



For the Martha's Vineyard residence of composer and conductor André Previn and his wife, Heather, architect Mark Hutker added a new wing, including the master bedroom, left, and the music studio, right. The studio roof, says Hutker, "was inspired by the human form with arms outstretched."

Martha's Vineyard has always been a landfall for vagabonds. It was settled by the English, who prospered in the whaling trade and whose merchant seamen came home with exotic gifts—scurmshaw, spices, parrots, cashmeres—for their wives. On the high

bluffs and in the cobbled towns clustered along the shore, they built these stoical ladies shingled houses the gray of the Atlantic. But they only enjoyed family life for brief sojourns after months, and sometimes years, at sea.

The restless life of a whaling captain is not, it turns out, so very different from the

life of a great musician like André Previn: conductor and pianist; composer of operas, film scores, concertos, chamber music and jazz; German refugee, British knight and citizen of the world. His stoical wife, Heather, tends the hearth in their island farmhouse while he spends most of the international philhar-



ANDRE PREVIN ON THE VINEYARD

THE COMPOSER AND HIS WIFE, HEATHER,
ORCHESTRATE AN ISLAND SANCTUARY

*Architecture by Mark A. Hutker, AIA/Text by Judith Thurman
Photography by Peter Vanderwarker*



monic season—September to May—conducting orchestras in Europe and Asia, then part of every summer performing at festivals. “People consider that I have a remarkable profession,” he says, “but they idealize it. One gets terribly tired of airports and hotel rooms.” “It’s monstrous,” adds his wife,

“and not glamorous at all. My main concern, for the seventeen years we’ve been married, has been to create a refuge of normalcy where André can shed the angst of travel and work in monastic peace on his own music.”

The couple and their son Lukas, the youngest of their many children, have been liv-

ing on the Vineyard full-time since 1996, after Previn underwent quadruple bypass surgery and was obliged, he says, “to think seriously about reducing stress.” She, a gemologist, opened a charming boutique in Edgartown that sells pearl and diamond jewelry, some of her own design. They moved into what had

The Previns (above, in the living room) and their son Lukas live at the house year-round. Heather Previn, a gemologist and jewelry designer, used mostly antiques in the interior design. “Both André and I love the patina of old treasured things—silver, linens, furniture,” she comments.



Beside the English oak farmhouse table—laid with Waterford crystal and silver cutlery from 1820—a 1750 clock sits on a 17th-century English linen chest. Artworks include a primitive wood carving by Elijah Pierce and, over the mantel, a painting by André Derain.

been their summer cottage, set in a spinney of oak trees close to a lake and surrounded by pastures where a local dairyman grazes his cows. During one of his seasons in Austria, Sir André, accompanied by the whole percussion section of the Vienna Philharmonic, set out for a mountain village to buy cowbells for the herd and had a

“very serious” technical discussion with the bellsmith about clappers and harmonic interplay. “The sound of cowbells transports us back two centuries,” says Lady Previn, “just as the view does, and the ticking of our antique clocks, to the time of Constable.”

But it quickly became obvious to the Previns that their summer house was not ade-

quate as a year-round family residence. They decided to build an addition that would include a new entrance hall, a living room, a master suite, a garage and a music studio. “Vineyard builders do beautiful work, but at one fixed tempo—*andante*,” says Previn wryly. “I have no doubt the Chrysler Building went up faster. Of course, I was roar-

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ing around the globe, making sympathetic noises on the telephone, while Heather and Lukas were living behind plastic sheets for a year and camping in the rubble. And then I wouldn't have been of much use because I can't read a blueprint—all my imagination is in my ears. But Heather knows me, and she's very visual. She did the translating.”

By then, Heather Previn had forged a relationship with Mark Hutker, the well-established Vineyard architect who had designed her shop, *Sine Qua Non*. A specialty of his firm is “regional modernism,” though the Previns—she is English and he an Anglophile—told him that “we couldn't live in a modernist house—we need tradition.”

But Hutker takes great pride in his “attunement” to clients: “Creative architecture is responsive to a specific set of constraints—of site, budget, climate, décor and personality. And we thrive on those constraints. A house that intimidates or overshadows its owners is a failure.”

The Previn project presented any number of chal-

ABOVE: Hutker lined the walls of the music studio, as well as the adjacent library, with cherry shelves. The piano wall has a sole window, which, says Hutker, provides only “an abstracted view of the landscape: the tree canopy, the sky and a gentle waterfall when it rains.”



A pass-through niche with a sliding door joins the kitchen and dining room "and allows one to close off the kitchen and all its commotion from the dining room," says Hutker. The drawings on the wall, says Heather Previn, "are just favorites, with no particular value."

lenging constraints. The family was moving from a "major" house in Westchester County, into which they had condensed their possessions from two even grander properties—an eight-bedroom 1723 estate in the Surrey countryside (see *Architectural Digest*, June 1986) and a Mediterranean-style villa in Beverly

Hills, bought when Previn was the music director of the Los Angeles Philharmonic. Heather Previn was determined that "every nook and cranny" of the Vineyard farmhouse be utilized for storage and shelf space for their books and collections, which include commemorative boxes, Christmas plates,

old silver, Victorian hatpins, bud vases, wood pigs, antique linens and the maestro's many trophies, including four Oscars. "André," she says, "adores bibelots and brings something home from every tour. And he's taught me never to regret buying anything beautiful."

Lady Previn told Hutker that she envisaged a floor



plan “open to the views on both sides and bathed in light, with access to the outside from every room.” The décor, Sir André specified, was to be “comfortable, old-fashioned and serene”—English family heirlooms, the couple’s art collection, a grand piano lighted by a favorite Victorian oil lamp that has



been converted to electricity and an “irreducible core” of furnishings that have followed them from move to move. The mellow woods, rosy chintz sofas and low beams of the living and dining rooms evoke the interior of the house in Surrey. The luminous palette of whites in the cathedral-ceilinged master suite reflects Lady Previn’s romance with pearls. There are hidden cupboards in every wall and alcove and an economy of space and function like that on a ship—but the feeling of the rooms is intensely personal and well lived-in rather than controlled.

The greatest challenge for the architect and the project designer, Laurence Mackler, was the wing that his wife refers to as “André’s inner sanctum.” “He’s an insomniac,” she confides, “so we sited it, for convenience and privacy, off the master bedroom. That way, he can get up in

ABOVE: Behind a player piano in the living room are Previn’s four Oscars—for *Gigi*, *My Fair Lady*, *Porgy and Bess* and *Irma La Douce*. On the wall are an Al Hirschfeld caricature of Previn, sketches by animator Chuck Jones and Previn’s knighthood decree.

BELOW: The master bedroom, which opens onto a terrace, is distinguished by a cream palette. Heather Previn’s personal coat of arms hangs above the bed. The library, visible through the door, serves as a sound buffer for the music studio, where Previn often works at night.



ANDRE PREVIN

the middle of the night to read or compose, and if I'm entertaining or Lukas is jamming with friends, he can retire to work without having to walk through a party in the living room."

In contrast with the family rooms, with their patina of sentiment, the studio is pointedly "masculine and cerebral." Each of the Previn's has a dressing room and bath, but Sir André's, as his wife puts it, is a "loobrary." His study, too, is lined with books, and he reads in an eighteenth-century English armchair, one of a pair upholstered in the original leather. This sensuous gentleman's cabinet opens to an austere luxurious workroom flooded with light from clerestory windows on two sides. There, Previn's musical archives are, says Hutker, "stratified, like the earth, on a canyon of shelves," with the heavy vinyl records at the bottom and CDs, tapes and scores arranged rationally above them. "When he's composing," says his wife, "he has to face nothing. When he's thinking, he contemplates the landscape."

Mark Hutker's design for the studio pays homage to Vineyard traditions of barn architecture and shipbuilding. The roofline is an inverted keel with exposed fir rafters, but the architect observes that "it also evokes the silhouette of a conductor's outstretched arms." The high north window above the upright piano frames an abstract vignette of clouds and branches, and a rain scupper



spills a waterfall down the pane—a sound Previn loves—and reinforces the illusion, which he also loves, "of being buried in a hold, lost to the world."

The warmth of the house and the discipline of the study have, in concert, nurtured some of André Previn's finest recent work: his violin sonata *The Vineyard*, his opera *A Streetcar Named Desire*, a new string quartet and a second opera, which will be ready for the

millennium. He says that the Vineyard has been "wonderful for my concentration" and that he now feels old enough—he has just celebrated his seventieth birthday—"to cut back on my vagabondage." But that isn't at all sure, because music, like whales, is an obsession that begs to be chased, and because, as Previn puts it, "island life revolves around two questions: How do I get on? How do I get off?" □

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