workmanship, and service.”

That philosophy is the cornerstone of a business that relies totally upon referrals. Normally, Andrew has two or three projects in progress, and feels it's important to avoid taking on too much work. Personally involved in each project, Andrew refuses to sacrifice the quality and customer service level of the company's work. The result is highly satisfied clients who produce those referrals and who also continue to provide feedback over the years. Another aspect to which Andrew points as evidence of quality is the relationship between his clients and his employees. Some of Andrew's employees have been with the company for more than 10 years. Long-term relationships with key subcontractors are equally important. He's a strong believer in continuity, makes himself directly accountable to his clients and architects, and strives to make a project's environment one in which the client is given every consideration. In this respect, Andrew notes, "Communication is everything. If I was a consultant to a young contractor, I'd stress communication as one of the most important elements in a business."

In 1986, Sam Dunn sold his architectural business on the Vineyard to Mark Hutker, a youthful, talented architect from the University of Cincinnati. While the office of Andrew A. Flake, Inc. and Mark Hutker Associates is the same, and they collaborate on many projects, the two maintain distinct and separate identities. Andrew describes the pair's relationship as "unique and special to both of us." Their clientele is demanding, keeping both busy, as people from all over the country and the world come to

Martha's Vineyard in search of either a primary or secondary home.

Many of the homes Andrew's company builds are new, but over the past four or five years, a higher percentage have been renovations or restorations. With the escalating value of real estate on Martha's Vineyard, Andrew asserts it makes good sense to put money into older properties.

"The Vineyard is a wonderful place to live and raise a family," Andrew enthuses. He notes also that the environment puts unique demands on the technical aspects of construction. Wind-driven rain is a constant problem. Dealing with humidity means avoiding wide-planked floors, insulating floors against moisture, and building in allowance for movement in trim, casework and floors.



Andrew A. Flake, Inc. Thompson & Rose, Architects. Photo by Peter Vanderwarker.



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One recent project required installation of a house-wide dehumidification system in a crawl space. Another example is substituting red cedar shingles or Alaskan yellow shingles for white, because they stand up to the moisture-laden climate better. This slight break with tradition results in a longer-lasting roof, impacting as well on quality and customer satisfaction over the long haul. Adapting traditional methods to current materials and knowledge allows Andrew to provide a higher quality product. The client, of course, benefits by a lifetime of

enjoyment. Andrew takes pride in knowing the homes he builds will be as much a part of Martha's Vineyard as their vintage counterparts.

Andrew recently was selected to serve on the jury for the 1996 Custom Home Design annual awards program. He enjoyed the opportunity to critique other designs and interact with his contemporaries from other parts of the country. He feels builders operate in a self-insulated world too much of the time, and involvement in programs such as the awards program provides an

opportunity to grow and learn. He intends to seek further involvement in this type of outside interest.

Andrew A. Flake, Inc.'s projects consist primarily of unique, highly crafted homes. Many have been published in *Architectural Digest*, *Metropolitan Home*, *House & Garden*, *Custom Home* and *Vineyard Magazine*.

Builder/Architect recognizes Andrew A. Flake as a builder with a commitment to his clients.

For information, call Andrew A. Flake, Inc., (508) 693-3340.

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