



Hidden Treasure

*Polhemus Savery DaSilva explores
unexpected acreage to create a private
enclave on Nantucket.*

By Chris White

Photos by Brian Vanden Brink

Every so often on the Cape and Islands, a story surfaces about somebody who moves into an old house and discovers an album of priceless baseball cards or about the grandmother who stumbles upon a John Singer Sargent painting perfectly preserved in her attic. Children dream of treasure in these sands, and as recently as last month, in June 2023, *Esquire Magazine* published an article about one of the region's most famous kids, entitled: "About That Time John F. Kennedy Jr. Hunted for Pirate Treasure." This piece, an excerpt from Kate Storey's new book *White House by the Sea: A Century of the Kennedys at Hyannis Port* details how the president's son worked his way onto Barry Clifford's successful discovery of the Whydah's sunken remains, the only authenticated pirate ship ever found. Now imagine that you've set out to transform a cute little cottage near Surfside on Nantucket, where land is worth its weight in diamonds. You want to build a larger home on the property, but you'd also like to have a pool and a yard. Room to move and relax and play outside. When the owners of such a project began working with Polhemus Savery DaSilva Architects Builders (PSD), one of the challenges was space. They learned that much of the land in the back of the lot, which they had assumed belonged to neighbors, was actually theirs—a full half-acre of wooded, sandy gold. Perhaps their discovery lacked the drama of SCUBA diving for a lost shipwreck, but a treasure chest had opened for them nonetheless, right in their back yard. Rob Calderaro, Senior Landscape Architect at PSD, says, "It was found property. The owners had not realized how much they owned. And so they were thrilled. It was fantastic."

Since one of the tasks of architects and designers is to "maximize the use of space," the windfall of an additional half acre offered more possibilities than anyone had first imagined. And the relationship between the architecture of the landscaping and of the home itself is integral to the point where neither can exist without the other. "Our overall approach," says Calderaro, "especially with Nantucket as a historic district, was to preserve the integrity of the property in keeping with the surrounding neighborhood while offering seclusion for the homeowner. Our first time on site, we saw that the existing house had just a short little drive, and the lot was very wooded. But with the additional land, we were able to create a serpentine drive through evergreens." This curved entry to the house, would, he notes, "Create an unveiling."

PSD Design Principal John DaSilva explains further, "At the street, it feels quite rural, and the front is lightly wooded to maintain privacy from the road—there's no view of the house. You arrive at the formal front of the home, where the S-shaped drive opens to a circle with an island and a flagpole that centers the entrance of a small porch and a fanlight over the front door. The driveway continues around the right side of the house to an oversized one-car garage with a guest apartment in the back. It feels pretty private and remote, although there are neighbors on both sides." This also runs true with some of the flavor of Surfside. "It's on sort of a flat coastal plain in an area with a more rural than village character."

PSD, as the firm's full title suggests, is an integrated architecture and construction company, so nothing ever happens in a silo. In fact, DaSilva stresses that despite his job title, "The firm is the architect, not just me." Each of their projects finds a name—often one that draws upon its elements—and it's a nod to both the location and to the spacious backyard that this home is called Meadowcrest. In keeping with Nantucket tradition and historic guidelines, DaSilva says, "We made use of simple, vernacular forms while creating





a home unique to our client. All contemporary island homes share certain vocabulary, but they don't all look like this house."

Rather than paint or stain elements of Meadowcrest, PSD chose different types of wood for organic color variation. "The sidewall shingles are white cedar, traditional to Nantucket and the Cape, which weathers to silver-gray," says DaSilva. "But for the roof we used red cedar that weathers a brownish-gray. The outdoor floors are made of IPE, rot-resistant ironwood. The only things on the house that are painted are the windows and doors." As part of the vernacular, PSD designed a porch along the front side of the home—but with a twist. "It's very shallow, to the point where it is symbolic, but it opens into a big functional porch on the southeast corner," DaSilva explains. "In this occupiable portion, we created an octagonal ceiling shape of red cedar, which we also used for the columns. Because the porch is part interior space and part exterior, it's clad differently—with smooth boards as opposed to shingles." Although the owners moved into Meadowcrest in time for July 4th weekend, 2020, their home has already weathered into shades of color on a spectrum from red to honey to browns and grays. These converge on the porch, and the copper gutters and drains add another dimension to the palette.

Because the porch serves as a liminal space between outdoors and inside, PSD designed one of the walls of the living room on a diagonal that aligns with the octagon. This creates a programmatic flow between the two areas, and a chamfered corner transitions smoothly to the interior built-ins and window seat. The ceiling shape in the living area also echoes the exterior one. "This again is octagonal, but very stretched," says DaSilva. "These shapes define the centers of spaces throughout the home."

One of the keys to Meadowcrest's definition is far more dynamic than any building material or shape, however—and this one is interpersonal. Chris McGinty, CEO of CM Design, collaborated with PSD and the homeowners from the very beginning. She, like PSD, had worked with them before, so she brought instant rapport to the project. "This was my second major project with this family," she says. "I was involved with Meadowcrest from start to finish, and participated in exterior choices, as well. It was an incredibly efficient process, and PSD's project management was excellent."

From the get-go, McGinty recalls, "The homeowners wanted a livable, casual, unfussy home that would feel welcoming and warm. We wanted it to feel like



easy living, which fits with my style where everything has a purpose, and there are not a lot of extra things.” By keeping much of the design simple—in the positive sense of remaining clean, uncluttered—certain elements seem to shine all the brighter. She says, “There’s not a lot of color in the home—I drew color from the landscape: gorgeous tall grasses, colorful potted plants, and the natural stone patios and walkways.” She and PSD worked together to create an “open, airy flow plan.” She says, “There really are no walls, and the multiple light sources were a major factor.” Within a T-shaped overall home design, PSD worked to ensure that all rooms access natural light. DaSilva explains, “As much as possible, we try to get light from multiple directions—which provides a sense of lengthening the day.” Even in spots where it was impossible to access the outdoors, they looked for creative solutions. For example, he says, “At the dining room wet bar, a small window goes into the mudroom vestibule, borrowing light.”

Speaking of lighting, McGinty chose a chandelier as the interior’s signature “showstopper” piece. “This is truly a work of art,” she says of the hand-blown glass sculpture suspended above the dining table. Artist Lindsey Adelman crafts one-of-a-kind “Custom Knotty Bubbles” wherein she combines glass orbs with natural rope in ways that fit particular spaces or situations. McGinty notes, “It became the focal point of the room.”

Even as the Knotty Bubbles stands out, the piece fits within broader interior themes. “Everything should flow,” says McGinty. “All of the furnishings are casual and the accents are organic, such as the reclaimed wood for the mantelpiece, and the distressed

surface of the dining table.” In more closed-off parts of the home, she also added whimsical touches. “I placed unique features in more private spaces,” she says. “So in a guest bathroom, I combined light blues, tans, and a geometric tile pattern. And in the laundry room, we hung blowfish wallpaper. I really had fun with that.”

PSD also included what DaSilva describes as “modern mannerist” elements. For example, he says, “In the mudroom, the paneling is used like wallpaper. There are no frames, so the openings were cut into the panels. This makes the built-ins both traditional and contemporary at the same time. Likewise, their bases can read as ‘feet,’ but they



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are also a continuation of the baseboard wrapping them in a slightly unconventional way. Anytime a space can take on multiple readings or meanings, this enriches and enlivens the architecture.”

Another area that focuses on the comfort of the home’s inhabitants was the placement of windows to access views of other parts of the house. The T-design lends itself to this practice, and DaSilva recalls, “My first architectural mentor would do this a lot. He taught me that it could be a very pleasant feeling in a house. So, a nook like the one in the living room that looks back at the entryway is a reassuring thing. It gets at the basic need to defend your space.” A related though disparate feature is the coziness built into the rooms on the second floor. “A requirement in this part of Nantucket is that houses may have a maximum height of 1.5 storeys,” he says. “So we had to design very carefully for headroom, using dormers strategically. The ceilings slope down at the head of the beds, for instance, and in one of the bathrooms the vanity tucks under an eave, but there’s plenty of space at the sink and mirror.”

In accord with some of the understated design qualities of Meadowcrest, Rob Calderaro says of the grounds, “I personally strive for a minimalistic and cohesive variety of plants, so we focused on hydrangeas and grasses for the interior of the lot. On the perimeter, we used maiden grass, bayberry and blueberry bushes to blend with the existing landscape.” He describes the overall program as fairly modest, although it includes a pool and firepit, outdoor dining area with wood decking inlay, and a privet hedge to separate the entire backyard space from the

more public driveway and garage. “The continuity of materials—IPE, bluestone, the solid granite diving rock—helped the project so the landscape, exterior, and interior all flow together.”

McGinty shares Calderaro’s enthusiasm, saying, “Meadowcrest has been my favorite project to date. I loved every minute of it, and

having vacationed on Nantucket for many years, I had a personal connection. It was fun working on the island in the offseason, getting to know shop owners, craftspeople, artists. It was a true collaboration and a really great experience.”

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