

All in the Family

By: [Meghan Drueding](#)



Designing or building a house for one's parent can be a wonderful experience or an emotional minefield. Happily for Belmont, Mass., architect Thomas Hecht, the vacation house he designed for his mother falls decisively into the former category. "She gave me a tremendous amount of latitude and was very tolerant of our approach," he says.

The Hecht family's ties to their property on Martha's Vineyard, Mass., run deep. For 40 years they've owned a 1940s fisherman's cottage in the town of Aquinnah. Now that Thomas Hecht and his seven siblings are grown, they spend summer weekends and vacations at the cottage, along with their spouses and children. His mother wanted her own place where she could host friends and entertain her grandchildren. When the lot next door became available, she bought it and asked Hecht to design a beach house for her.

Around that time, the town revised its design codes in an effort to discourage oversized houses. Hecht didn't mind this move a bit. He intended to work with the site's contours, nestling the house into them to minimize its impact on the landscape. He, his mother, and landscape designer Carly Look spent hours walking the property, noting its trees and other vegetation, its water views, and its topography. The plan he came up with contains three main pieces connected by shed-roofed links. One piece contains the living room, dining room, and kitchen; one holds the master bedroom; and the third comprises two guest bedrooms. The tripartite strategy allowed Hecht to avoid damaging any trees. "This way we could twist the house to work its way through the woods," he says. And because the 2,000-square-foot plan resembles that of a small house added onto over time, it helps the project fit into the local built context of 50- and 100-year-old cottages.

In fact, the older houses on the island inspired much of the project's design. They provided a model for its exterior palette of cedar shingles and gray-green painted wood trim, as well as its one-story scale. The idea for the exposed interior trusses, built in place by general contractor David Pizzano, came from the Hecht family's original cottage. "That house is uninsulated, with all exposed framing on the inside," says Hecht. "My mother's house is winterized, but we still wanted to capture that feeling of a more rustic summer home." Sunlight enters the house through large-paned windows and filters through the white-painted trusses for an ethereal effect.



Pizzano, a longtime Martha's Vineyard resident, admires the building's low-key look. "It's understated," he says. "There's no air conditioning, just ceiling fans. When you come to the Vineyard, you want to have the doors and windows open all summer." This assessment must please Hecht, who worked to create a laid-back aesthetic appropriate for a summer dwelling. "It's a very simple house," he says. "It's not trying to be too finished."

Project Credits

Builder: Pizzano Construction, Oak Bluffs, Mass.

Landscape designer: Carly Look Design, West Tisbury, Mass.

Site: 5.7 acres

Construction cost: Withheld

Architect: Hecht & Associates Architects, Belmont, Mass.

Living space: 2,000 square feet

Photographer: Warren Jagger

Resources: Bathroom plumbing fittings: Grohe and Symmons; Bathroom plumbing fixtures: Kohler and Toto; Cabinets: Imperia; Countertops: Nevamar and Wilsonart; Dishwasher: Bosch; Entry doors/windows: Marvin; Exterior siding: Maibec; Fireplace: Wittus; Flooring: American Olean and Teragren; Hardware: Schlage; Interior doors: Brosco; Kitchen plumbing fittings/fixtures: Elkay and KWC; Lighting fixtures: Illuminating Experience, LBL and Lightolier; Oven: GE; Paint: Benjamin Moore; Range: Thermador; Refrigerator: Amana; Roofing: GAF; Structural lumber: TrusJoist.