

## Hub Architect's New Book Opens Doors to Vineyard Homes

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Reporter

Having spent a considerable amount of time on Martha's Vineyard in his teens and early adulthood, Boston architect Keith Moskow gradually came to appreciate the tiny island's varied topography and its abundance of well-designed homes.

The island is dotted with the uniquely designed homes of renowned architects from all over the country, says Moskow. "What became interesting to me is: Why do these architects do what they do? How do they respond to these specific contexts?" he noted.

Using photographs, drawings and essays, Moskow spent the last few months putting together a book that examines the ways in which those architects responded to the island's landscape. The book, "The Houses of Martha's Vineyard," went to the printer earlier this month and is expected to be ready by March.

"As architects, we look at a specific context and try to design something appropriate for the context," he said. "In the book, if it was a McMansion it was immediately ruled out. There are some extremely large houses in the book, but they're all broken down in scale such that they're appropriate for the island."

### 'A Collective Endeavor'

Moskow, of course, is no stranger to residential design. His firm, Moskow Architects, has designed homes for clients in several Bay State communities, including Cohasset, West Newbury and Martha's Vineyard, and is currently working on residences in Illinois, Wisconsin, Florida and Mexico. The firm recently designed a 14-unit condo project on A Street in South Boston that is currently being completed and is completely sold.

Moskow, 44, received a lot of his professional training when he worked for Robert A.M. Stern Architects in New York City in his 20s. While working for Stern, Moskow designed elaborate homes in Houston and on Long Island. He did more residential design after joining what he calls an avant-garde architectural firm in Los Angeles.

About 14 years ago, Moskow, who grew up in Newton, decided to strike out on his own and founded his firm in Boston. One of his firm's first projects was to convert basement space at Harvard University's dormitories into mailrooms and student meeting space.

Moskow's projects look pretty standard from afar, but upon taking a closer look, keen observers notice that they're flush with distinguishing interior and exterior details. A small barn that he designed on Martha's Vineyard, for example, looks like a traditional barn from a distance. But a closer look reveals the barn's specially created stainless steel hinges designed in the shape of ticks, which are plentiful on the island.



Boston architect Keith Moskow recently finished a book about houses on Martha's Vineyard that is slated to be published in March.

Keith Moskow is perhaps best known for renovating the Conservation Law Foundation's headquarters in downtown Boston in the early 1990s. When the project was complete, Moskow recalls that he received a phone call from the head of the Boston Society of Architects inquiring about the "sustainable" renovation his firm had completed. "I had no idea even what the word [sustainable] meant," he said. The project was eventually chosen to receive the BSA's first sustainable design award.

Other high-profile projects Moskow has completed include the renovation of an office building at 145 Tremont St., and The Carroll School in Lincoln – a project that involved designing a new high school building, renovating a middle school and expanding an elementary school. The firm, with six architects, was recently tapped to design a new student union and science center for the Chapel Hill-Chauncy Hall School, a boarding school in Waltham.

Moskow acknowledges that Moskow Architects doesn't specialize in any one type of project. It wasn't a strategy that Moskow set early on; it's just worked out that way. "It keeps us fresh. It keeps things interesting," he said.

In addition to buildings and residences, Moskow's company also has designed products and furniture like teapots, desks and chairs.

Moskow Architects has received media attention and recognition from industry groups for some designs that have never come to fruition. In 2001, Moskow pitched a proposal to MassPort to convert a derelict dry dock in East Boston's Jeffries Point into an athletic complex, with playgrounds and parkland. MassPort was receptive to the idea, according to Moskow, but then with the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks the agency's focus shifted.

Last year, Moskow's firm won an award from the Boston Society of Architects for its idea to design a dispenser for Zipcars. The dispenser would stack Zipcars above unused alleys.

And just last month, Moskow's firm was featured in a short article in The Boston Globe for its design of an urban hookah – an outdoor shelter specially designed for smokers. The prefabricated shelters are attached to streetlights, away from building entryways, and feature a filtration mechanism and a heating device to keep smokers warm during cold days.

A developer is currently putting together a financial package and searching for manufacturers for the components of the hookah. Already 12 people have expressed interest in ordering a hookah, says Moskow.

"At times, to push our own envelope, what we do is we look for issues – something that is an urban concern – or an urban issue," to focus on, said Moskow. Even if projects are never executed, Moskow said the concepts and ideas are eventually recycled into other projects.

When asked to describe what distinguishes his firm from others, Moskow said that he strives for his designs to be appropriate for the place and appropriate – and distinctive – for today. He also said his designs aim to be environmentally sensitive.

During an interview in his office, Moskow emphasized that architecture is collaborative. He calls Robert Linn, who became his partner about 18 months ago and with whom he's worked for the last six years, an integral part of the firm.

"It's a collective endeavor. That's the reality of architecture," he said.