Light Touch

ON A WATERFRONT PROPERTY IN QUOGUE, DESIGNER DAMON LISS AND ARCHITECT PAUL MASI TEAM UP TO CREATE A SITE-PERFECT HOME.

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Architecture: Paul Masi, Bates Masi + Architects
Interior Design: Damon Liss, Damon Liss Design
Home Builder: Stephen Breitenbach, Breitenbach Builders
Landscape Architecture: Margie Ruddick, Margie Ruddick Landscape

A perimeter of Arcadia glass doors and windows pours natural light into the interior and allows uninterrupted views from the entry to the backyard. A graphic array of limestone pavers nestled in stone pebbles plays off the grid-like nature of the columns.

Previous page: This waterfront home in Quogue contains a structural system of 120 slender columns fabricated by Tebbens Steel. The oversize roof, clad in cedar Tapersawn shakes, keeps the unusual design anchored in the local vernacular.



When kicking off a new project, architect Paul Masi likes to cast a wide net—especially with regard to the many past lives of a site. “When we design, we always start with the history of the setting,” he says. “We like to understand the factors that developed the particular character of a place and what makes it unique.”

In researching for this home in Quogue, Masi and his team uncovered something surprising. After digging up a 125-year-old geological survey of the land, which is located on a peninsula overlooking Shinnecock Bay, the architects discovered they weren’t on solid ground. “We mapped it out and realized that our site used to be underwater,” Masi says. New soil tests confirmed the land was indeed man-made and therefore soft and unstable—not exactly ideal conditions for construction.

Masi’s solution came in the form of columns and piles. Distributing the load of the house across many touchdown points meant that it would be less likely to shift and settle over time—hence the field of thin spindles that defines the spatial experience of the home. General contractor Stephen Breitenbach and his team executed plans for a system that works much like tent poles, with a total of 120 slender columns arranged in a rectangular 6-foot grid, driven as deep as 30 feet down to provide the support for the house. Sitting atop the structure is an oversize cedar-shingle roof, a form that was influenced by the character of historic beach homes in the area. “The roof has a heavy mass to it and a lot of presence,” Masi says. “Seeing it in contrast to the columns creates a dynamic experience.” The roof design also has a functional purpose; besides shading exterior spaces, it stores mechanical equipment above ground in case of flooding.

Inside, Masi’s columns gave designer Damon Liss a jumping-off point, as well. “The columns are light in stature but significant in their definition of space,” he says. Together with Masi, Liss endeavored to create spaces with a strong, grounded sensibility but that were light and airy enough to welcome the coastal feel inside. “The interiors were about having restraint and not overdesigning,” he continues. “We wanted to be respectful of the architecture and the views.”

In the living room, a Charlotte Biltgen sofa and Stahl + Band coffee table converse with a Carl Hansen & Søn wingback, alongside a side chair and armchairs, both by Jorge Zalszupin. A wood side table by Etel Carmona echoes the Petersen Tegl bricks on the fireplace wall.

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—DAMON LISS

Liss's light-handed approach combined eras, materials and forms to craft rooms that are both livable and elevated. "It's our job to incorporate certain pieces that are of the moment but to balance that with historic pieces that keep the composition timeless," he explains. In the living room, this translates to a linear sofa with playful curves anchored by Brazilian stacked-wood side tables and a Scandinavian wingback chair. "Together, it feels beach-appropriate but also fresh and crisp," Liss offers.

In the dining area, which is delineated by a set of columns on either side, an angular stone table is softened by wood-rattan-and-leather chairs. A black metal chandelier with subtle perforations hangs high overhead, keeping sight lines open between the entry and the lush backyard landscaped by Margie Ruddick. Adds Liss, "The art in this house is really what's outdoors."

Throughout, Liss introduced subtle layers of organic textures and fabrics to foster a feeling of comfort and softness. Linen wallcoverings, natural woven rugs and upholstered furnishings bring moments of warm tactility without overpowering the space. "This project was often about taking a deep breath and asking how we could complement without being distracting," says the designer. "My biggest hope is that we have designed something for them to live in and to grow into."

A row of thin columns demarcates the dining area, which is anchored by an Angelo Mangiarotti table and Claudia Moreira Salles chairs lit by a Stan Usel chandelier. The counter stools are a 1stdibs find and the countertop sculpture is by Chris Gustin via Paul Donzella.





Above: A gabled oak ceiling caps the primary bath and ties to the custom vanity fabricated by Peragine Millwork. Walls and floors are wrapped in Ramon Grey limestone. The soaking tub is Aquatica and the showerhead is Waterworks.

Above, right: Water views star in the primary bedroom, where a built-in bed by Magdalene Bespoke is upholstered in Cowtan & Tout fabric and fit with a Matter sconce. A Suite NY chair sits atop a Carini Lang rug. The art is by Virginie Hucher.

The home's two levels feature a common area with outdoor living space and a cozy den on the ground floor, while a set of guest rooms, an office and a primary suite sit above. Outdoors, a planting palette designed by Margie Ruddick rings a pool and spa by Guillo Pools.

