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FIRE ISLAND IDYLL

Designer Thomas Jayne and architect
Peter Pennoyer save the best of the past
for a family whose 1895 house
has stood the test of time

This view: A private ferry brings residents to this community of well-preserved summer cottages for three and a half months each year, then all goes dormant. Facing page: Making seamless repairs to the 1895 house was the goal of the owners, designers, and workmen. Automobiles are forbidden on Fire Island; bicycles and wagons carry residents and their gear.

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with summer really pop against it.”



IN THIS ERA OF SUPER-SIZED architecture, the beauty of restraint has nearly been forgotten. A refreshing reminder of past glories is this simple, recently renovated Shingle-style cottage on Fire Island, New York. Dating from 1895, it's part of a small enclave of houses originally built by a group of intellectuals interested in education and the arts.

The community is accessible only by private ferry service and only during the summer, and automobiles are forbidden. Houses are not winterized; they are simply opened and aired out each Memorial Day and then closed up by mid-September. For all its brevity, the social season hews to lovingly preserved traditions that can make even a first-time visitor wistful. Clambakes and BYOC (bring your own cutlery) suppers convene at a meeting hall informally dubbed “the casino.” At the tennis club, players are required to wear white.

Passed down within families, the cottages mostly belong to third- or even fourth-generation descendants of their original occupants. Properties rarely go on the market, so when a small three-story house suddenly became available, a Manhattan executive who had fond

Both views: The living room's custom-colored area rug is from Stark Carpet. The wicker sofa is by Bielecky Brothers. On the upholstered armchairs are slipcovers in Marimekko's Vikuna, Pool. Red pillows are covered in Quadrille's Fairie Enchantée toile. The pair of bronze floor lamps is from Alan Moss.



boyhood memories of summering here jumped at the chance to introduce his own family to this sandy *Brigadoon*. Though structurally sound, the cottage needed attention. Decorator Thomas Jayne, who had worked on the family's apartment in New York, was called in. “First, we made sure things were stable, so there wouldn't be worries about maintenance,” he says. “The houses here really take a beating during the winter.”

The remote location makes it difficult to ship goods in or out; thus another local quirk is that the few houses sold usually come with the furniture. Jayne's next task was to salvage whatever of the cottage's windfall he thought reusable, such as a set of Hitchcock side chairs (“Not something you'd normally find in a beach house”) and spool-turned wooden beds.

Beyond recycling furniture, conservation was a guiding principle—a goal complicated by the various “improvements” the house had endured over a century. Although photographs on file at the town's historical society show



exactly what the cottage looked like when it was built, architect Peter Pennoyer, who frequently collaborates with Jayne, thought a complete restoration would be impractical. "This isn't Colonial Williamsburg," he says. "Part of the great character of this place is its anonymous accretions. On the other hand, jalousie windows are never nice, so those had to go."

What should stay was decided case by case. Giving the wide-plank floorboards a fresh polish was an easy deci-

sion, but what to do with the natural beadboard paneling? Should it be painted white to lighten the interior? "We thought about it and decided to retain the paneling as it was," says Jayne. "The bright colors associated with summer really pop against it. White walls tend to bleach out color, and the idea of kids living in all-white rooms is kind of horrifying." The kitchen was completely rebuilt and somewhat expanded, but even here, existing cabinets were copied, and old-



Facing page: In the rebuilt and slightly enlarged kitchen, existing appliances were retained and old cabinets copied. Only in this room was the beadboard painted. The ceiling fixtures are from Urban Archaeology. This page: The dining room's trestle table was made by Barton Sharpe; the antique English Arts and Crafts chairs with rush seats are from Ann Morris. The George Nelson Saucer lamp is from Design Within Reach.



Blue paint (Benjamin Moore #2066-30) framing the screens on the porch and all the windows gives the house a lift, as do the vibrantly colored sofa. The oval extension table is Touquet from Triconfort; around it are Also chairs by Tom Deacon. A spirited mix of pillows and lanterns adds more color.



fashioned linoleum was used for the countertops. The appliances were rearranged but not replaced.

These design decisions weren't necessarily made to save money. "New construction is always much easier and cheaper," says Penoyer. "The contractors couldn't just put wires and plumbing wherever they wanted and hide things in insulated walls." To do this sort of work, Penoyer claims, the builders had to love the old house nearly as much as the owners did. "If the cottage had been ugly, we wouldn't have preserved it this way," Jayne adds. "When something was attractive and could be preserved—like the funky window seat in the living room—we did

so. Basically, my clients didn't want to make the house grander than it was."

And grand it is not. But the ingenious carpentry and craftsmanship give the space the feel of a fine wooden sailing yacht. Some family members have to duck their heads when going through certain doorways, and there are no auditory secrets—if someone enters the house or goes up the stairs, everyone hears it. Then again, other sounds are more easily savored: the crashing of ocean waves, for example, or the caterwauling of seagulls. "There's an ancient tradition of people going to the sea," Jayne says, "and every season when you hit the beach, it's almost like a re-birth. You want stability, repetition, history... but you want it fresh." ●

"Part of the great character of this place is its anonymous accretions"



Above left: A small third-floor attic became the teenage daughter's room. The early-20th-century hooked rug is American. The chest drawers is a 1950s George Nelson piece. The tie-dyed bedspread is from Garnet Hill. This view: The uncomplicated outdoor shower shelter consists of two sheets of red sailcloth hung from sailor's rope. For more details, see Resources.