



JOURNEY

ALAN
WANZENBERG

The Life and Times of
an American Architect

A COUNTRY HOUSE INSPIRED BY THE SPIRIT OF CLASSICAL SHAKER ARCHITECTURE



The historic Shaker Meetinghouse in Sabbathday Lake, Maine, 1794.

Why is a simple black cocktail dress so popular and enduring? Could it be that it allows the wearer to accessorize it, and that the personality of the wearer becomes more important than the simplicity of the dress itself? If one started with something more flamboyant, the effect would not be the same. We are often drawn to these wonderfully simple elements in our everyday life. In the Hamptons, there are streets outside the historic estate area that are intimate and familiar because of the accumulation of wonderful old cottages built over time, and which are so beautifully sited in the environment. Yet, the current trend is quite the opposite. While we are drawn to these marvelous and picturesque areas, due in part to the enormous value of the

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land, we tear down the structures and build significantly larger, often overwhelming, and potentially inappropriate structures for these unique settings. Having lived on the ocean in Water Island, New York, for several decades, I like the simplicity of beach life and the respite that it gives from everyday demands. The long periods of unstructured time offer one the opportunity to recharge oneself. The family that had approached me for this particular commission lived in a cottage on a street that exemplified these marvelous traits of simplicity and originality. Yet the property they acquired had two houses in severe disrepair—one prosaic and nondescript, the other charming but far gone. The property had once been owned by the trailblazing scientist Madame Curie's granddaughter, and had a quirkiness in its layout and materials that I truly admired. But saving the buildings was not possible. Thinking about the new house that we would be building, I immediately turned away from the notion of the classic Shingle Style. For me, that style had been degraded in many instances due to the aggressively inflated homes built in the flurry of construction of the last decade. I wanted to create a home that was clearly part of the vocabulary of the area, but more astringent, tailored,

refined, and crisp—like the air and environment can be on a morning at the beach. So I looked at the early and reductive style of Shaker architecture from the nineteenth century. It was simple and clean, and thoroughly American. It was that neutral palette that would allow both a sense of personality in design and decorating to be revealed, while maintaining the contextual building traditions of this beautiful part of the Hamptons. I had worked with Susan Child, a landscape architect who was based in Boston in the past. She brought an elegant and familiar plan to the early stages of the project. Her input and desire to site the house closer to the street gave it an immediate history, making it appear more significant and connected the building to the traditions of the area. A tremendous effort was also made to maintain the large, decades-old trees that populated the site. In all of my work, a lot of attention is paid to proportion. The

was something that I specifically wanted to use because it had been in one of the original structures on the property. Color—primarily blue and some greens—was used thematically, in reference to color as used by the Shakers, but done in a sympathetic and quiet way, to draw out the inherent beauty in the wood.



Colorful oval boxes are a Shaker classic.



Repetition and spontaneity define the placement of the windows.

choice of windows is indicative of one of the Shaker characteristics I truly admire. There is a kind of repetition, but also a spontaneity as the windows are placed in locations relative to what is required for the interior rooms. The secondary buildings are built with wood shingles and have the identical, although reduced, proportions of the main house, and clearly reference the agricultural and storage barns in the area. In the kitchen, I chose Danby, Vermont marble, locally supplied bluestone, and reclaimed Cypress, which has a rich driftwood-like feeling, and



The mudroom has Shaker-style pegs and paneled walls.





















DOORWAYS

It would be nearly impossible to design a home without doors. They are not only fundamental to the language of a residence but are often very under-considered and not utilized to their fullest design capacity. Designing a great-looking door, one of the highlights of the interior design process, can be a challenging endeavor. Doors should not become overly complex, as that's when they become self-conscious. But they should not be extremely minimal either, so designing the right door is like seasoning a dish, the door being necessary to bring out the flavors of the other elements in the house. I generally utilize the traditional construction elements of a door—the vertical styles, the horizontal rails, and the center panel. They not only add beauty and proportion to the work, but demonstrate detail and craftsmanship. Texture, stain, and color can be added into the mix when one uses natural woods in an exceptional way.

1. The overscaled board-and-batten exterior door is in the guesthouse.
2. Natural stained-wood doors lead to a screened porch in a pool house.
3. Stained and distressed white oak-raised panel doors are dramatic in a New York apartment.
4. Teak pocket doors have stained glass panels in an Arts & Crafts interior.
5. Satinwood doors with dark wood inlays in a Manhattan dressing room.
6. In Florida, a raised panel mahogany door opens out from the entrance foyer.
7. A triangulated series of doors frame a view through a series of bedrooms in a Vermont house.