

ON LOCATION

In Plain Sight, an Actor's Hideout

1. & 2. The house sits on a narrow plot, with the neighboring properties just 12 and 13 feet to either side. Skatelite, a pressed paper-and-resin material made for skateboard parks, was used throughout, including on the front facade, right, and the lower half of the back facade, far right, to save money.



7. The Wittus Shaker wood stove, made from black steel, will allow the owner to use the house year round.

8. The sliding glass front door can be shuttered for privacy with a screenlike partition made from Skatelite that has a pattern cut with water jets.



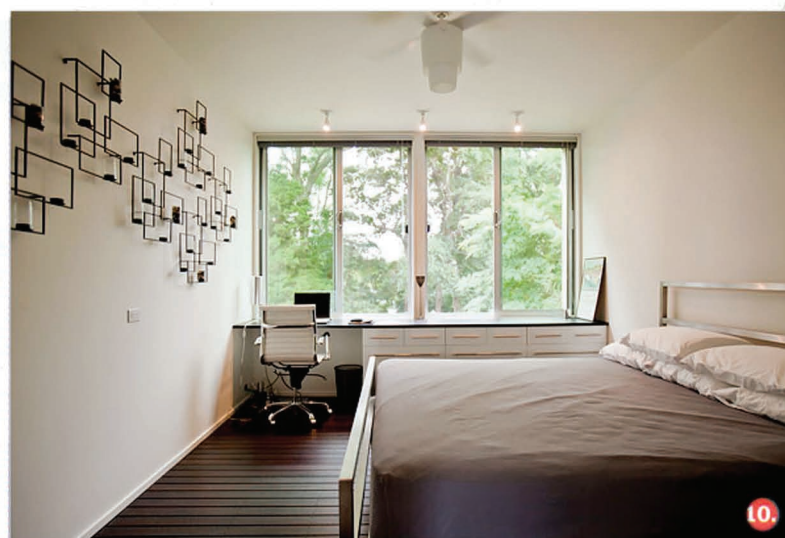
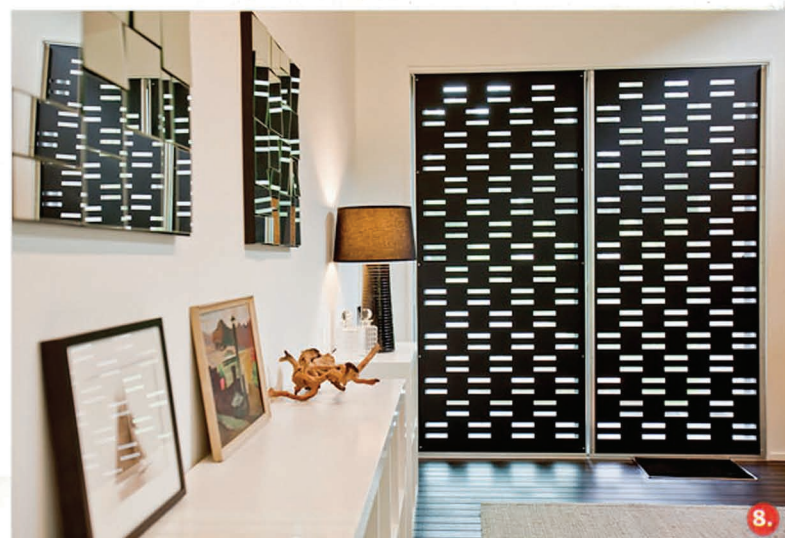
3. Skatelite was also used on the front of a Jenn-Air refrigerator and some of the interior walls; it alternates with rough-cut cedar, creating a contrast of smooth and coarse.



4. Marine cables manufactured for ships' railings are strung from stair treads to the ceiling, forming a balustrade that favors openness and light.

5. The architect eliminated a subcontractor and saved about \$600 by extending the mahogany decking indoors. The modular chaise was made by Zach Adam, a designer and photographer.

6. The house is simple, with a few theatrical gestures that reflect the owner's life as an actor, most notably the double-height kitchen, where Skatelite covers the floor and counters.



9. On the second floor, a bridge leads to the master bedroom, which can be closed off with a rolling cedar door.

10. The master bedroom is slightly cantilevered, drawing the view through sliding windows to the estuary behind the house.

By MICHAEL CANNELL

SAG HARBOR, N.Y.

TEN years ago, Eric Rasmussen, a stage actor, inherited a ranch house in a shady backwater on the South Fork of Long Island. It had low ceilings, a few brass lanterns, compasses and other nautical items left by his great aunt and uncle, and one redeeming feature: out back, the lawn sloped to a fringe of cattails and an estuary flowing into Noyack Bay, the kind of scene you might expect behind a Nantucket saltbox.

Mr. Rasmussen, who lives in the West Village, spent years debating whether he should sell the property or hang onto it. Then one day, while watching Suze Orman on television, he had what he calls an epiphany: he could do both.

Three years ago, he sold the house and most of the land, keeping a wooded acre on one side of the property and a 61-by-230-foot slice facing the water — the narrowest building plot permitted by local zoning — on the other. The 1,300-square-foot home he built on that grassy sliver is an exercise in seclusion.

In this show on a Long Island estuary, the egrets and sunsets are the big stars.

Mr. Rasmussen's architect, Paul Masi, an alumnus of Richard Meier's office and a partner in Bates Masi & Architects, designed the house to focus on the estuary and sunsets, like a commuter tuning out other passengers on a close-packed train by concentrating on a crossword puzzle. A 10-foot-high wall running along its south side blocks the view of the original ranch house, allowing Mr. Rasmussen glimpses through a series of peepholes, while three sets of sliding doors open the rear facade to native plantings and the estuary beyond.

"When I go into the house, I always get the sense that it's very much me," Mr. Rasmussen said. "I'm an actor, but I'm really a private person when I'm not on stage."

The house is discrete, but with a few flourishes befitting an actor. The kitchen functions as a performance space, like most do, but this one has the added drama of a two-story loft overhead. Side-by-side indoor and outdoor staircases double as bleacher seating, an oblique theater reference. Weekend guests sit on the steps and watch egrets and cormorants working the estuary, while Mr. Rasmussen serves lemonade and apple pie made from his grandmother's recipe.

The circulation itself is a form of show. "You walk in a kind of spiral — a journey — from the front door to the master bedroom," Mr. Rasmussen said. "It's remarkable how that makes you feel like you're not in a small house."

Mr. Masi, an avid surfer and skateboarder, stretched the budget by scouting materials not normally used in home building. For the exterior cladding, kitchen floor and privacy barrier, he used a pressed paper-and-resin material made for skateboard parks.

"I always look for that one material that can be used for practically everything," he said.

And in keeping with the idea that the fewer contractors involved, the cheaper the house will be, he extended the mahogany decking inside, instead of using conventional flooring. That meant the installation could be done by the crew working on the deck and there was no need to hire an additional subcontractor, saving about \$9 a square foot.

"A simple palette of materials adds to the serenity of a beach house," he said. "And it keeps the focus on the view, not the rooms."

Because construction is fraught with rude surprises, Mr. Masi said, he also makes it a practice to price materials in advance so contractors can bid accurately. "It adds to the design process," he said, "but there's less chance of going overboard and then having to scale back."

The house was completed earlier this year for \$300 a square foot, about half the cost of most high-end homes in the area. Unlike those behemoths, the little house on a narrow swath is a sensitive reflection of one man's life, and a private retreat from the stage.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY MICHAEL WESCHLER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES