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67 HAMPTON ROAD, STE. 5, SOUTHAMPTON, NY 11968

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SASHA PIVOVAROVA

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BATES MASI + ARCHITECTS' NEW OFFICE SPACE IS A SOARING EXAMPLE OF THE BEST ARCHITECTURE CAN OFFER.

BY EMILY WEITZ



The new home of Bates Masi + Architects on North Main Street in East Hampton, showing the wood siding and copper shingles

Even though the homes by Bates Masi + Architects (batesmasi.com) peppered throughout the East End are varied in aesthetic, one guiding principle defines each design: listening. Paul Masi considers it the core of his business model, so when a client comes in to discuss a project, Masi sheds all preconceived notions and listens first.

When he and his team began designing their new office on North Main Street in East Hampton, the group had the hardest

task of all: hearing one another. They held meetings to discuss how they work, why they work and what didn't work so well in their prior location.

"Our last office in Sag Harbor was broken up into different spaces," explains Masi. "I wouldn't even know if someone was in for the day. And if someone was working on something they'd never done before, I'd be the one to connect them to someone else who could help them. I'd be the connective tissue."

The way the space is set up now—one spacious room flooded with natural light—that won't be a problem. "Each desktop area has a space for book design, and a filing cabinet that rolls out with a bench in it, encouraging people to get together and work together," says Masi. "Everyone here learns from each other."

As they planned the new building, Masi also became sensitive to its surroundings. North Main Street is at once a happening area

and a historic road; some of the best restaurants are within spitting distance of the Bates Masi roof deck, and the East Hampton Historical Farm Museum is directly across the street.

"The forms of the buildings across the street are very simple planes," Masi points out. "We used that same vocabulary of simple elements reinterpreted in a modern way."

While he didn't want to mimic the museum buildings—the function of a commercial building is different from a home's—he did want to acknowledge them with a gesture.

"We wanted the buildings to have a dialogue," he says.

The cedar slabs on Masi's design are a nod to the cedar shingles across the street, but he also considered how the material would age over time.

"We used a clip system to fasten the wood," he explains, "so there are no screws or nails. That way these wider boards can move and slide without splitting."

Masi grew up on the East End, but most of his employees are from elsewhere, a fact that compelled him to encourage his colleagues to experience the natural splendor of the area. Interior details, such as light wells that open to the sky and invite natural elements, keep them connected to the place.

"Sometimes you're sitting in a conference and a butterfly will fly up between the windows," says Masi. Surfboard and bike storage, as well as an outdoor shower on the property, are other signs of that call to explore.

"To be a good designer, you have to be a person of many experiences," Masi explains. "I want people to get out and interact with the environment around them." ■



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—PAUL MASI, BATES MASI + ARCHITECTS



Clockwise from top: Adjustable lighting in the architects' design studio uses the same clip system as the exterior siding; a conference room with custom light fixture designed by the firm; this outdoor shower and storage area belies an office only two miles from the beach.

