This page: Large uncurtained windows let in natural light from all sides, giving the traditional house a contemporary, transparent feeling. **Right:** The vintage style of the exterior is emphasized with weathered white cedar shingles and painted white trim. A view of the ocean can be captured from the front door.

best of both worlds

Vintage architectural details and traditional design combine with modern comfort in a Martha's Vineyard house

TRAVELERS TO THIS PART OF MARTHA'S VINEYARD MIGHT EASILY THINK they have stumbled across one of the island's elegant old vacation homes sitting on a slight hill overlooking the water. The gambrel roof, the row of dormer windows, and the shady front porch all recall the leisurely styles of a century ago. But, in fact, the house is less than two years old, owned by a family of four that spends most of every summer on Martha's Vineyard. Snug and sunny, the house is rich with graceful architectural details without sacrificing any of the comforts of a contemporary beach house. "They had a vision of a 1920s-style seaside home," says architect and builder Gerret Conover, who designed the house, "but with a modern wish list."

PHOTOGRAPHY **BY SAM GRAY** STYLING **BY NAN WHITNEY**

NATURALDEFENSES

The weather is a factor in building any kind of beach house, but with some forethought and a careful selection of materials you can preserve the house without sacrificing style.

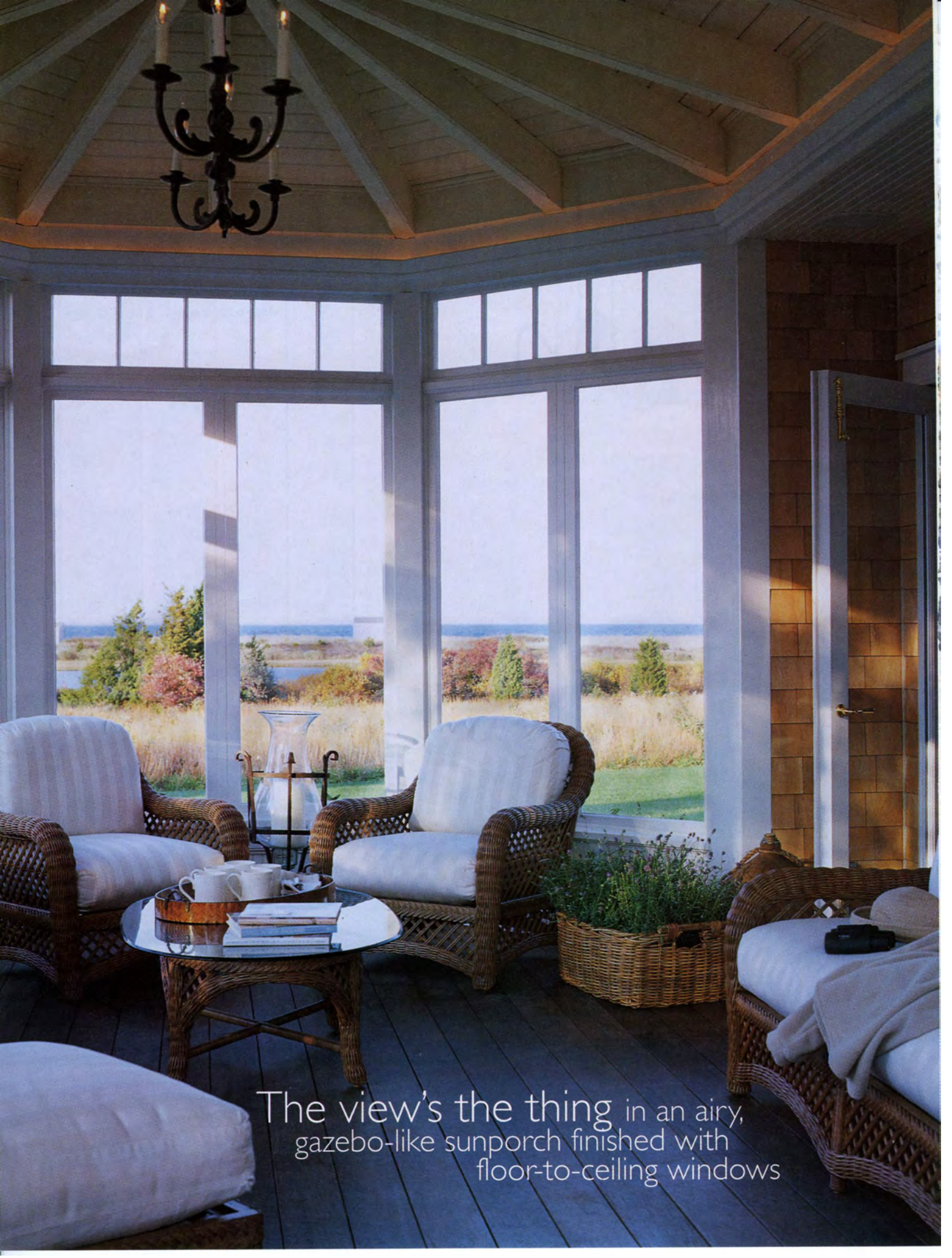
- Cedar shingles are a classic for both traditional and contemporary beach houses. Leave them untreated and let them weather to a soft silvery gray.
- Good thermopane windows are a wise investment both for protecting against storm damage and containing energy costs.
- Moisture and salt air take their toll on painted wood. Any painted trim or other details should be well-primed and given an extra coat of paint. In some cases durable man-made materials can be used as a stand-in for wood: the porch columns on this traditional house, for instance, are molded of fiberglass with aluminim tops and bases.

When the owners bought the property it included a 1960s-style house that did not particularly suit their needs, but the lovely sweep of view down to the water and the wild, unspoiled landscape surrounding it was too tempting to pass up.

Although not bound by the historic district guidelines that exist in Edgartown, the island's principal town, the homeowners wanted to build a house that would blend comfortably with existing local architecture. Even more important, they wanted to be sensitive to the fragile ecology of the shoreline, protected under the guidelines of a local conservation district. In order to avoid disturbing the wetlands, the house sits 200 feet away from the water, out of the conservation district boundaries.

Building actually occurred in two phases. The first year, the main house, a nearby swimming pool, and the surrounding landscaping were completed; the next year, a carriage house with two

Left: Salvaged architectural pieces and new millwork make a pleasing blend in the sunny open-plan kitchen. The cupboard in the corner of the dining room is an old piece, retrofitted with a wet bar; the lighting fixture over the kitchen's central island was adapted from an old pot rack. **Inset:** The old-styled farmhouse sink is actually a new model. **Below:** A cushioned window seat by the breakfast table provides both seating and extra storage.



The view's the thing in an airy, gazebo-like sunporch finished with floor-to-ceiling windows

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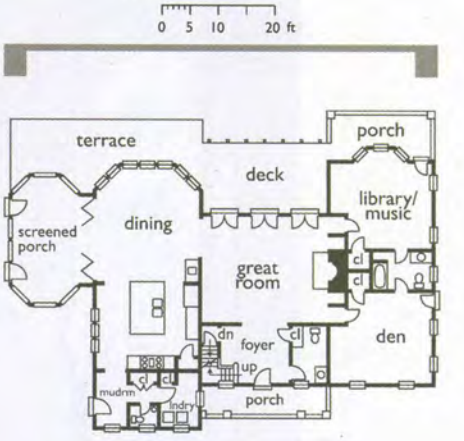
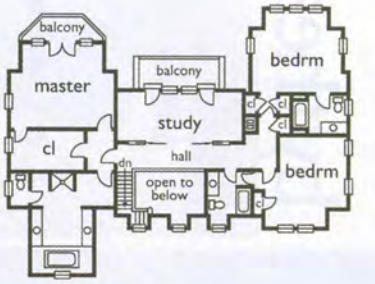


FIRST FLOOR



SECOND FLOOR

Left and top right: Furnished with comfortable wicker and affording a 180-plus degree view of the ocean, the gazebo-like sunporch off the dining room is a favorite place for sitting. **Bottom Right:** A casual sitting room outfitted with a sink-into sofa and a 50-inch flat-screen TV doubles as the family's entertainment room.

guest bedrooms was built.

Since they knew from the beginning they were going to install separate guest quarters, the homeowners kept the total size of the main house relatively modest—just 4,000 feet—but still plenty large enough for themselves and their two children.

Rooms flow comfortably into each other but large openings without doors provide just a hint of demarcation, which allows rooms to work as individual spaces while still making a single unified sweep. "No matter where you are inside the house you can see through to the other rooms and often further to the outside," says Conover.

Wide French doors and traditional six-over-six double hung windows let in floods of light; a softly neutral color scheme with an emphasis on glossy white paint and natural wood lets the views outside the uncurtained windows take center stage. The furniture is traditional without being formal, an easy-to-live-with combination of antiques and new pieces.

The house owes much of its vintage style to antique architectural details, discovered in salvage yards and antique shops up and down the east coast. Custom molding, inspired by detailing on some of the older pieces, and refinished antique oak flooring add to the sunny house's timeless feeling.

A massive antique cupboard provided the cue for the kitchen's handsome millwork. The cupboard was cut in half and installed next to the

The emphasis is on understated luxury in the master bedroom and bath. **Left:** The bathroom's marble tiles are decorated with a mosaic border, thick cotton towels are stacked ready on an antique table. **Above:** The steam shower has two showerheads and nickel-plated fixtures. **Right:** A diminutive balcony outside the Palladian-style French doors is just big enough for two.

kitchen window seat, switching halves so that its cut sides are hidden and its two finished ends exposed. In the nearby dining room a handsome corner cupboard was retrofitted as a wet bar; Conover then cleverly picked up the V-groove motif at the back of the cupboard and used it for the molding in the kitchen and dining room.

The house's style offers some practical as well as aesthetic advantages. Island building codes restrict roof heights to 26 feet, but the broad gambrel roof makes it possible to still have nine-and-a-half foot ceilings within those limits; dormer windows and larger Palladian-style windows let in copious natural light. Air handlers are tucked into attic space and extra sump pumps in the basement take care of occasional storm flooding.

One of the family's favorite rooms is the octagonal sun porch reminiscent of an old-fashioned conservatory, just off the dining room; a flagstone terrace beyond the sun porch has space for pots of geraniums and a barbecue grill. The room, lit with a combination of soft valance up-lighting and an iron chandelier, started out as a screened porch with removable glass panels, but the family discovered that glass panels not only gave more all-weather versatility but opened up the spectacular view. "This is a house," says Conover, "where the view is everything." ■