



HOUSE IN WAINSCOTT, LONG ISLAND, NY

Architects: Venturi, Scott Brown and Associates, Inc.

Location: Wainscott, NY

Completion: 1982

The clients wanted a year-round weekend house that was a work of contemporary architectural art, that would exploit the natural beauty of their wooded site (which fronts a salt pond behind the ocean dunes), and that would reflect the dignified turn-of-the-century houses nearby. They wanted the house to be practical for two in the winter, yet comfortably accommodate the family and guests in the summer. The resulting design creates a home of serene simplicity yet subtle complexity which fully meets its owners' requirements and expectations.

The house is a forthright rectangular structure of shingle and clapboard with a gambrel roof, evoking three centuries of houses and barns in the region. Two main rooms occupy the lower floor. A 23 by 36 foot multi-purpose living space opens broadly through two pairs of cornice-high double doors to two full-length porches, front and back. The large kitchen also opens onto both porches with double doors. Thus, in the summer the main floor expands into a wide-open pavilion accommodating children, grandchildren and guests, while in the winter it contracts to become a warm refuge for two.

An office and three bedrooms with baths are upstairs. A pool house-boathouse-garage faces the main house. The small lawn is enclosed by native trees, shrubs and meadow plants. In a place where storms have carried houses away, the challenges to the structure required substantial safeguards. It has a foundation the contractor likens to a bank vault, a super-stiffened frame and floors. On the side facing the sea wind, it bears a deep pent eave that acts as an air foil.

In this understated building, special details play an important part in the success of the design and show that the understatement is purposeful. For instance, the use of decorative painted panels on the dormers with waves symbolizes the nearby sea and the owners' love for sailing. Other examples include the architect-designed benches for the porches that also serve as safety rails; the wooden fence's gently nautical wave design; oversized, countrified chair rails and the painted cornice dentils in the living room. These extraordinary details from ordinary elements also exemplify traditional details without literally copying them or reducing them to symbol.





