



SEA CHANGE

Charles Myer's Vineyard make-over: from sea shack to beach cottage

It's not by chance that Corky Pollan refers to her family's seaside cottage on Martha's Vineyard as a boat. Like a seaworthy vessel, the house bows to the dignity and force of nature while still asserting its own special vigor. Compact yet comfortable, weathered and windswept, the cottage sits snugly amid a stretch of rolling dunes and sea grass, the nearby ocean its constant companion.

It seems so spontaneous, but that graceful fit between house and land took months of careful planning by the Pollans and their Cambridge-based architect, Charles R. Myer. Once no more than a simple changing shed perched on the edge of the Pollans' Gay Head property, the cottage assumed its present form in response to local zoning regulations intended to protect the area's endangered wetlands and barrier beach. "Given the house's

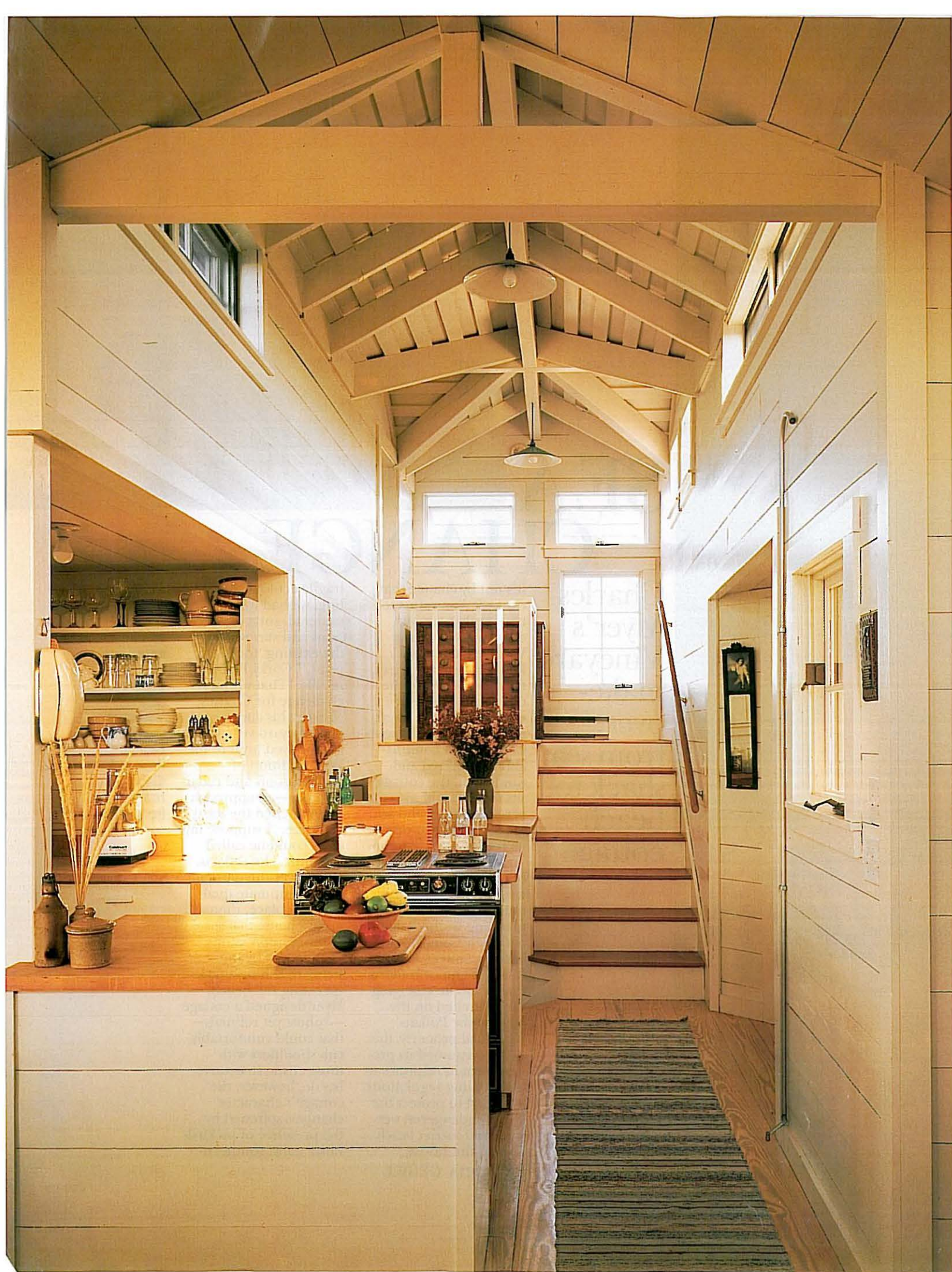
fragile ecological setting, we had to build under all sorts of restrictions and stay within the existing 'footprint,'" Corky Pollan recalls. "That was the challenge for Charles."

Taking his cues from the Vineyard vernacular, Myer stayed loyal to the local tradition of pitched roofs and cedar shingles—an approach that matched the local mandate. "I suppose my work could be called romantic," he reflects. "I discover the particular and intimate qualities of a place, then make a house that speaks to those impressions."

Fascinated by the string of fishing shacks speckling the beach, Myer designed a cottage—robust yet refined—that could comfortably rub shoulders with those rustic structures. Inside, however, the cottage's character changes, softened by the presence of pickled-white walls, southern-

At sea's edge, another sea of dune grass surrounds the house (above). The ocean sparkles beyond deck and dining room (opposite).

VICTORIA GEIBEL



Simple style adds allure

yellow-pine floors, exposed rafters, and plenty of light.

Such gestures do much to mask the cottage's diminutive dimensions. It is just under 850 square feet, big enough for a living room, dining area, kitchen, and a single bedroom. The attractively miniature scale is solely the result of serendipity: In compliance with codes, Myer couldn't add any rooms with new uses nor could he expand his plan beyond the perimeter of the existing house. He could, however, build upward—just barely. "The height limitations are intended to prevent people from building two-story houses," he explains.

By making every inch count, Myer

A central two-story windowed space extends the shipshape kitchen (left). Candlesticks, botanical prints, a bottle, and babies' blocks are set on white wicker (right).





“Every room a little house”

carved out enough volume to allow a central double-height space and a second story just big enough to sneak in a bedroom.

By squeezing in a corner here, a window there, Myer conjured up a cottage that doesn't feel cramped, creating a place where, as he says, “Each room is its own little house.” Today, with the renovation complete, Myer's stamp is manifest: Only the chimney and fireplace wall remain from the original structure.

For the Pollans, the cottage's simple style adds to its allure. “The house is in an area of great simplicity, and we wanted to preserve that,” Corky Pollan says. “We wanted to keep the cottage connected to the water, to the land, to its surroundings.”

Sloped ceiling, exposed rafters crown the bedroom (left), which has its own sink. Vintage glass (right) catches the light.



Light on the subject

For this reason, all rooms—except the bathroom—face north to the water. And the sun's path is always in sight; sunrises can be seen from the bedroom, sunsets from the dining room. (To draw in cooling breezes, Myer put crank-operated windows in some parts of the house.)

With only one bedroom, the cottage can't accommodate reunions of the whole Pollan clan, which includes Corky, a *New York* magazine editor; her husband, Stephen, a lawyer and writer; daughters Lori and Dana, owners of an aerobics studio; son Michael, executive editor of *Harper's*; and daughter Tracy, an actress married to Michael J. Fox.

"We really do have to take turns using the house," says Corky Pollan. >

The sun transforms a humble porcelain sink and tub. For color, a print left by the original owner hangs above an old washstand.





Windows on the world

"But that works out fine, since almost no one is ever free to come at the same time."

There's always a Pollan or two in residence during the summer. For this fast-paced family, the cottage serves as a welcome refuge, an oh-so-small seaside retreat where sun and water shape the day where the rhythmic sound of surf sets the easy tempo.

"There is a sense of wonderment about this place," Stephen Pollan says. "You can sit on the deck, look out toward the beach, hear the water, and feel the wind blow." Adds his wife, "There's a rare feeling of solitude here. It's a place to relax immediately."

New York writer Victoria Geibel is a former executive editor of *Metropolitan*.

The snug bedroom (right) boasts built-in storage. More storage is tucked alongside the stairs leading to the living room (left).