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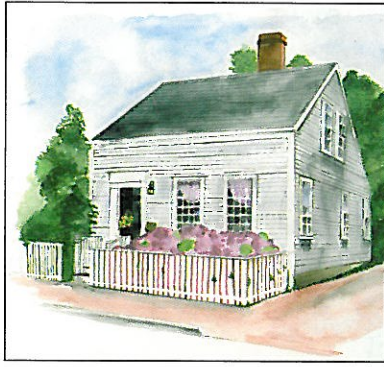
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# Renaissance Architect

LYMAN PERRY DESIGNS FOR TODAY'S NANTUCKET

The **clapboard cottage** sits serenely at number 5 Prospect Street, amid a row of similar cottages in Nantucket's historic district. The house is prim and well-tended, with **window boxes** and crisp painted trim. A fence encircles the house, where two enormous **hydrangea** bushes fill the small yard. This house doesn't call out to you "Hey! Look at me." Instead the home meshes neatly with the fabric of Nantucket: another integral piece of the **island's charm**.

TEXT BY JILL EVARTS • PHOTOGRAPHY BY TERRY POMMETT



**Lyman Perry sails to Nantucket every summer to work on several architectural projects.**

**Opposite: Perry's first restoration project, a half house in the town of Nantucket.**

# Renaissance Architect

LYMAN PERRY DESIGNS FOR TODAY'S NANTUCKET

This loving restoration has retained the best elements of an 1800s Cape-style house, while at the same time becoming a functional, livable home for the next millennium. The house still boasts its original wide plank floors, and has a buttery in the basement. The staircase once housed the deed inside its newel post, capped by an 1850s vintage ivory mortgage button. Wherever possible, original windows and panes remain; any replacements have been milled to match.

"The structure was not altered much over the years," says architect Lyman Perry, who purchased the home in the early '80s. "Although it had deteriorated. The windows were painted black. It was just a wreck. People would walk through and not be interested in buying it. There was one small bath and a marginal kitchen. But the basic bones were there."

Perry replaced the trim on the house with a heavier plank cedar to increase the shadow line, and substituted clapboard for the shingled facade. He opened up the home to light with a large paned window overlooking a new garden. Four feet were added to the rear of the house, and four inches of height were added to the second floor to create a more livable space. The kitchen was moved and updated, the old bathroom removed, and three and a half baths added. A salvaged vintage mantel now adorns the dining room addition fireplace. The result is a charming, livable space where it is difficult, if not impossible, to determine where the old ends and the new additions begin.

The cottage is called a half house, a favorite style for Lyman Perry, who has restored, renovated, and designed additions on about a dozen similar houses on Nantucket over the last 20 years.

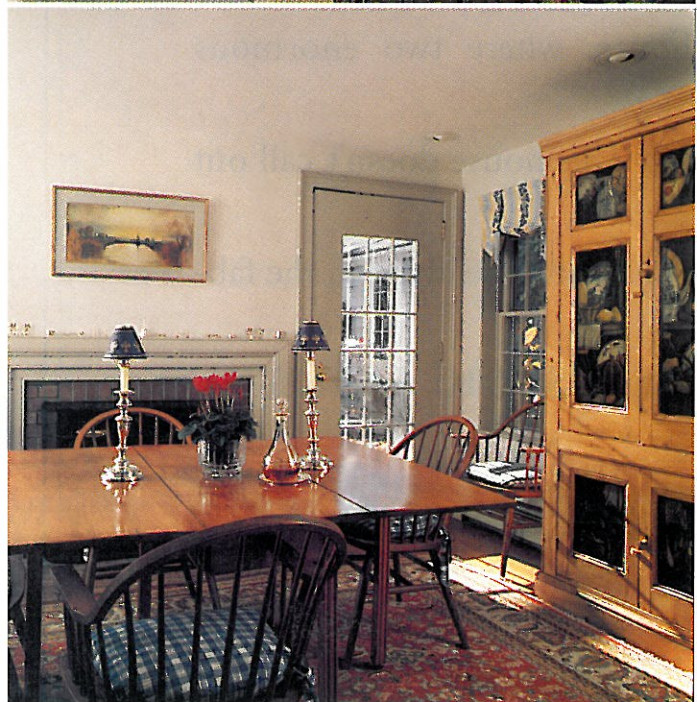
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**Top:** The half house has not changed much over the years. The narrow staircase in the entry hall still has its original newel post capped with a vintage ivory mortgage button.

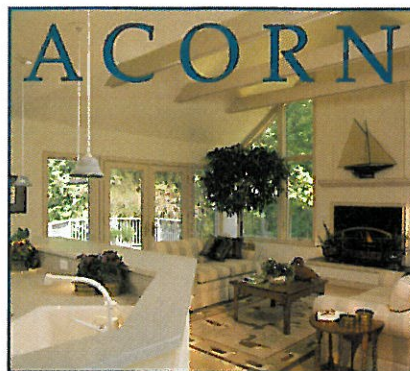
**Middle:** Period molding and mantel pieces were left intact. New owner Elvira Harden has decorated the home in a traditional New England manner.

**Bottom:** In keeping with the small proportions of the house, a cozy breakfast room just off the kitchen was a later addition.

**Right:** In the living room Perry added a large paned window to bathe the antique home in light.







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# Renaissance Architect

"I love the half houses," says Perry of the Cape-style house whose knee walls allow for a low second floor, differentiating it from the traditional one story Cape. "These houses are plain and simple—much in the Shaker tradition—but elegant in their simplicity. They are modest and unpretentious, but function very well. They're appropriate for Nantucket."

Lyman Perry incorporates the same principles in all of his designs, whether he's renovating a bungalow on the beach in Dionis or designing a palatial trophy home overlooking Polpis harbor. "I'm not interested in making a statement," he says. "I'm more interested in making the house feel as if it's always been there. The idea is not to impose your ideas on others, but instead to respect the traditions of Nantucket."

The more than 60 projects on Nantucket designed or renovated by Perry clearly express these design considerations. At 60 Centre Street, he designed a Federal-style home suitable for Nantucket's core historic district and was honored by Nantucket's Board of Realtors for contributing to the character of downtown Nantucket.

The design and construction of the Nantucket Golf Club was an environmentally sensitive project, which involved years of planning. The club house, adjoining cottages, as well as the renovation of two buildings on the site are Lyman Perry designs. The house is no edifice on the bluff overpowering the landscape, as is often the case in architecture today. Instead the buildings unassumingly merge with the heathlands of Siasconset, a welcome addition to Nantucket's landscape.

Last year the golf club was selected by the professional golf managers' magazine, *Crittenden*, as the best private golf club in America. When beginning a project, Perry does not start with the building. He starts by placing the building on the site, to create architectural space. "Building and site start to speak to each other," he says. "The building is more in harmony with the land."

On a project in Pocomo, Perry convinced the homeowner to move the 6,000 square foot main house back 800 feet from the water. "The house is now less obtrusive from the harbor and gives the homeowner more of a sense of site. It blends more with the surroundings."

Perry's own cottage is quintessential Nantucket style and does seem as though it has always existed on these windswept moors. The home was built in the early 1980s and has been featured in *House Beautiful* and in the book *Vernacular Architecture*.

The cottage sits on one acre of land in Shawkemo, with expansive views of both Nantucket and Polpis harbors. The

The cottage is called a half house, a favorite style for Lyman Perry, who has restored, renovated, and designed additions to about a dozen similar houses on Nantucket over the last 20 years.

post and beam structure illustrates an economy of materials while maintaining a fresh, open, livable space. "In those days, I was trying to get a foothold on Nantucket without spending a lot of money," says Perry. The ground coverage of the main house is a mere 540 square feet. An expansive deck connects the house with the even smaller guest wing, and off to the side, linked by a small path, is a garage with an upstairs studio.

He says of the overall effect he was trying to achieve, "I wanted it to be a boat on land." Boats, it seems, have played an important role in Lyman Perry's history. Perry's father was a Naval officer, and boats to Perry were always second nature.

Today, Perry divides his time between Nantucket and Philadelphia, where he originally went to train in row-

  
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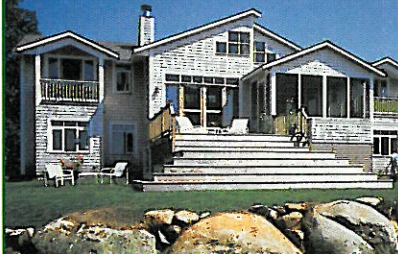
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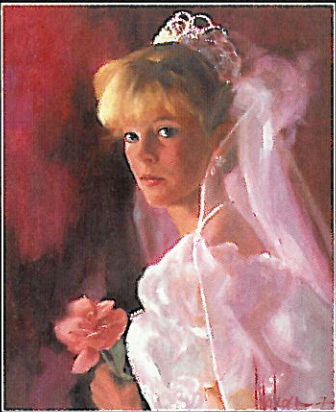


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## Renaissance Architect

ing for the Olympics. He has been there 35 years.

Perry did row in the Olympics, and made the 1960 finals in Rome. He has also rowed in and won the prestigious Royal Canadian Henley, along with numerous other competitions. He still competes today.

"I'm not interested in making a statement," he says. "I'm more interested in making the house feel as if it's always been there."

After graduating from college Perry went to submarine school and served as an officer on a submarine for three years. He then taught at the Naval Academy for two years before returning to college at the University of Pennsylvania, where he received a master's degree in architecture. He also earned gold medals for best student and for best designer.

"Architecture brings everything that I love doing into play," says Perry of his decision to return to college. "Working with my hands, creating things; engineering, and mechanics. They're all a part of architecture."

After graduation, Perry was invited back to teach and spent 15 years as a professor while maintaining a small design practice. Perry founded a program for aspiring graduate students called Design and the Environment, a study on respect for the environment and on how site should influence architecture.

Perry first vacationed on Nantucket in the early 1980s, and shortly thereafter he borrowed money to purchase the land in Shawkemo. Over the years he became



more and more involved in Nantucket's architecture. Today he designs houses from Maine to Virginia, although he says 90 percent of his work is on Nantucket.

Perry travels between Nantucket and Philadelphia, where his office now has 15 full-time employees. In the summer he can often be seen in Nantucket's boat basin on his 36 foot Sabre, which he sails to the island every summer.

Currently Perry has 20 or so Nantucket projects in the works, including the renovation of the Eel Skin Inn, a well known vacation rental on the beach in Madaket, which was assembled—as opposed to built—in the early 1900s. This conglomeration of several cabins, a scallop shack, and boat houses, overflows with charm—but is a long way from being structurally sound. He is also working on a renovation on the bluff in 'Sconset and one on historic Union Street. Perry's design of new compounds in Shawkemo and in Pocomo are under construction, and the designs for the new Nantucket New School on Nobadeer Farm Road and a beach house addition in Dionis are in the works.

It appears Lyman Perry's designs will be shaping the face of Nantucket for years to come—a fact those who love Nantucket should be grateful for. 🏠

*Jill Evarts is a freelance writer living on Nantucket.*

## Nantucket's Architecture

Visitors to Nantucket often marvel at the unspoiled, historic atmosphere. From the cobblestone streets lined with Captain's homes, simple Quaker structures, and rustic fishing shacks, the island has retained a distinctly historic and noticeably harmonious appearance. These traits are largely the result of the efforts of residents who have been guiding the island's development in an almost communal fashion for centuries. At the urging of islanders, in 1970 Nantucket's Historic District Commission (HDC) was created by an act of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Today island homeowners and businesses are keenly aware of the role of the HDC, which oversees and approves new construction, renovations, and additions to existing structures. The HDC's goals include preserving the harmonious look and scale of the island, encouraging compatibility of structures to one another, and encouraging development that preserves open space and strengthens—not threatens—the island's sense of place.

Complete information on HDC policies and guidelines—and the philosophy behind them—is found in *Building with Nantucket in Mind, Guidelines for Protecting the Historic Architecture and Landscape of Nantucket Island*, which is available for a fee by contacting the HDC at 508-228-7231.



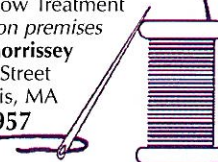
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