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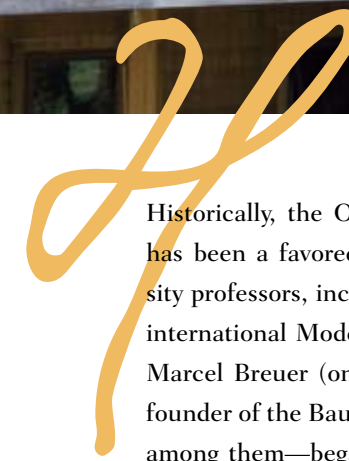
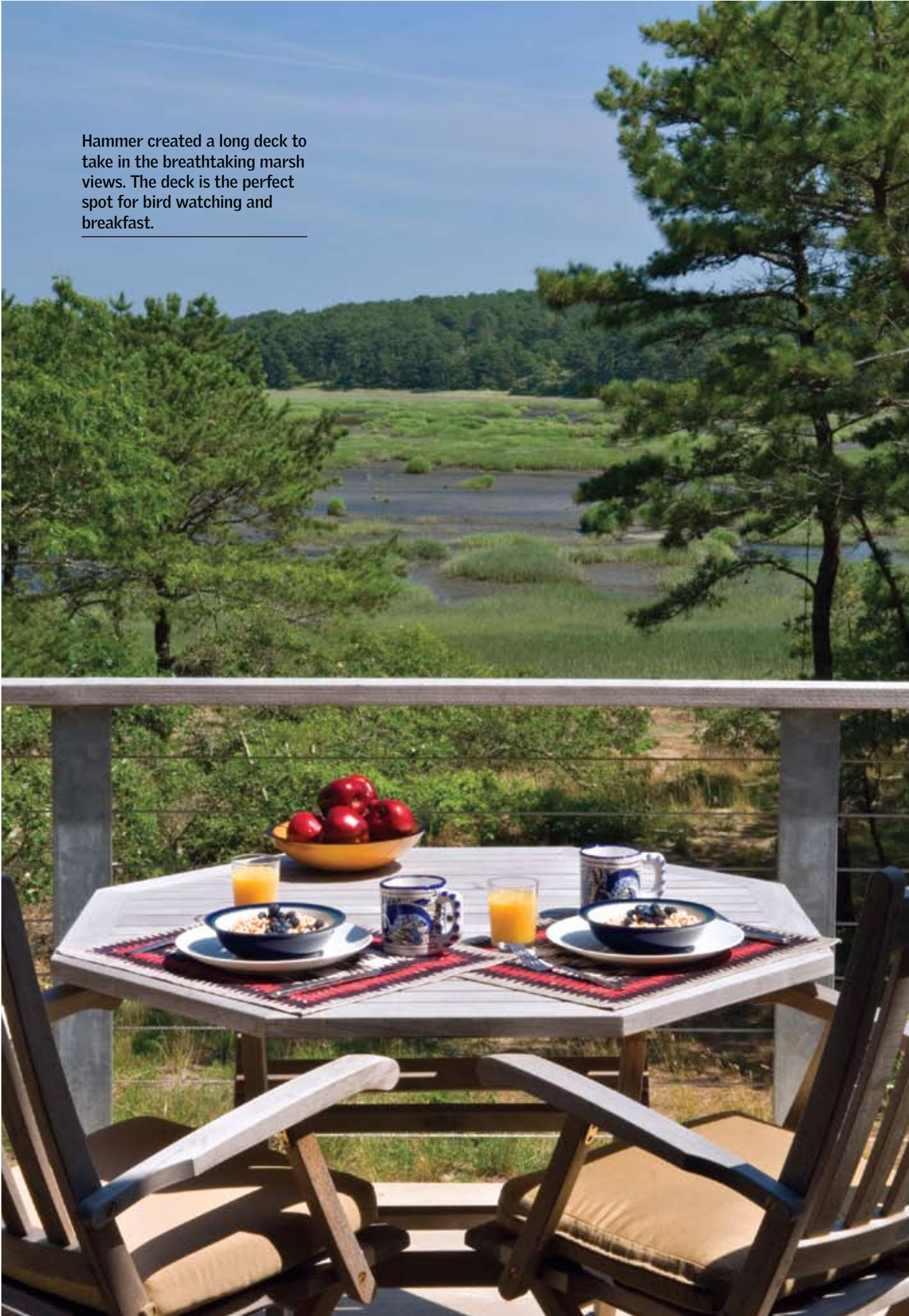
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Wellfleet modern

by laura v. scheel | photography by randall perry

ARCHITECT MARK HAMMER
LOOKS TO THE A MID 19TH-
CENTURY INTERNATIONAL
STYLE TO CREATE A RETREAT
HOUSE IN THE WOODS.

Hammer created a long deck to take in the breathtaking marsh views. The deck is the perfect spot for bird watching and breakfast.



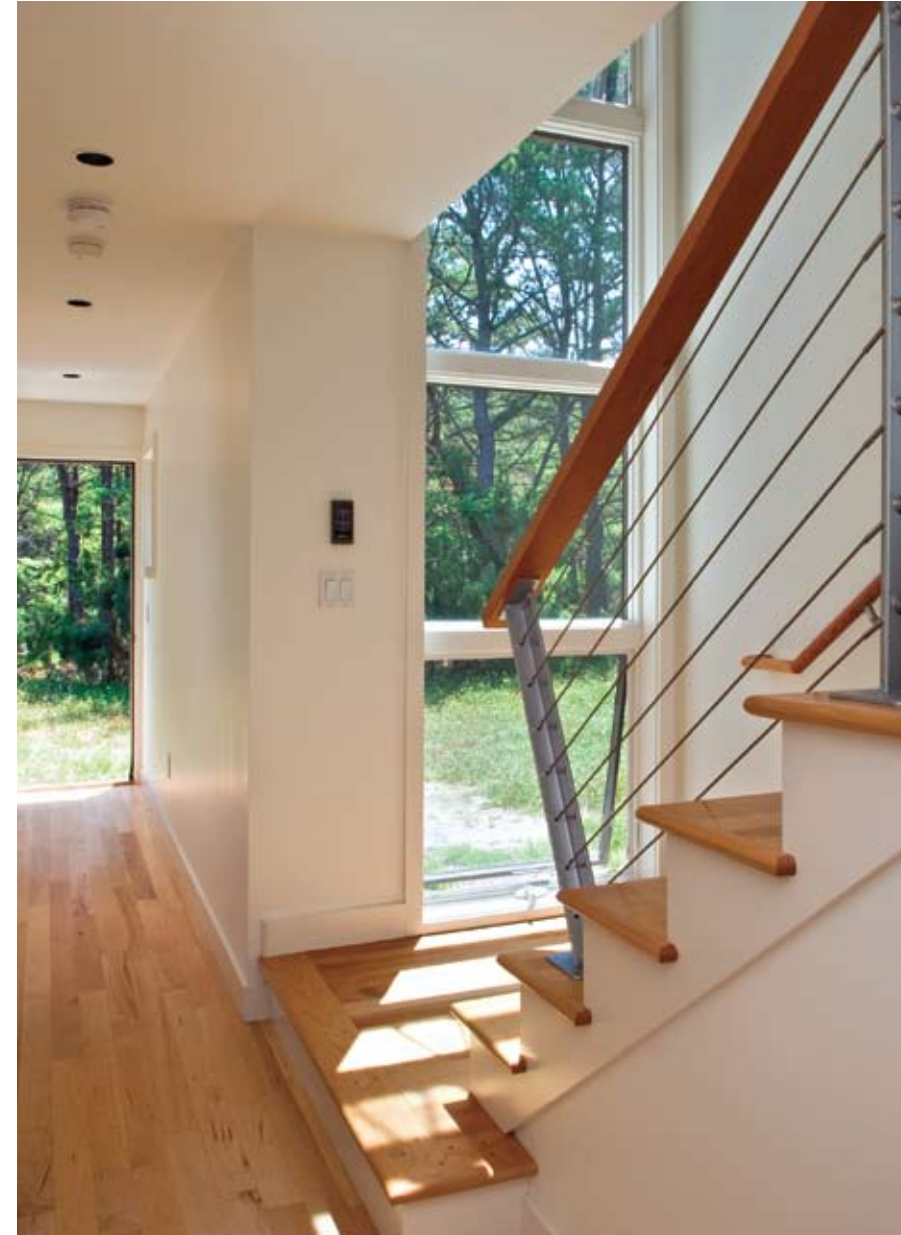
Historically, the Outer Cape—and especially Wellfleet—has been a favored place for artists, writers, and university professors, including several architects working in the international Modernist style. A few of these architects—Marcel Breuer (once a partner with Walter Gropius, the founder of the Bauhaus movement) and Serge Chermayeff among them—began designing vacation homes for themselves and their friends in the late 1940s. (Some of these homes are still standing and have fortunately been left mostly intact; a few are listed with the Massachusetts Historic Commission; see page 100 for more information on the preservation of these Modernist homes.)

The style was a new way of looking at home design, especially, as Mark Hammer of Hammer Architects of Cambridge and Cape Cod explains, when it came to creating a house used for recreation rather than year-round shelter. Old Cape Cod houses were compact, outfitted with small windows affording little light. “It was perfect for the old days,” says Hammer, but the style of design these architects brought to the area for their summer homes “changed the whole paradigm 180 degrees.” Rather than using design as a safeguard from the elements, these homes look

instead to enhance and invite the outside in. “It’s all about having open space and connecting with the outside,” says Hammer. “These homes were, and are, designed to keep the breezes flowing through, to let light in, to connect with the views and nature.”

The owner and the architect share a strong interest in this international style of design and also liked the idea of paying homage, of sorts, to a nearby home designed by Marcel Breuer in the late 1940s. “We wanted to be a good neighbor to that architectural legacy,” Hammer says. The key to that legacy exists in simplicity and practicality while creating little division between the inside and outside environment. “Like the idea of the steamship in architecture, a house is a machine for living. The design is in harmony with its function.”

“It was important to both of us,” recalls Hammer, “that the home would sit gently on the site.” The desire was to create a sense of privacy for the front of the home while opening out to the serenity of the tidal marsh framed by trees toward the back of the property. The existing hillside, viewed as a benefit rather than a hindrance, was incorporated into the home’s design. The main living spaces—



The interiors are open and bright. A wall of glass doors offers unobstructed views to the marsh. The staircase becomes a work of architectural art—it is seen from outside the home as well.

kitchen, dining area, living room, outdoor decks, and master bedroom—all sit on the upper floor, which is level with the grade. With a front-to-back alignment that sits north to south, the home is in place to receive ample light without being too bright and is also situated to receive the prevailing summertime southwesterly breezes.

The slanted design of the home serves many purposes. At the height of the slant, a line of awning windows lets in light and offers an escape for the rising hot air of summer. Adding to this efficiency is the deep overhang of the roof, which shades the windows from direct sun and also protects them from rain. Ventilation, an abundance of indirect light, and the beautiful marsh views are the rewards of the wall of large windows on the opposite side of the home. Taking advantage of the natural movement of air and controlling the intake of sunlight also eliminate the need for an air-conditioning system—a move that’s both

cost-effective and environmentally friendly.

Hammer wanted to highlight the main staircase as an appealing standout feature that would be seen from both inside and outside the home rather than as a mere necessity to get from one level to another. As he explains it, the main staircase and entry hall are enclosed as an attachment to a wall physically separated from the main volume of the house by tall vertical windows. While descending the stairs, one is treated to unimpeded views to the outside. The front entrance of the home, topped with a linear metal canopy, is seamlessly blended into this concept.

While the homeowner and Hammer were in complete accord with the major design elements of the house, the owner had a few important requests of her own. “I wanted to keep things as simple as possible,” she explains. “No clutter, a lot of glass and light, a lot of storage, the use of good materials, and the warmth of wood.” Unadorned exposed

wood is a dominant feature throughout the house, with the planked ceilings and the kitchen cabinets crafted from fir; the floors are made from narrow boards of European steamed beech. White-painted walls gently contrast and offer a neutral backdrop for the various hues of the wood.

For each of the three downstairs bedrooms (the master bedroom is on the entry level), there is enough space for a desk and a comfortable chair. The owner explains, “I’m bookish, so I wanted bedrooms that would be a pleasure to be in all day long,” with places to read and write. The bedrooms also have the benefit of private decks facing the marsh and close proximity to the outdoor shower.

Even at the not-so-diminutive size of 2,600 square feet, the home sits unobtrusively amid the landscape, its red cedar siding continuing to soften with age, complementing the surrounding pines. Some of the original trees were lost to make way for construction, but since the home’s

completion in fall 2006, the owner has been adding more plants, trees, and decorative shrubs with each passing year. She’s pleased with the way the house seems to be blending farther into the woods with the additional plantings—despite the voraciousness of the local rabbits when it comes to her carefully chosen specimens. But that’s all part of the package; she loves the variety of birds visiting her backyard feeders, the hawks overhead and the herons in the marsh, and the nighttime communication of the coyotes.

“There’s a great sense of privacy here,” says the owner of her home in the woods. “There are a lot of neighboring houses here, but you can’t see them from my home. I love that it’s such a peaceful spot.” **h**

Laura V. Scheel is a freelance writer living on Cape Cod.

FOR INFORMATION, SEE RESOURCES PAGE 106.