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A NEW TRADITION

Set on a pristine oceanfront site, the charming Martha's Vineyard summer home of Lynn Forester de Rothschild and her husband, Sir Evelyn, conjures the character of an old house expanded over generations

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TWO CENTURIES AGO, ON 15 BUCOLIC ACRES OVERLOOKING THE SOUTH SHORE OF MARTHA'S VINEYARD, a farmer built a simple cottage, a barn, and a stone larder for milk and cheese. Several decades later, in the 1870s, as the island started developing a summer colony, the farm was purchased by members of the Rothschild family, the great European banking dynasty. Over the ensuing decades they made a variety of changes and additions to the property, substantially enlarging the house, converting the adjacent barn into a vast common room, and erecting a series of new structures—all of which were joined together to make the rambling residence that now serves as a vacation home for Lynn Forester de Rothschild and her husband, Sir Evelyn.

It's the sort of story that is familiar on Martha's Vineyard, of course. Except in this case it is actually a playful fabrication, contrived as the conceit behind a new house that would suit the couple's space requirements while also being sensitive to the island's architectural traditions. "A very clever fiction" is how Lady de Rothschild, an entrepreneur who, along with her husband, runs the private investment firm E. L. Rothschild, describes the elaborate history.

The tale was the invention of New York City-based architect Hugh Weisman, a longtime Vineyard summer resident whom the Rothschilds enlisted a number of

years ago to create a house on the island, which has been their summer getaway for nearly two decades. Rather than design a single grand edifice, the architect envisioned a residence that seemed to have expanded organically over time. The fanciful backstory helped both Weisman and Manhattan decorator Mark Cunningham, who was brought in to oversee the interiors, lend an air of authenticity to the home, which—while huge, to be sure—manages to meld modestly into the landscape. "You don't really see the house from the beach or the road. It's big but discreet," Lynn says. "We wanted something rustic, cozy, unpretentious."

Lynn notes that she and Sir Evelyn—who also own homes in New York, London, and Bedfordshire, England—host family and friends on the island "all summer long." Their extended brood includes five grown children (from their previous marriages), three grandchildren, and everyone's assorted partners and pals. What's more, they're avid hosts and active in politics (Lynn is an ardent Hillary Clinton supporter), so the house needed to be both spacious and flexible, as comfortable for just the two of them as for entertaining a large group.

Throughout the compound, which features separate guest quarters and a poolhouse with a gym, the historical conceit can be seen in everything from the varying sizes of the baseboards (larger in the common

Opposite: Reclaimed timber beams accent the barnlike common room at Lynn and Sir Evelyn de Rothschild's Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts, home, which was built by Rivkin/Weisman Architects and decorated by Mark Cunningham; the landscape design is by Horiuchi Solien. Circa-1930 lanterns (one is pictured) from Ann-Morris hang from the ceiling, and an artwork by Callum Innes is mounted above the fireplace. For details see Sources.



Clockwise from top left: Lynn Forester de Rothschild relaxes on a poolside terrace; her hair and makeup are by Vincent Roppatte. In the common room, a quartet of Mark Cunningham-designed club chairs joins a custom-made sofa by Rose Uniacke, all of which are upholstered in a Loro Piana linen; the walls are coated in a Ralph Lauren Paint white. Greeting visitors in the entrance hall is a bronze elephant sculpture atop a 19th-century English country table from Yew Tree House Antiques; on the wall is a series of Richard Diebenkorn lithographs.

room, smaller in what was conceived as the farmer's cottage) to the multitude of reclaimed materials. The old timbers used extensively in the common room and kitchen were salvaged from New England farms, while the antique terra-cotta tiles paving the breakfast area hail from Italy. "Lynn insisted the materials be old or look old and that things shouldn't feel artificial," Weisman says. Even the name they gave the place, Bagehot Backs, has the ring of an earlier era. In fact, it's a tribute to Walter Bagehot, the legendary editor of *The Economist*—which is partly owned by the Rothschilds—and to an area known as the Backs at Cambridge's Trinity College, where Sir Evelyn studied.

When it came to the decor, Cunningham installed a mix of furnishings that convey both warmth and

Yankee restraint—all in perfect harmony with the rustic nature of the residence. It's the kind of meticulously curated array Cunningham mastered during his years working in store design at Ralph Lauren. "It was my stepdaughter who suggested we think Ralph Lauren—homey and relaxed," Lynn recalls.

In the entertaining spaces, richly burnished antiques, such as the common room's rare ladder-back chair or the breakfast area's pine lazy Susan table, mingle with bespoke pieces upholstered in summery shades of wheat and blue, with splashes of green—colors that prevail throughout the house. (One striking exception to this earthy palette is a powder room where a specially made crimson framework lining the walls is inset with covers from *The Economist*.) →



Above: In the family room, a bespoke De Angelis sectional sofa in a Rose Tarlow Melrose House linen blend is grouped with antique English armchairs clad in a Jasper fabric and a cocktail table custom crafted from reclaimed oak; the curtains were made by Anthony Lawrence-Belfair using a Chelsea Editions linen. **Opposite:** Vintage copper pots shimmer in the kitchen, where an Ellsworth Kelly lithograph overlooks a 19th-century tavern table and two antique chairs.

The overall feeling of the interiors—which are enlivened by a small selection of contemporary artworks by the likes of Richard Diebenkorn, Callum Innes, and Ellsworth Kelly—is at once traditional and modern, or, according to Cunningham, “like Martha’s Vineyard but without being too literal.”

This quality carries through to the private quarters, where one of the two master bedrooms features a tranquil Kelly lithograph overlooking a four-poster of almost Shakerlike simplicity, with an antique blanket stand and papier-mâché owl decoy serving as distinctive accents. It’s a signature Cunningham moment—casual yet serenely beautiful and, as the poet Jorie Graham, a friend of the Rothschilds’, once described the house, “democratic.” With a small *d*, jokes Lynn, adding, “Mark made sure all the spaces were special. I would never do a house without him or Hugh again.”

Landscape architect Kris Horiuchi of the Falmouth, Massachusetts, firm Horiuchi Solien oversaw the grounds. At the rear of the house, beyond an expansive lawn used for family football games, she created a delightful—and poignant—five-acre meadow of native flowers in honor of the late scientist Miriam Rothschild, a cousin of Sir Evelyn’s and an early leader of the wildflower movement. And around the perimeter of the house, Horiuchi planted ferns and huckleberry bushes, including many that were original to the site but had been temporarily removed during construction. Framing it all, meanwhile, are the scrub oaks that have long defined this terrain. “When you turn down our road, you have a ten-minute drive through those beautiful oaks, with the sunlight streaming through,” Lynn says. “You can’t help but arrive here happy.” □





Above: The kitchen's pot rack is from Ann-Morris, the reclaimed-oak open shelves feature brackets by Rocky Mountain Hardware, and the backsplash tile and farmhouse sink are by Waterworks; a Ralph Lauren Paint white was used on the Rivkin/Weisman-designed cabinetry, and the antique granite flooring is from Exquisite Surfaces.
Below: Under the terrace pergola, a zinc-top reclaimed-oak table by Mecox is surrounded by Janus et Cie chairs cushioned in a Perennials fabric; the chaise longues beside the pool are by Sutherland.



A brass station light is suspended above the breakfast area's 19th-century lazy Susan table and antique Windsor chairs.



Above, from left: A guest room is outfitted with twin beds designed by Mark Cunningham; the curtains are of a Robert Kime fabric from John Rosselli & Assoc. and were made by Anthony Lawrence-Belfair. One of the house's two master bedrooms opens onto a terrace furnished with a Janus et Cie wicker chair and ottoman.
Below: The room is anchored by a Rose Tarlow Melrose House four-poster; the Portland limestone mantel is by Chesney's.



In one of the master baths, the tub is equipped with Waterworks fittings; the aluminum Windsor-style chair is a John Vesey design from the Window.

