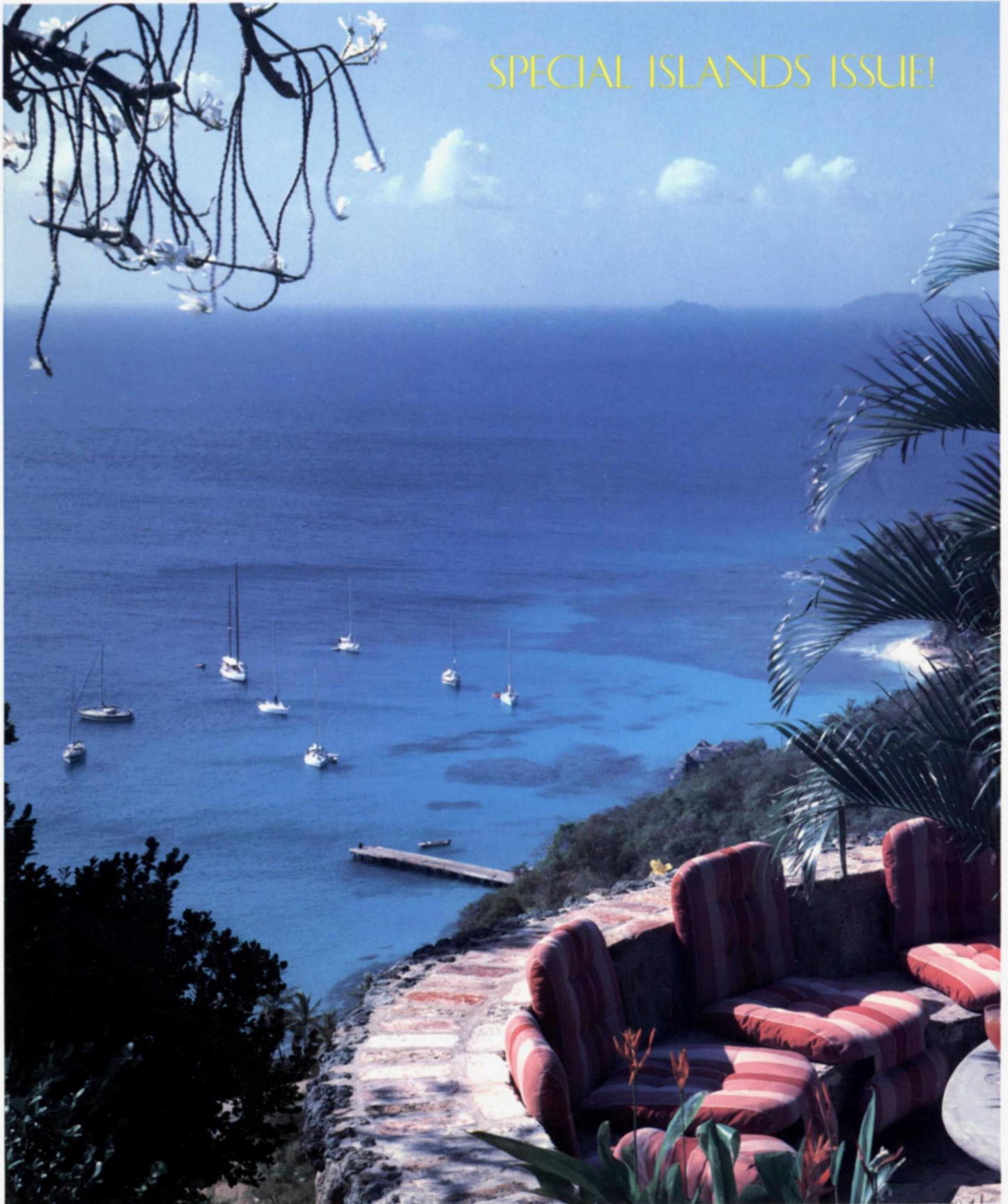


# ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST


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Contemporary  
Clapboard on a  
Nantucket Pond



*A Secluded Summer Residence  
That Draws on Boathouse Logic*

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In designing a white-trimmed clapboard vacation house on Nantucket, New York architect Edward F. Knowles wanted to create the feeling of "friendly local architecture" for Rita and Samuel Robert and their large extended family. PRECEDING PAGES: "The guest bedroom wing looks onto a flower garden with a croquet lawn enclosed by a Gertrude Jekyll-like trellis," says Knowles. THESE PAGES: The multigabled house and "floating" decks are set on a pond filled with imported Japanese fish. At left, the arched doorway opens from the master bedroom onto a private deck, while the living/dining room, center, has its own deck. Guest wing is at right.







EVEN ON A SMALL ISLAND, distances can seem vast and the houses of friends hard to locate. Think of Nantucket, whose sweet sea air rings all summer long with the moan of how overbuilt it has become. And yet there are portions of that sturdy cockleshell of an island that, despite its ever-increasing popularity, remain to this day as remote as Timbuktu. The property owned by Rita and Samuel Robert is of this kind. Leaving the town proper and heading out toward Sconset, one turns off the main road onto a sandy lane, passing through woods as dark—as mysterious, even—as the



ABOVE: For a family that often has large gatherings, Knowles designed a “casual but serious” kitchen. Japanese carved fish share the space with a glass-front refrigerator, left, industrial stove and Sub-Zero refrigerator.

LEFT: “Skylights flood the gabled living/dining room with sunshine, and a circular window affords interesting views of the sky, clouds and sea gulls,” says Knowles. Behind the dining area, doors open to the deck. Flooring and cabinetry are pumpkin pine.



The master bedroom sitting area features a cane-and-red-lacquered-wood chaise longue made in China. A harem screen ornaments a wall above the Jacuzzi. To the left of the antique pine mantel are two carved wooden winged lions from Bali. Painting is by Aaron Fink.

woods in any fairy tale, and arrives at last at an elevated open place, from which one looks out through scattered clumps of trees to a sea of cranberry bogs. The bogs are a landlocked version of the true sea itself, that illimitable Atlantic which hovers unseen upon the horizon.

In the center of this remote open place stands the Roberts' sunny, many-gabled house, which, though recently built, has taken care to put on a pleasing semblance of age. (Nobody on Nantucket wants to have a brand-new house.) Its cedar clapboards have begun to silver, its intricately arched arbors—the handiwork of a skilled boatbuilder—bear the weight of innumerable clustering green vines. The house presides with an air of benign authority over what

one might imagine to be an otherwise uninhabited solitude, but that is not to say that its isolation implies unfriendliness. On the contrary, to the stranger who may have stumbled upon it in the course of a late-morning ramble, the house appears to say, "Welcome to my kingdom. How lucky you are to have found me! I am every bit as hospitable as I look."

The house was designed by Edward Knowles, an architect practicing in New York. His clients, the Roberts, live and work in Boston and travel frequently throughout the world, collecting art and interesting objects as they go. Fortunate in the possession of children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, the Roberts intended to create a summer place that will provide happy memories

for the entire family, and not alone for the four generations who enjoy the property today but for uncounted future generations as well. Whether consciously or unconsciously, this intention appears to lie behind the building of almost every summer place, for it is in summer that we succeed in coming together and weaving more of the fabric of family affection than in any other season. The Roberts believe, moreover, that an island is a particularly advantageous place for family reunions. "The blessed separateness of an island!" Rita Robert says. "On Nantucket we are cut off from all our ordinary cares and distractions. In a very old-fashioned way, we are a family content to gather together under one roof and make our own good times." From



ABOVE: The cranberry bogs are visible through the arched doorway of the master bedroom. Chest is tiger maple; four-poster bed is pine.  
 BELOW: The living/dining room deck has English outdoor furniture. "It's a fine place to feed the fish and take in the sun," says Knowles.

which it follows that the very seclusion of the Robert site, along with its size—seven acres—amounts to an incomparable benefit: The woods and bogs that surround it will presumably remain inviolable forever.

The front of the house, approached by a gravel driveway, is securely anchored to the ground, but seen from the back, the house appears to be floating a few inches above the still waters of a pond. Wooden decks projecting from the wings of the house heighten its likeness to a boathouse, unaccountably grander in scale than the modest size of the pond would seem to require. The pond looks as if it had been there since glacial times; in fact, it was dug out of a deposit of clay that has been mined

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A Secluded Summer Residence on Nantucket  
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on many previous occasions to provide the surface for tennis courts throughout the island. Once the site had been excavated to the depth of three or four feet, a plastic membrane was stretched across its bottom and sides and the requisite amount of fresh water added. Ornamental fish were imported from Japan and now flourish in the pond's clear depths.

The house is entered through what might be called an architectural prefix—a small, gabled structure attached to the bigger, higher structure behind it and consisting mostly of a pair of glass doors with sidelights, surmounted by a gigantic segmented fanlight. The entrance leads into a vestibule area, from which one looks through an archway straight down the length of a big, airy room that combines living and dining quarters, with, at the far end, a glimpse of sunlit deck and pond. Access to the deck is through a pair of doors matching those in the entrance hall; above the doors, in the center of the triangle formed by the high, slanted ceiling, is a bull's-eye window some four feet in diameter. Along the ridgepole of the roof runs a skylight, through which the sun's rays, according to season, dapple the floor or mount the walls.

The rhythm of the house is set by a pleasing repetition of arches, both inside and out. On the south wall of the living/dining room is an arched fireplace, bracketed by recesses for storing firewood, and an arched doorway leading to the master suite, where again one encounters, as at the entrance, the bold arch of a fanlight over paired doors. The north wall of the living/dining room is pierced at midpoint to reveal an ample tile-walled kitchen. Beyond it, a passage leads to a guest wing containing three bedrooms and a couple of baths. The guest bedrooms look out upon the garden and its accompaniment of arbors, which, like those of ancient Roman villas, reach out to make house, garden, field and woodland seem a single extended habitation.

The furnishings of the house re-

flect the Roberts' travels and the fearless catholicity of their taste. In the master bedroom, for example, the pine mantelpiece is from an early New England farmhouse, the painting above it is by a young contemporary painter named Aaron Fink, the fierce lacquered winged lions beside it are guardians of the household from Bali, the chaise longue in front of it was made in China in the nineteenth century for the export trade and reached Nantucket via a sea captain's house in Newport, and the dark wooden screen above the Jacuzzi is from a harem in Morocco. The same spirit of international, eye-delighting eclecticism is evident in the living/dining room, where oversize Mexican *butaca* chairs merrily join forces with a French wooden carousel horse, paintings by Tom Holland and Malcolm Morley, and an assortment of Windsor chairs, clustered around an oval pine table big enough to seat eight and plucked years ago from its obscure place of origin—a château kitchen? an eighteenth-century inn?—somewhere in the far-off French countryside.

If it is characteristic of summer places to foster family affection, it is also characteristic of them (as it is of families) to keep expanding. Having built a swimming pool a short distance from the house, the Roberts have been unable to resist building a poolhouse, which Knowles also designed and which is now in construction. When finished, it will consist of a high-roofed central octagon with two flanking low-roofed wings. The roof of the octagon will terminate in a windowed octagonal cupola five feet across and rising to a height of twenty-seven feet above the floor. No one can doubt that someday a member of the third or fourth generation of the Robert family will find some means of shinnying up the beams that support the cupola and stake a claim to that high, breezy place as his secret kingdom within a kingdom. And why not? What are heights for if not to be challenged by a child? □