

ISLAND PEOPLE

Robert Kliment and Frances Halsband design a holiday house on Martha's Vineyard for a young family of five



BY SUSAN ZEYON PHOTOGRAPHY BY PETER AARON / ESTO



Robert Kliment and Frances Halsband's work is becoming increasingly pure and simple. Top: The entry porch and bay window in the second-floor stair landing form a sculptural element on an otherwise flat facade. The architects used painted siding rather than shingles on the porch to relate it to the interiors. Above: Along a wall of French doors and windows with four-light transoms is an interior pocket door between two rooms with its own matching transom. Opposite: Just inside the front door, guests can look across the entry hall and living room to the terrace, which in turn overlooks a sloping lawn. Beyond the treetops Vineyard Sound gleams.

Americans living in London, the couple who commissioned this Martha's Vineyard house for their holidays had no qualms about the long-distance project. They already knew and loved the island, and they already knew and loved the work of R.M. Kliment & Frances Halsband Architects, who designed the place they had been renting in that area for several years.

The lawyer husband and historic preservationist wife had chosen their property for its proximity to town and its dramatic views. Although the site is a quarter-mile from Vineyard Sound, it is 144 feet above sea level and there is plenty of water to look at. Moreover, they realized they had a gentle slope that would permit a large lawn—a playing field for the three children. Their mother says, “In dark English winters I dream about summer on the Vineyard, watching the children in the sun.”

Kliment and Halsband are husband-and-wife partners in a New York City-based firm, and they now concentrate on large civic and academic buildings. Yet they could not resist designing a house for such admiring clients, clients moreover who said they did not want a copy of the ten-year-old house they had been renting. They realized that the style of professionals evolves.

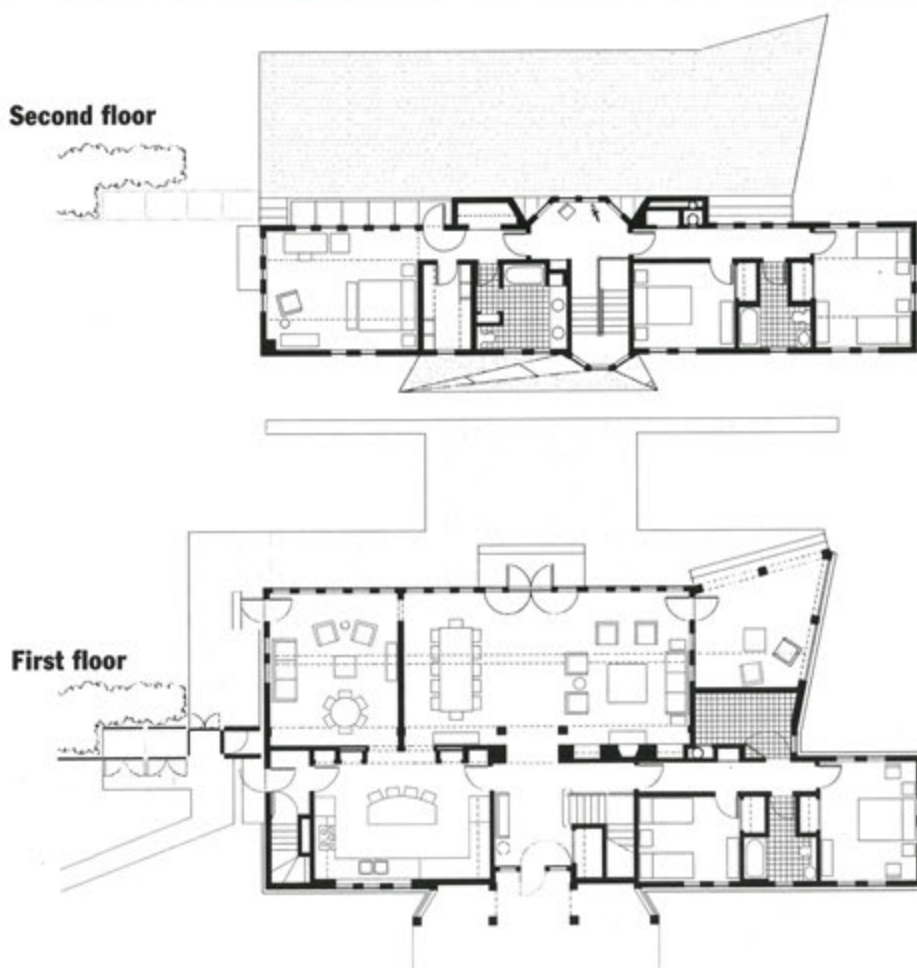
To assist in planning a house to be built 3,000 miles from their home base, the couple typed up a seven-page, single-spaced list of everything they wanted. First there was the matter of pleasure and mood: They hoped for as many water views and as much light and air as possible. Then they went into the basics: five bedrooms, with at least one on the lower floor; a kitchen to eat in; interflowing living and dining spaces. And finally they dealt with details some clients might leave to their architects, such as the height, location, and dimming power of every light switch.

The site suggested a long, narrow, tall building “to engage the two distinct landscapes—the densely wooded slope to the south, and sea to the north,” according to Kliment. The extended social spaces and an intimate family room all open to a terrace through a wall of French doors. The kitchen and adjoining entry hall on the opposite side borrow a water view and sea breezes through these rooms.

In the Vineyard vernacular are the shingled walls and roof and the small-pane windows, but the back and front facades have distinct late-20th-century personalities. The side facing the meadow, where visitors arrive, is Shaker-simple but punctuated by a midstructure portico and upper bay. Rooms at the rear open to a generous porch and terrace. Here at the top of the sloping lawn is where the dreams of a mother wintering on an island in the North Sea come true.



“We wanted to keep the house light and airy, so natural woods and Swedish painted furniture seemed just right,” says the woman of the house, who did the decorating. She had much of the furniture shipped from London, her winter home. Most floors are white oak. Clockwise from above: Comfortable living room seating is focused on a bluestone fireplace between built-in bookcases. At the far end of the long room, a door opens to a sheltered porch. Across the antique pine dining table is seen the front hall and staircase to second-floor bedrooms. The view over the rounded counter in the kitchen, which has a marbled linoleum tile floor, is of the family room at left, dining area at right. Plans show how the second floor occupies about half the space of the first floor.







*Above: Bay window in the upper landing.
Below: The master bedroom's antique quilts
and hooked rug are from Milne.*



Michael Van Valkenburgh, who advised on the landscaping, suggested white roses on the slope, which will form a sea of flowers when mature. Below: House profile shows the room-deep second floor perched above living room roof.

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