





cycles of WIND + SAND

A HOME ON EDGARTOWN'S KATAMA BAY
GRACEFULLY EMBODIES ITS DYNAMIC SURROUNDINGS

The shape of Katama Bay, winding between Edgartown and Chappaquiddick, is one of the defining features on a chart or map of Martha's Vineyard. Depending on one's perspective, it could resemble a sea lion rising up on its front flippers or the likeness of the hookah-smoking caterpillar from "Alice in Wonderland." To further complicate the Rorschach Test of this estuary is the fact that its boundaries undergo constant fluctuation and change, and this is only at its surface. On the bay's floor, beneath its shallow, tidal-driven and wind-frothed water, the sand shifts and rolls in whorls that resemble the cascading petals of giant peonies—the flowers that Marco Polo once described as "roses, big as cabbages." To view aerial photos documenting the shape of the sandy floor over a span of months and years is akin to returning to a flower garden year after year and studying its patterns, its spiraling calyces and corollas.

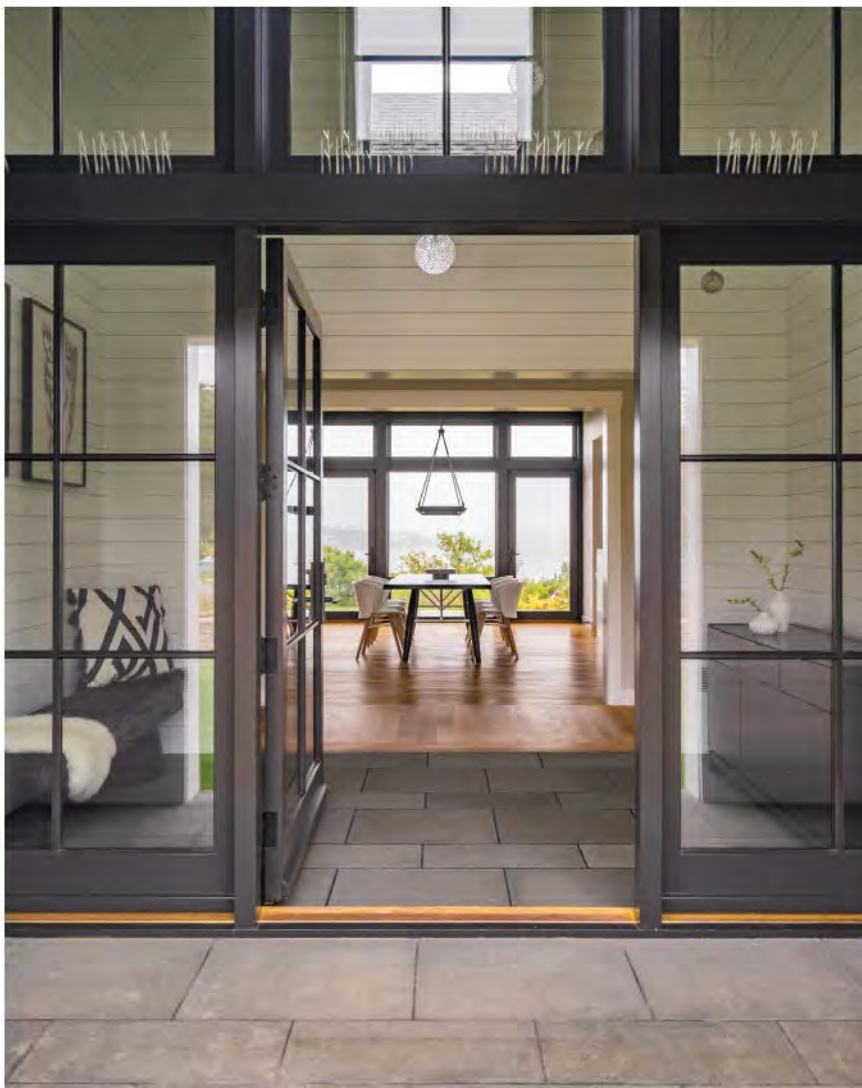
In 2011, the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution (WHOI) began charting the bottom of Katama Bay using a Sea-Doo jet ski and sonar technology. The project immediately showed benefits for the harbormaster and oyster farmers who had been operating for decades with outdated charts. The U.S. Department of Defense also became interested, as the data could help the

BY CHRIS WHITE
INTERIOR PHOTOGRAPHY BY ERIC ROTH
EXTERIOR PHOTOGRAPHY BY NAT REA

Navy to operate in other such inlets around the world. WHOI explains that the sands shift so dramatically because Katama Bay has two inlets. According to the report, "Water pours in from Vineyard Sound through Edgartown Channel, and from the Atlantic Ocean through Katama Inlet. The size of Katama Inlet runs on a 10-15-year cycle, ranging from an opening a few kilometers wide, to a very narrow opening, to completely closed." This variation in size causes circulation patterns to change, thus altering the underwater landscape. Some years the sand peonies look neat, almost manicured, while other years they seem to explode. In 2007, the Atlantic broke through near Norton Point. The cut then migrated east at a rate of about 500 yards per year until 2014, when only a small outlet existed in the far corner next to Chappaquiddick. In April 2015, the sands made another surge and sealed it off completely, so that it now resembles its appearance in 2006.

Katama Bay is much more than a simple pond, and homes above its shores have luxury box seats from which to observe Nature's ongoing show. The speed of the action on screen may be more in line with an Andy Warhol film than with the latest installment of "John Wick," but over time, the drama unfolds in its entirety. Based on the cycle, the inciting moment when the ocean breaks through at Norton Point should occur soon and bring this current act to a close. The number of years in the cycle clip past on a generational scale, so a grandmother living here might see





the Katama Bay Inlet migrate five or six times before her first grandchild reaches adulthood. In designing one particular house here, Hutker Architects drew upon both factors to create a home that offers much of the dynamic potential of the bay and allows for its owners and their family to blossom for generations to come.

Project Principal, Phil Regan, who has been in Hutker's Vineyard Haven office for 30 years since graduating from college, says the "two big ideas" they presented to the client involved repositioning the driveway so the approach to the house presented differently. "So often clients say they wish they could move their house—a major undertaking," Regan explains. "But many times we suggest changing the driveway, a much easier and



affordable option that can make a big difference.” The other big idea involved creating a higher grade that would offer expansive views to the southeast.

Regan, a Vineyard native, notes that the Katama sands are not the only shift the island has recently experienced. “The change in architecture across the Vineyard has had a profound influence. Houses are being replaced, money and resources are being introduced. It is definitely a changing landscape, not only the sand on its edges, but the island as a whole is changing pretty dramatically.

“Over the years, we have recognized as a group, what we want to do most is create homes that feel comfortable here. That can still be a house with a lot of square footage if you treat it differently, by quieting it down with a smaller collection of independent structures. Those structures look familiar to some of the old camps, cottages and barns that might have been here at one time. How we include a modern interpretation of what might have been traditional forms, scale and architecture is what we are after. If you look at our work, there is a theme, and the theme is based upon what looks like it has always belonged here.”



The transition between the structure and the drama going on outside is seamless through large expanses of windows. Endless skies and ocean views complement the natural materials and interior design choices.



Design/project manager Greg Ehrman notes that one philosophy of Hutker Architects is to employ a “new regional vernacular” in their design, taking cues and hints from a place to try to capture its particular language. In the Katama Bay home, Ehrman, the homeowners, and the entire project team worked to express some unique qualities. “We tried to think intergenerationally,” says Ehrman. “The owners were thinking in terms of their children and their development. Ten years from now, the children might be in college; 10 years after that, they

might bring families of their own home for vacation here.” Driven in part by this concept, Hutker Architects designed the house to have two wings. “Mom and Dad can occupy one wing, while the other wing is available for the rest of the family,” says Ehrman. From the master bedroom suite on the left side of the house, a living room, dining room and kitchen create circulation and flow into the family wing. The layout also allows the home to feel intimate and small or to feel more expansive when needed. Ehrman concludes: “You

JUST AS KATAMA BAY TRANSFORMS WITH THE CYCLES OF NATURE, HUTKER ARCHITECTS AND THE PROJECT TEAM SET OUT TO CREATE A HOME WITH DISTINCT SPACES THAT ALLOW ITS RESIDENTS AND GUESTS TO ADAPT TO THE CHANGING MOODS OF MARTHA'S VINEYARD.



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don't end up with one large house. Instead, it's segmented, which fits with the Yankee tradition of being built over time."

Additionally, the character of the Katama Bay home relies heavily upon the juxtaposition of traditional and modern elements. An elegant, formal entry pavilion features a stone wall and a walkway of wide granite rectangular blocks leading to a white clapboard facade that creates an homage to a classic cottage. However, instead of a simple doorway, large windows set in a heavy slate-colored frame provide welcome. From the motor court, one can see straight through the entrance, through the dining room, and out to the view beyond. Flanking the cottage section are walls of vertical cedar planking that

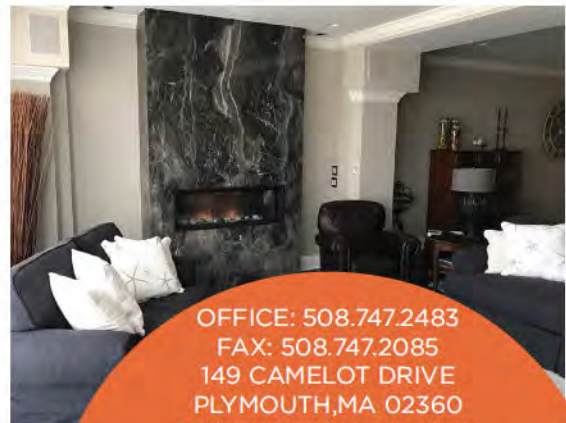


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announce the multifaceted quality of the house. Ehrman says, “It’s down in a pine forest, one of just two houses on a long dirt road in the outwash plain of Katama Bay, yet it keeps one foot clearly in the village of Edgartown.”

The Katama Bay home faces east-southeast, perched to welcome the roses of dawn but also to absorb the slates and grays from heavier skies, the whitecap-torn charcoal surface of the water when northeast winds howl. Rather than design a home that captures a single fancy or evokes a simple story, Hutker Architects created one that reflects Nature’s myriad moods and recognizes the beauty in warmth, in coldness, and in the juxtaposition between such opposing elements. While much of the home captures the colder white



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and gray hues of Martha's Vineyard, the ceilings of the living room, dining room and kitchen all reveal exposed beams of reclaimed, hand-hewn white oak. Hutker Architects works with Harry Raymond of Vintage & Specialty Wood, based in Florida, to source pieces for this type of project. Ehrman says: "Harry's an amazing vendor who scouts all over North America. To achieve this warm, driftwood tone, he uses a special sauce—a lime wash that makes it appear like the timbers have been bleached in the sun for years." Echoing this warm coloring, the floors and the screen porch are wooden with bright finishes. The latter has the feel of a traditional camp and contains areas for socializing and dining.

The interior design of the Katama Bay home enhances and amplifies many of the elements that Hutker Architects envisioned. Liz Stiving-Nichols, founding principal and senior designer of Martha's Vineyard Interior Design (MVID), says, "This house has great views,

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so we took influences, but we didn't want to compete with the natural beauty. The overall goal was to work with a coastal palette without it feeling forced." She notes that one advantage of working with grays is that they can take on other colors, almost reflecting them. "In areas where there's less natural light, the same color has a different effect," she says. With the furnishings, Stiving-Nichols and her team worked to keep a low profile to avoid imposing on the views, and she selected swivel chairs so that people can either hold conversations with others or turn outward to the natural surroundings. Perhaps the most impressive area of the Katama Bay home is its entryway. "It's almost like a surprise as you pass through the first section, through such an elevation of glass," Stiving-Nichols says. "You don't have a full appreciation for its volume until you enter the vestibule." Here, her goal was to keep the lighting elements and furniture minimal, but the light fixtures really stand out like celestial bodies. "Each one is a handmade



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glass orb on a pendant that hangs from the wood ceiling on a simple cable,” Stiving-Nichols explains. On the porch, MVID chose teak furniture to add to the traditional warm feel of the room, but the cast concrete coffee table and side tables reinforce the confluence of the modern with the traditional, as does the porcelain surface of the dining table. Because of the room’s layout, Stiving-Nichols says, “The family can utilize the space for lounging, dining, entertaining, or just stretching out for a nap. Two people could sit out there and feel comfortable in the space.”

Just as Katama Bay transforms with the cycles of nature, Hutker Architects and the project team set out to create a home with distinct spaces that allow its residents and guests to adapt to the changing moods of Martha’s Vineyard. On the water side of the home, a bluestone terrace and fire pit encourage guests to take advantage of late evening hours, while the pool and poolhouse, set back behind the

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family wing, celebrate sun and warmth. Ehrman says: "We wanted to create various opportunities to live in the spaces. For instance, when the wind comes up from the south, there are protected areas. This is a home that can have a lot going on with a lot of people or just a little bit happening with fewer people and still feel appropriately scaled."

Ehrman is grateful to the entire project team—from the owners, to Martha's Vineyard Interior Design, to Caleb Nicholson of Contemporary Landscapes, who designed the gardens and the rest of the landscaping. Scott Stearns of J.G. Early Builders led the construction team. "Given all the edges of the project, these guys were perfect," says Ehrman. "They do some of the best work on Martha's Vineyard." And for this, generations of family will surely enjoy this home above Katama Bay for many cycles of transformation to come.

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Chris White is an English teacher at Tabor Academy in Marion.

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