

DESIGNING

Summer Solace

A VINEYARD HOUSE SOOTHES WITH A JAPANESE SPIRIT. BY WILLIAM MORGAN

Is there any more appealing phrase in our architectural lexicon than “summer house”? In the remote woods of Chilmark on Martha’s Vineyard, an island that lays claim to a stunning collection of contemporary architecture, Moskow Architects of Boston has made a worthy addition to the genre.

Simply named MVII, this summer house is the second Moskow-designed cottage in a compound that has been one family’s vacation spot for decades. Principal Keith Moskow designed the neighboring 800-square-foot MVI as a weekend getaway house for two. There, he created grape arbors (like those described by Bartholomew Gosnold, who named the island after his daughter in 1602) to frame an outdoor

court and nicknamed the project Arbor House.

MVII, designed with partner Robert Linn, is a less conceptual, more mature work. At 2,700 square feet, and with 4 bedrooms and 3½ baths, it is a much larger than MVI and is used as a shared summer retreat by four adult siblings and their families. It also sits on a far more interesting piece of land: a narrow 6-acre slice of woods facing a grass meadow. The intentionally circuitous journey to reach the house – down a dirt road, through a gate in a stone wall, past scrub oaks, across an open meadow, and then back into the woods – is a poetic device to reveal MVII and the surrounding landscape slowly, like the unfolding panels of a Japanese scroll.

A covered arcade connects the separate liv-

ing and sleeping wings, and these private and public elements form the outline of a roofless outdoor room as well as frame the view to an *allee* of trees that leads the eye toward the meadow. In a setting where there are no dramatic mountains or even a glimpse of the ocean, the architects have opened up the house and courtyard to an expansive sea of grass.

The living wing is canted 9 degrees off-axis, which, in an echo of the Italian Baroque, creates a courtyard that is trapezoidal. It is a hardly noticeable subtlety that constantly alters the sightlines to the view.

MVII was designed to blur the distinction between indoors and out. The covered porches that run the length of each wing and face each



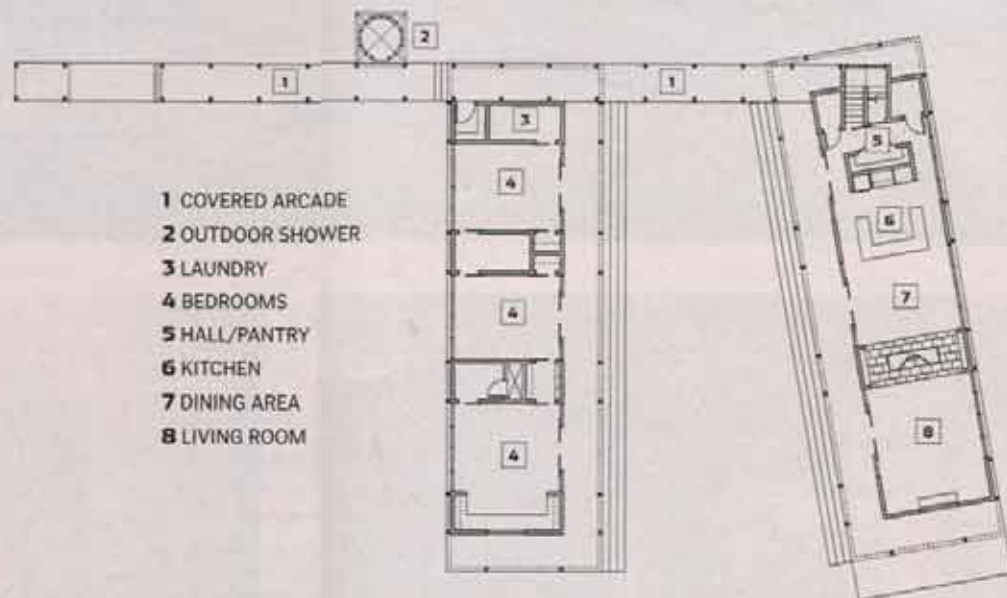
A HOUSE DIVIDED The architects created a summer retreat with two distinct wings (top). On the left are the living spaces, on the right the sleeping pavilion; the two are connected by a covered arcade. Sliders in the living room (left) open to a courtyard and a view of the sleeping wing. The one bedroom on the second floor (above) has the only private balcony in the Chilmark house.



other across the grassy courtyard are really outside hallways. While it is possible to pass from bedroom to bedroom while remaining indoors in the sleeping wing – a fourth bedroom is located on an upper level – it is much easier to wander along the veranda. While the island's sweet summer days are hardly tropical, this cottage captures something of the languorous pace of India, the Caribbean, or the South Seas.

At the same time, however, Moskow and Linn have adopted a Japanese spirit with the use of polelike porch columns, seemingly weightless low-pitched roofs, and exposed modular structural members. This is especially evident in the little pavilion that encloses an outdoor shower. The floating roof and sense of delicacy pay suggestive homage to a Kyoto temple garden. The same refined aesthetic that pervades classical Japanese design is further suggested by meticulously crafted details, as well as the emphasis on revealed construction. Since external columns support the roof, there is both more interior room and a sense of shelter reminiscent of the Prairie Style houses of another architect enamored of Japan, Frank Lloyd Wright. The house is not air-conditioned, so the broad overhangs also have functional duties to catch breezes and offer shade.

While wood is the traditional material of the island, the use of fir and pine here is far more sophisticated than the usual application of cedar



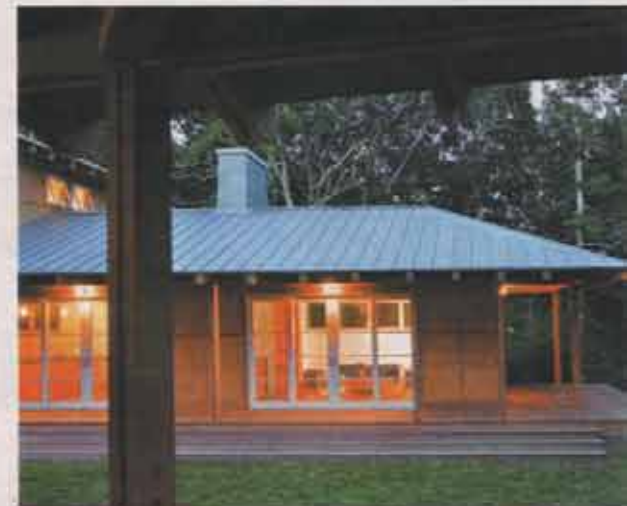
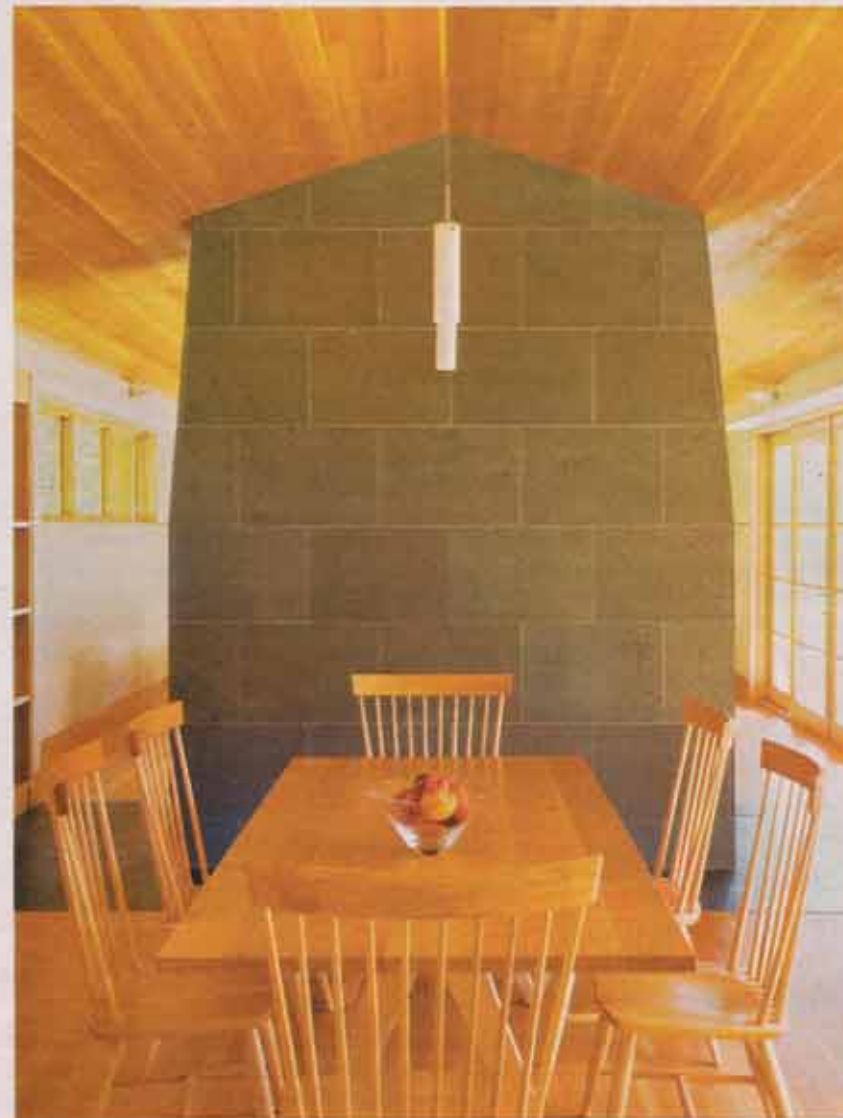
- 1 COVERED ARCADE
- 2 OUTDOOR SHOWER
- 3 LAUNDRY
- 4 BEDROOMS
- 5 HALL/PANTRY
- 6 KITCHEN
- 7 DINING AREA
- 8 LIVING ROOM

shingles. The almost-blond wood of the floors, ceiling, and trim inside form a warm, neutral backdrop for family life. To offset that austere woodiness, the architects used green Vermont slate on the massive fireplace, which divides the living room and dining/kitchen areas.

The easy flow of spaces throughout the house encourages the restful air of a vacation home. Like the best of the Vineyard's summer struc-

tures, this is a modest house that echoes the local vernacular and respects the wildness of the land while demonstrating that careful design and craftsmanship top conspicuous consumption.

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INFORMAL ARRIVAL The covered arcade (facing page) is the main entry to the house and passes a petite pavilion that encloses an outdoor shower. This page, clockwise from bottom left: An efficient kitchen opens to the dining area, which has a coffered wood-lined ceiling; an imposing slate fireplace separates the dining area from the living room; a twilight view across the courtyard; homeward bound from the beach.