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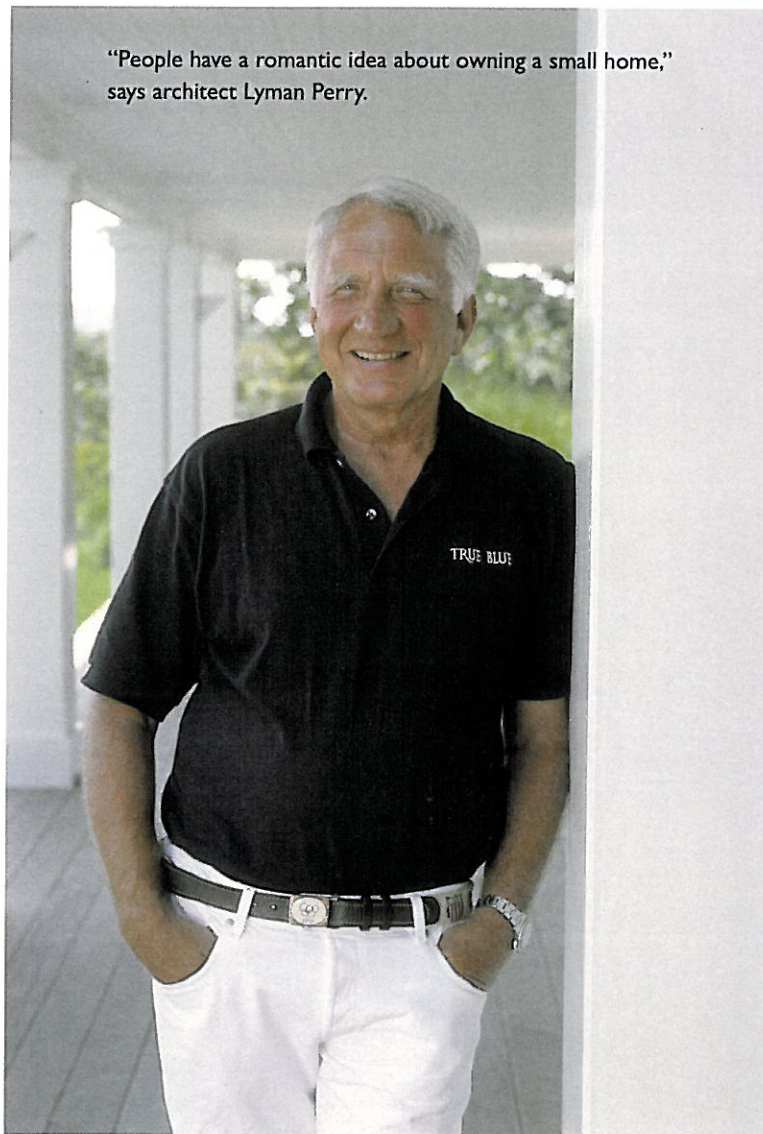
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Less is More

Lyman Perry
capitalizes on
small space in his
“snug as a boat”
Nantucket homes

“People have a romantic idea about owning a small home,”
says architect Lyman Perry.



By Terry Ward Libby  Photography by Terry Pommett

In the last twenty-five years, Lyman Perry has become one of Nantucket's most accomplished architects, having fully renovated or built from the ground up some two hundred structures on the island. His Philadelphia-based firm, Lyman Perry Architects, designed the Nantucket Golf Club, recently praised in *The New York Times* and regarded by some as the most beautiful clubhouse in the country.

Perry is an engaging, straight-to-the-point man who exudes powerful personal energy and enthusiasm. He wastes nothing – not time, not money and not a speck of square footage in his designs. In the 1960s, he was a rower on the U.S. Olympic team, part of a life lived perpetually on or very near the water. The University of Pennsylvania nearly denied him admission to their prestigious architectural program because, Perry admits, “I had no background in the field.” But he talked them into it. He proceeded to graduate first in his class, then taught in that same program for the next fifteen years.



Perry transformed an old bicycle shop in a desirable part of Nantucket town into a much-loved family retreat for Sherry and Bart Simon of Cleveland.

In 1979, Perry built “the smallest house he could” on a one-acre parcel of land on Nantucket. The site has an expansive view of Nantucket Sound, just a half-mile away, and looks out over one hundred acres of never-to-be-developed conservation land.

“I had an image of an original fisherman’s shack,” says Perry, who built the main cottage with a footprint of just 540 square feet. He then added a tiny guesthouse and, eventually, a two-car garage with a finished studio above it. Each of the three gray-shingled structures is freestanding, linked by decks that serve as outdoor living spaces. The place can accommodate as many as



Photo by Bruce Buck

Perry had “an image of an original fisherman’s shack” in mind when he built his own home on Nantucket.

twelve overnight guests. Taken together, says Perry “they make up a nice little compound.”

Perry’s “small-house” idea was ahead of its time. Today, Perry likes the message touted by architect and author Sarah Susanka, whose 1998 book, “The Not So Big House: A Blueprint for the Way We Really Live,” became a bestseller and inspired a trend for home buyers and architects to begin to think in smaller terms. Susanka writes that “Hummer houses” meet neither the emotional nor functional needs of human beings. Her books are so popular that they have earned her spots on the Oprah Winfrey and Charlie Rose shows. She is regarded by her admirers and colleagues as the leader of a movement away from “steroidal” houses to homes on a human scale. Her latest book, “Inside The Not So Big House,” is due out this fall. Comfort, she writes, is not related to size, but to fit. It was the same notion Perry had in mind twenty years earlier with his assemblage of little Nantucket dwellings.

“She’s hit upon a real nerve,” says Perry. “People have a romantic idea about owning a small home.” A cottage-sized vacation retreat appeals to many because it provides a relief from the formality of the big interior spaces they may live and work in most of the time. A small space, writes Susanka, can renew our sense of “the pleasures of a cozy nook.” It’s an idea well-suited to Nantucket, where space has become ever more scarce, and where the architectural tradition of toy-scale houses has always

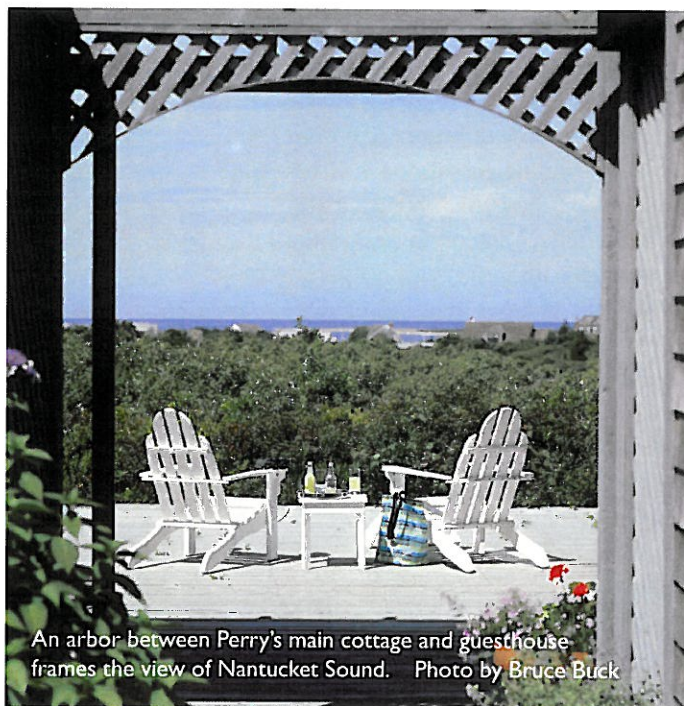


The interior of Perry’s home feels like a wooden sailing ship: sturdy, open to the salt air and wasting not a bit of space.

given the island much of its special charm.

As Perry steps onto his deck, he spreads his arms wide and says, “You don’t start with the building, you start with the site.” And, in the case of his Nantucket compound, the site was all about the view.

“These two pieces of architecture here form a gateway,” says Perry about the main cottage and the guesthouse, which stand about fifteen feet apart. “There really is no front door for an entrance. That’s a device to draw your full attention to the view, which is so great that you actually feel a little reluctant to go inside at all.” A pergola, a trelliswork arbor, extends over the deck, linking the main cottage with the guesthouse and forming a picture-perfect rectangle that frames the ocean view. The guesthouse has only 120 square feet, room enough for just a bed and



An arbor between Perry’s main cottage and guesthouse frames the view of Nantucket Sound. Photo by Bruce Buck

bath. On the far side of the guesthouse, a separate deck, accessible only from the guesthouse itself, gives visitors a space for outdoor privacy.

Inside the main cottage, a rustic post-and-beam structure, a vaulted ceiling over the entryway ushers you into the open living-dining space, where huge windows meet at corners "to make the whole room feel like a big bay window," says Perry. Posts, beams and the vertical wood-plank walls are all painted bright white to add to the sense of height and spaciousness. A super-efficient galley kitchen sits just steps from the dining table. The decor is uncluttered and the furnishings are decidedly casual with a color scheme that draws on soft hues of sea, sky and sand. The interior doors are of board and batten construction and are secured with old-fashioned wooden latches that Perry designed. Floors are made of thick tongue-and-groove planks.

Upstairs, the master bedroom has a vaulted ceiling with a group of windows, topped by a graceful, semicircular fanlight window, that softens the harder angles of the room. The view is even better from there. It's no accident that the place feels like a wooden sailing ship – that was Perry's intent. You can literally smell the salt in the air.

For several years, Perry had his eye on a particular patch of property on Chester Road in Nantucket town, where a tumbledown structure without significant historic value housed a bicycle shop. The surrounding homes had been restored and the neighborhood had become especially desirable because it was close to the town's amenities, yet off the tourist-beaten path.

When the property went on the market, Perry grabbed it – a lot just fifty feet wide and seventy feet long, he estimated. He razed the old commercial building and, for the tiny lot, created a three-story house with four bedrooms and four-and-a-half bathrooms, all contained within twenty-eight hundred square feet of interior space.

To lower construction costs, he had the house built off-island in component parts, then shipped to the site for



Sherry and Bart Simon had vacationed on Nantucket for thirty years before deciding to build a home there.

To look at the Chester Road house today, you would never guess it was not built a century or two ago. It has classic Nantucket appeal with a capital "N."

assembly.

To look at the Chester Road house today, you would never guess it was not built a century or two ago. It has classic Nantucket appeal with a capital "N." Perry artfully finished the interior with top-quality fixtures and materials, then put it on the market.

For thirty years Sherry and Bart Simon of Cleveland had come to Nantucket as visitors. With their children grown and the number of grandchildren on the rise,

they began to shop around for a place on Nantucket where the family could gather for summer vacations. They began to make inquiries. They met Lyman Perry.

"I'm convinced this is Lyman's best house," says Bart, now happily ensconced in the Chester Road house. "He's a master of space. He's a great sailor. His style derives from the water."

"It's as snug as a boat," says Sherry. They christened their home with the name "Family Ties."

The modest front porch, just a step up from the sidewalk, opens into a miniature foyer with a long hallway that looks down the full length of the house. The living room, little more than two hundred square feet, feels simultaneously cozy and elegant. Its centerpiece is a Rumsford-style fireplace with a heringbone brick pattern. Accent moldings give it an antique dignity. The fireplace has “pass-throughs” on both sides leading to an open dining and kitchen area, where the reverse side of the fireplace is identical to the front. Horizontal wood-plank wainscoting below the chair rail runs the length of the interior, giving the space additional depth. The layout gives the first floor an enhanced sense of spaciousness and suggests an easy flow of movement through the house. As Perry would say, the floor plan presents a “community of rooms” as opposed to a set of closed and separate ones.

The only outdoor space is a rear patio enclosed by a stacked stone wall, big enough for family cookouts. It enjoys a view of the neighbor’s spacious gardens. “Borrowed space,” as Perry calls it.



Above: The Simons’ compact home has four bedrooms and four-and-a-half bathrooms. Perry is “a master of space,” says Bart Simon.



Left: Space in the pass-through is efficiently used for a bar.

Below: Off the kitchen is an intimate patio enclosed by a stone wall.



The Simons decided from the outset to make the house their own by using local materials for design motifs. They even commissioned works of folk art by Nantucket artisans as decor centerpieces.

“They had definite ideas from the beginning. Their major thrust was to make it a real family home,” says the Simons’ interior designer, Barbara Halsted, owner of Nantucket-based Fenwick House Designs. “They went for a clean, very tailored look in each room.” A smart approach, Halsted says, when you are dealing with small rooms.

“You can scale down furniture to accommodate the size of the room,” says Halsted, “but you add character with just a few bold patterns.”

The compact bedrooms are decorated with one predominant color against a canvas of pale cream. One bedroom is finished



On both sides of the living-room fireplace are pass-throughs to the dining and kitchen area, which has a matching fireplace. The compass rose on the wall is by Nantucket artists Noelle Walters and Eric Bogden, and the fireplace scrimshaw is by Walters.

a soothing shade of celadon, while another has bold Regency-striped wallpaper with wide ribbons of cranberry and white. Cranberry, in varying hues, is the only color used in the room.

Perry finished the bathrooms in contemporary style, using ceramic "subway" tile and fixtures of brushed satin nickel, a metal finish used consistently throughout the house.

in The third floor has a roomy suite for grandchildren with a window that looks out across a tumble of neighboring rooftops, and down to a quaint Nantucket streetscape that looks just like

Popeye's hometown of Sweet Haven.

Of necessity, a small house invites its occupants to share space, time and activities. It promotes togetherness, exactly what the Simons had in mind when they built "Family Ties."

Sherry loves the lively in-town location, the friendly proximity to neighbors. Bart likes to imagine the street during the Revolutionary War, when British troops marched down Chester Road to the harbor. Their utter delight with Perry's design is evident. The Simons are happily steeped in the romance of their small house. ♦



A smaller home invites occupants to share space, time and activities, which is just what the Simons had in mind for their vacation retreat, which they christened "Family Ties."



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