

BESPOKE HOME

BATES MASI + ARCHITECTS

ORO
EDITIONS

INTRODUCTION BY PAUL GOLDBERGER

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INTRODUCTION

BY PAUL GOLDBERGER

I first encountered the work of Bates Masi + Architects a decade or so ago, when I agreed to serve on a jury to select the winners of the annual design awards of the regional chapter of the American Institute of Architects on eastern Long Island. The jury of architectural experts spent a rainy afternoon going through photographs of several dozen new and renovated houses in East Hampton, Southampton, Bridgehampton, Sag Harbor, and the other communities that make up the heart of this unusual and special region, and came up with a first prize winner, a second prize winner, and some honorable mentions.

Almost all of the best houses we reviewed that day—and a disproportionate number of the winners—turned out to be by a local firm called Bates Masi. I had never heard of them. I remembered that there had been an architect named Harry Bates who did some fine modern beach houses back in the 1960's and 1970's, but Bates is a common name and I had no reason to believe that this Bates was that Bates. As for who Masi was, I had no idea whatsoever.

I soon learned that Bates was indeed the same Harry Bates, and that Masi was Paul Masi, a gifted architect younger by a generation—actually more than that, since there is a difference of more than 40 years in their ages—and that they had formed an unlikely and extraordinarily fruitful partnership. Together, Harry Bates and Paul Masi were producing some of the most compelling modernist residential architecture in the Northeast. The designs of theirs that so impressed the jury on that rainy afternoon were widely varied, but they all had an unmistakable degree of self-assurance, and they were marked by a consistent but very subtle kind of elegance. You could say that they had both inventiveness and gravitas, two things that rarely go together, especially in the category of new domestic architecture in the Hamptons.

Those houses from the early years of the Bates Masi partnership marked the beginning of nearly two decades of noteworthy architecture, and by now it is fair to say that the *oeuvre* of Bates Masi takes its place within the important heritage of modernism in the Hamptons. Their architecture is good enough to be taken seriously if it were anywhere, but it is particularly meaningful situated where it is.

It makes sense to digress for a moment and say something about the nature of the place in which the firm does most of its work. The set of communities by the sea at the eastern end of Long Island evolved long ago from farming and fishing villages to resorts, and from casual summer communities whose tone was set by artists and writers to grander places where fortunes made on Wall Street and elsewhere are oft expressed in the building of enormous new houses that now, more often than not, are designed to look like old ones. That kind of house is not, needless to say, what Bates and Masi build. Their work connects to another part of the Hamptons' history,

the tradition of modern houses by architects like Richard Meier, Charles Gwathmey, Norman Jaffe, Andrew Geller, Julian and Barbara Neski, Paul Lester Weiner, Pierre Chareau and Robert Rosenberg, not to mention Harry Bates himself.

It is a tradition that fell out of favor when the fashion for making new houses in the manner of the great Shingle Style mansions of the early twentieth century began in the early 1980's. At first, those houses were an intriguing curiosity, and not unwelcome. The motive behind them was understandable: by the 1980's, it was easy to feel that modern domestic architecture in the Hamptons, which in the 1950's and 1960's seemed to hold promise of a bright new world, had lost its groove so to speak, faded along with the innocence that had helped to make much of that work so appealing. By then, even the sharp, lively geometries of Harry Bates' early houses did not seem as fresh as they had in 1966, when a magazine like *Better Homes and Gardens* could swoon over a modest and simple Bates design, publishing it under the headline "Gift for a Lifetime: A Vacation House." Times had become more jaded. They had also become wealthier, and houses were getting much bigger in the 1980's. Most of the notable modern houses in the Hamptons were small. The best of them were visually exciting and explored interior space with great inventiveness, but no one ever claimed that their appeal came from their grandeur.

Such restraint would not do in the 1980's, when along with new wealth came a desire for a level of opulence that the modernist tradition, at least then, seemed unable or unwilling to provide. Within a few years, the neo-Shingle Style houses that had first seemed an appealing alternative became more and more common, spreading everywhere, each seemingly bigger than the previous one, and each appearing to give birth to two more. I found myself yearning for the directness, clarity, and understatement of the modern houses, particularly since all too many of them were literally disappearing before our eyes, purchased by wealthy Hamptonites only to tear them down and put enormous shingled mansions in their place. The new modernist houses that were built in the 1980's and 1990's were few and far between.

That was the picture in 1996, when Paul Masi, a young architect who had been working for Richard Meier in New York City, first came to work with Harry Bates in his small office on eastern Long Island. Bates was past seventy and had stayed the course of modernism, but he was not entirely sure how bright the future was, and the thought had crossed his mind to consider retiring from architecture altogether. Masi was in his twenties, due shortly to leave for Harvard to get a graduate degree in architecture, and he saw his time with Bates as no more than a summer job. The two got along so well that Bates invited him back the following year, and then, once he finished at Harvard, proposed that he join him permanently. Bates found that the presence of his younger colleague reignited his own creative instincts. If Masi would

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forego his original intention of joining a large corporate firm and instead become his partner, Bates told him that he, in turn, was prepared to forego any thoughts of retirement. Masi, realizing that with Bates he would have the opportunity to design entire houses rather than toil away on minor details of huge projects, which is what he would have been doing if he joined a large corporate firm, agreed, and Bates Masi Architects was born.

It was a propitious moment, in large part because the architectural culture was beginning to shift again. While there were still plenty of traditional houses being built, by the early 2000's there was an increasing interest in the potential of modern architecture in the Hamptons, as well as a renewed respect for the houses of the first, mid-century modernist generation that remained. And implicit in this rediscovery of modernist architecture was the recognition that the omnipresent Shingle Style did not have sole possession of the region's architectural traditions: modernism, too, was a part of the Hamptons architectural DNA, with an important history that was waiting for a creative architect to mine.

Bates and Masi have succeeded at doing that, but they have also succeeded in another related realm, which is in connecting their work to the important, and all too often ignored, architectural vernacular of eastern Long Island. The first wave of postwar modernist houses made little reference to their context. They were shaped primarily by their architects' imaginations, adjusted, to a greater or lesser degree, to accommodate the programmatic requests of their clients. For the most part they ignored the potato barns, the seventeenth and eighteenth-century houses, the fishing shacks, and the other structures that were in some ways a deeper part of the area's heritage than the great and oft-imitated Shingle Style houses. The simple forms of these vernacular buildings were ripe for reinterpretation by a new generation of modernists, and they have been a consistent and strong influence in Bates Masi's work, especially in projects such as Pierson's Way, Northwest Peach Farm, and Genius Loci. Pierson's Way illustrates with particular eloquence Bates and Masi's ability to abstract vernacular buildings, turning these familiar, everyday forms into clearly articulated, simple, and modern geometric shapes.

Bates and Masi are devoted to materials: to finding new ones, to using old ones inventively, to assuring that every material fulfills its utmost potential. Their houses are built of many kinds of wood, stone, glass, and metal, often combined in unusual ways: elegant mahogany siding may cover the exterior as well as the inside walls and ceiling, as in the house at Sam's Creek; or copper is installed as shingles, as in Northwest Peach Farm; or Corten steel juxtaposed with cedar siding and screens, as at the house in Sagaponack, where the two join to make an exquisite abstract composition. To do this kind of thing well you need to understand materials in the deepest sense,

to know what they are capable of, and to know where not to use them, which can often be as important as knowing where they will mean the most. To be able to use industrial materials in a residential design and sacrifice none of its domestic feeling is an accomplishment. Bates and Masi pull it off because of their inherent sense of restraint and appropriateness. They make wood feel like wood, concrete feel like concrete, and metal feel metallic. What enables this—what needs to go hand in hand with this close affinity for materials—is an ability to detail consistently and well. In every Bates Masi house, there is a myriad of tiny, alluring details that invite your eye. They are often among the most inventive elements of the design, and they can shape the experience of being in the house as much as anything bigger.

Every Bates Masi house is different: as the title of this volume reminds us, these are all bespoke houses, designed for the needs and aspirations of different clients and for the demands of different sites. Yet they are also all of a piece. Beyond a rich sense of materials and superbly conceived details, they share a commitment to light, a modesty of scale—at least by comparison to many houses built today, if not to their modernist forebears—and, perhaps most important, and most subtle, a sense of texture. This is not modernism as super-sleek or high-tech, and it is not modernism as a series of spectacular, space-age curves. You wouldn't confuse Bates Masi with Norman Foster on the one hand, or with John Lautner on the other. Harry Bates and Paul Masi are not wedded to any particular shape, but I think it is fair to say that they prefer straight lines to curving ones, and they prefer quiet, understated effects to flamboyant ones. In this sense, their work really does extend themes begun by Harry Bates, whose early work did not so much break out of the box as make boxes into lively, rhythmic compositions. No Bates Masi house is a glittering, perfect sculptural object, the kind of architecture that seems to say “look, but don't touch.” These houses have the opposite effect. They make you want to touch them, not to look at them from afar. They are sensuous, and they call for engagement.

Few of these houses are made up of a single, large structure; many are broken down into units that are carefully arranged into a serene composition—at its best a kind of architectural still life. Pierson's Way, with its series of connected, barn-like masses, epitomizes this. Here, Bates and Masi have turned the image of the barn into something truly sumptuous, and made of it the theme of what could almost be called a small village. Mothersill is a different kind of composition altogether. It consists of a long, L-shaped main structure set into a site that slopes down toward the wetlands; the façade is two stories high facing the wetlands, and appears to be a modest single story on the entry side. Even more notable here is the way the long, L-shaped structure plays off against two small outbuildings on the property that were designed more than fifty years ago by Andrew Geller, which Bates Masi restored and integrated into their design, literally demonstrating the bridge between the old modernist

generation and the new that all of the firm's work alludes to symbolically. It is not only the larger houses that are handsomely composed, however. The smaller buildings, like Paul Masi's own house, Elizabeth II, contain the same appealing balance of elements: solid and void, horizontal and vertical, hard and soft, textured and flat, neatly and tightly bound together into a smaller package. (The details are just as inventive here, too. Rough vertical boards are placed over concrete as exterior siding and also used as cabinet fronts inside. In each case, they are both punctuated and decorated by stainless steel clips that are both fastening clasps and handles. And then they are used again on white interior cabinets, creating a subtle tie between different materials throughout the house.) In another instance, Bates and Masi condensed their ideas and their design skill still further, in a small house recently completed in Beach Hampton in the Amagansett dunes: a tightly composed box of glass, steel, and concrete, it stands as a reminder that the modesty of the houses of the earlier modernist generation has not been entirely lost.

For Bates and Masi modernism is a language, not a doctrine. Neither of them has much interest in approaching architecture from the standpoint of theory. Their shared commitment to modernism carries with it a freedom from dogma and a belief that the modernist vocabulary can be every bit as flexible, as attuned to demands of program and site, and as visually pleasing as any traditional architectural language. And while they take obvious pleasure in connecting their work to the history of modernism in the Hamptons, as well as to Harry Bates' own history, they are emphatically not limited by that history, and they would be no more likely to design a house today that looked like Harry Bates' early work than they would be to design a shingled McMansion.

Harry Bates and Paul Masi are producing houses for the twenty-first century, and they acknowledge, and even celebrate, the differences between their time and that of the mid-century modernists. Their work takes advantage of what is almost invariably a larger budget, a more expansive program, a wider choice of materials, and an altogether different level of technology than that which was available to a previous generation of modernist architects. I think it is fair to say that their deepest commitment is to producing architecture that proves that modernism continues to evolve, that it has ongoing, fresh life within it, and that it can yield as much warmth and serenity as any traditional architecture. Bates and Masi's work aspires to extend the history of modernist architecture in the region, to situate it properly in its time and place—and to prove that as far as the history of modernism in the Hamptons goes, there are meaningful chapters still to be written.

TREE HOUSE

1967

On a National Seashore island with divergent communities, this two-level house, referred to by its Owner as his “tree house”, is situated in a dense grove of pines and hollies. Served for the most part by wooden walkways, the island is primarily seasonal with a lively social scene in the warmer months and a more reflective atmosphere in the cooler days and nights.

After briefly considering renovating an old waterfront house, the Owner, an interior designer, bought the heavily wooded lot close to the bay that he wanted to see from the main living level. His aesthetic was simple, opting for the architecture and natural surroundings to be the dominant elements.

The approach to the closely positioned cubes leads to a walled deck and glass entrance. Two guest bedrooms, bath, and guest deck are on the first floor with a steel stair leading

to the living, dining, kitchen, master suite, and deck on the second floor with views of the bay and treetops.

All exterior and interior wall surfaces and cabinets are rough-cut cypress; the flooring is bleached oak. The ceilings are exposed fir structural members, and doors and windows are aluminum. The wall-hung fireplace provides heat on cool spring and autumn days and evenings. The 1” X 12” cypress vertical louvers on the high windows reduce the intensity of the southern sun. The east and west walls of the house have selected views but are virtually blank because of the close proximity of the neighbors and a community walkway.

Whether alone or with guests and coupled with the often erratic weather, the serenity of the elevated spaces was a welcome respite for the Owner for many years from a crowded and busy professional life in the city.



Community walkway

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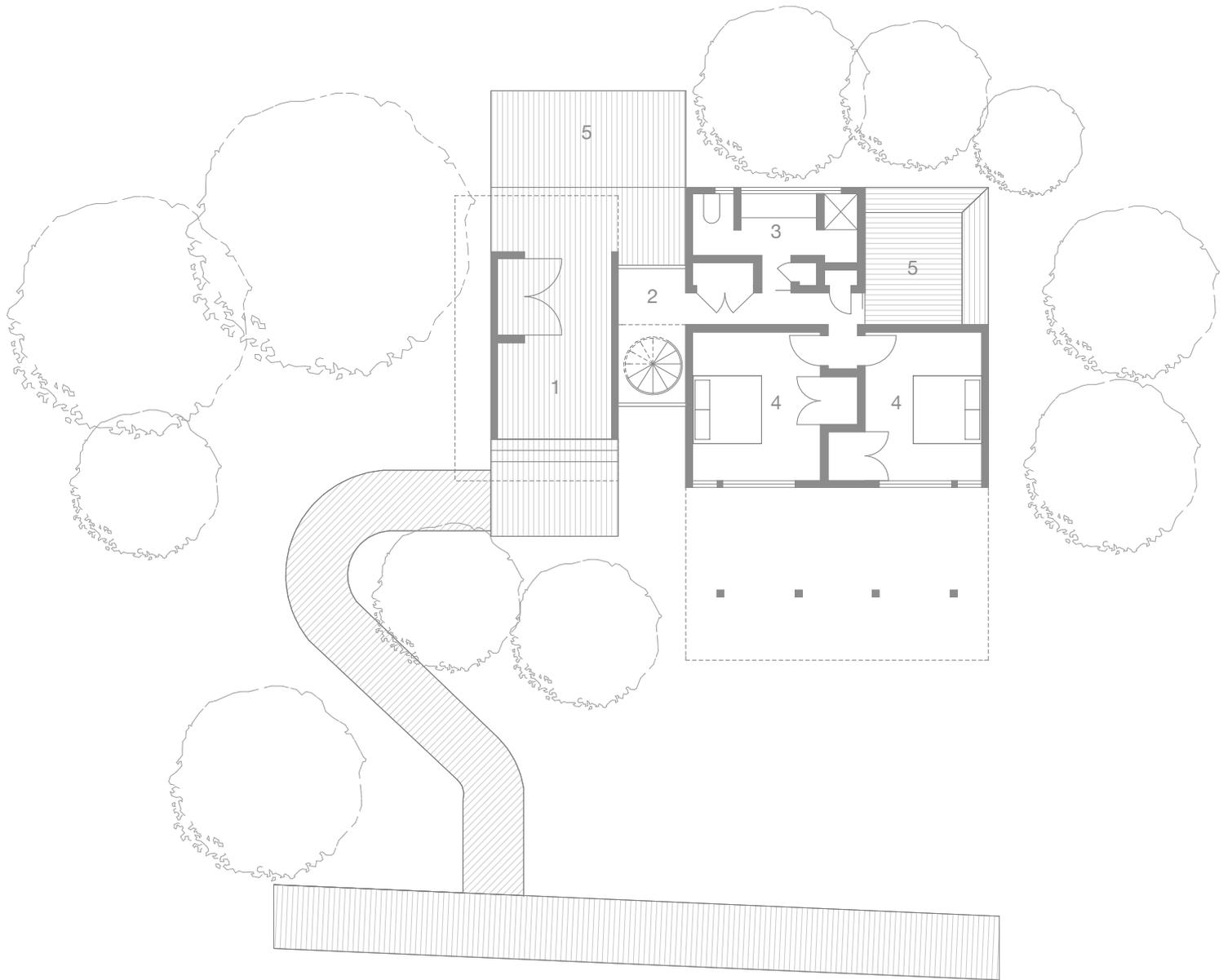
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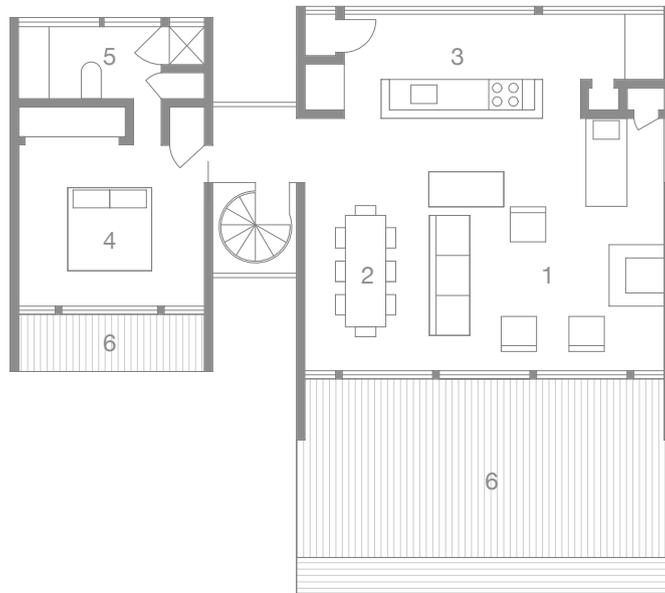
Harry Bates, 1967

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ENTRY LEVEL PLAN 

- 1. Entry Deck
- 2. Entry
- 3. Bath
- 4. Bed
- 5. Deck



UPPER LEVEL PLAN



- | | |
|------------|---------|
| 1. Living | 4. Bed |
| 2. Dining | 5. Bath |
| 3. Kitchen | 6. Deck |

SELECTED TIMELINE

BATES MASI + ARCHITECTS

2014 Smithsonian's Cooper-Hewitt Nomination
2013 Interior Design Hall of Fame Inductee
2013 Best of Houzz - Design
2010 Residential Architect "Architects We Love"



TREE HOUSE

1967

Bates Architects

RECOVER

1968 + 2006

2009 Wood Design & Building Merit Award

2008 AIA Peconic Honor Award

Bates Architects & Basi Masi + Architects



KAMEN

1968

Bates Architects

MADSEN

1969

Bates Architects



SALTAIRE

1971

Bates + Booher Architects

GEORGICA POND

1989

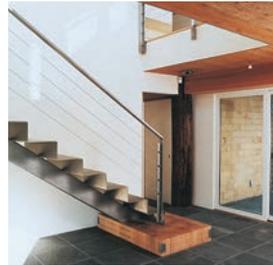
Bates, Booher + Lund Architects



STAR TOP

1997

BUZZARDS BAY II
1999



FRIEDMAN
2000

HERC
2002, *unbuilt*



CDCH
2003
2004 AIA Long Island ArchiAward
2005 Metal Architecture Awards
2007 AIA Peconic Awards

ELIZABETH-H
2003
2003 AIA Long Island ArchiAward



MONTAUKET
2004

CULLODEN POINT
2004, *unbuilt*



UPCHER
2005
2005 AIA NY State Award of Merit
2005 AIA Long Island ArchiAward
2006 Residential Architect Magazine Award
2007 AIA Peconic Honor Award

CHERRY POINT

2005, *unbuilt*



LANDFALL

2006



MONTE BRISAS

2006, *unbuilt*



MAKO

2007



SILVER HOLLOW

2007, *unbuilt*

- 2007 AIA NY State Award of Excellence
- 2007 AIA Long Island ArchiAward
- 2007 AIA Long Island Commendation
- 2007 AIA Long Island Sustainable Design
- 2008 Peconic Honor Award



ROAMAN

2008

2008 AIA Peconic Merit Award



NORTHWEST PEACH FARM

2008

- 2008 AIA Long Island ArchiAward
- 2013 Crittall Prize



TWIN POND

2008, *unbuilt*



PRYOR

2008

- 2009 AIA Long Island ArchiAward
- 2010 AIA NY State Award of Merit
- 2010 AIA Peconic Honor Award
- 2010 Int'l Design Awards Honorable Mention



SPINNER

2009, *unbuilt*

NOYACK CREEK

2009

- 2010 AIA NY State Citation of Design Award
- 2010 AIA Peconic Honor Award
- 2013 Houzz Best of Design Award



LIONS HEAD

2009

- 2010 AIA Long Island ArchiAward Commendation

SALT CAY

2010, *unbuilt*

- 2010 AIA Peconic Merit Award



ROBINS WAY

2010

- 2011 AIA Long Island ArchiAward Commendation
- 2011 AIA Long Island ArchiAward Lighting Award
- 2011 AIA Peconic Juror's Award
- 2012 Interior Design Best of Year Honoree
- 2013 Watermark Award
- 2014 Remodeling Magazine Grand Award

QUAIL HILL

2010

- 2010 AIA Peconic Honor Award
- 2010 AIA Long Island ArchiAward Commendation



GENIUS LOCI

2011

- 2011 Int'l Design Awards Gold Award
- 2011 CWC Residential Wood Design Award
- 2011 AIA Long Island ArchiAward
- 2011 AIA Peconic Honor Award
- 2012 AIA NY State Citation Award
- 2012 Architectural Record House
- 2012 Residential Architect Mag. Design Award

SAM'S CREEK

2011

2011 Int'l Design Awards Gold Award
2011 Int'l Design Awards Architecture of the Year
2012 Interior Design Best of Year Winner
2012 AIA NY State Award of Merit
2012 Metalmag Awards Honorable Mention
2013 Watermark Award



TWENTY SEVEN

2012, *unbuilt*

SAGAPONACK

2012

2012 Int'l Design Awards 1st Place
2013 Interior Design Best of Year Honoree
2013 AIA Peconic Merit Award
2013 AIA Long Island ArchiAward
2013 Builder's Choice Custom Home Award
2013 AIA NY State Citation Award
2013 Residential Architect Mag. Merit Award
2014 Watermark Award



FAR POND

2012

2013 AIA Long Island Best of the Best
2013 AIA Long Island ArchiAward
2013 HC&G Innovation Award–Kitchen Design
2014 Remodeling Best of the Year Design Award
2014 Watermark Award
2014 Architectural Record–Record Kitchen

432 PARK

2012, *in progress*



NORTHWEST HARBOR

2013

2008 AIA NY State Award of Merit
2008 AIA Peconic Merit Award
2013 Canadian Wood Council Award
2014 Int'l Design Awards Honorable Mention

MOTHERSILL

2013

2011 AIA Peconic Merit Award
2013 Interior Design Best of Year Winner
2013 AIA Peconic Honor Award
2013 AIA Long Island ArchiAward
2014 AIA NY State Merit Award
2014 Int'l Design Awards Gold Award
2014 HC&G Innovation Award –Architecture
2014 Builder's Choice Custom Home Award



PIERSON'S WAY

2013

2014 Residential Architect Mag. Design Award
2014 Int'l Design Awards Silver Award
2014 Int'l Design Awards Honorable Mention
2014 Builder's Choice Custom Home Award
2014 AIA Long Island ArchiAward Commendation
2014 AIA Peconic Juror's Award

STAR RANCH
2013, *unbuilt*



TESSA NYC
2014
2014 Interior Design Best of the Year Honoree

ELIZABETH II
2014
2014 AIA ArchiAward
2014 AIA Peconic Merit Award



BEACH HAMPTON
2014

AMAGANSETT DUNES
2014, *in progress*



PROMISED LAND
2014, *in progress*

HITHER HILLS
2014, *in progress*



UNDERHILL
2014, *in progress*

GEORGICA CLOSE
2015, *in progress*



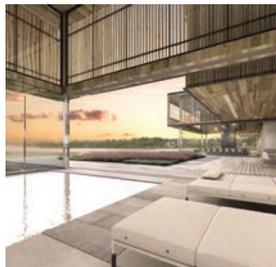
132 NORTH MAIN
2015, *in progress*
2008 AIA Peconic Merit Award
2008 US Green Building Council Award

ACTON COVE
2016, *in progress*



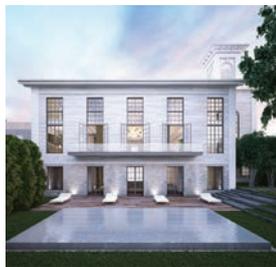
GEORGICA COVE
2016, *in progress*

SHINNECOCK
2016, *in progress*



SEBONAC CREEK
2016, *in progress*

SAG HARBOR SANCTUARY
2016, *in progress*
1810 Church conversion to residence



SAGG FARM
2017, *in progress*



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