

# Cape Cod & Islands

# HOME

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# Gaining Ground

**They may be outnumbered in the male-dominated field of architecture, but for these six women, a passion for their profession is making Cape Cod and the Islands a more beautiful place to live.**

For these six women, space really is the final frontier. In it they see possibilities that simply elude the untrained eye. From the void of a desolate building site and the depth of their client's imagination, they construct a vision of what could be. In their minds, walls spring up, a window frames a single tree, a generous foyer opens to a circular living room, a winding staircase leads to a posh master suite, and rooms take shape. In the final stages the details—recessed lighting, hand-carved moldings, and stone fireplaces—emerge.

What distinguishes an architecturally designed home from a standard house is the architect's keen eye for form, light, and site and unwavering attention to detail. What separates these female architects from their male counterparts is a little tougher to define. Perhaps it's their ability to listen, to really hear what's

being said. Perhaps it's their domestic *savoir-faire* or their sense of empathy. Or perhaps it's just their clients' expectations that they'll bring these traits—along with breathtaking designs—to the table. Whatever it is, it seems to be working.

Each of these women heads her own thriving architectural firm. They work on an average of thirty to fifty projects annually, and design everything from renovations of historic landmarks and outdated, outgrown homes to construction of quaint seaside cottages and 10,000-square-foot mansions. In most cases they are supported by a small staff of assistants, who take care of everything from drawing detailed architectural plans to keeping the office running smoothly. But most important of all, what these women share is a passion for their profession and a dedication to designing beautiful homes.

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■ OPPOSITE: (left to right) Sally Weston, Jill Neubauer, Lisa Botticelli, Sara Jane Porter, and Jane Hewitson were photographed by Terry Pommett in front of one of Centerville's historic buildings. ■ ABOVE: Lisa Botticelli designed this guest house on Nantucket. The landscape was the work of Keith LeBlanc, who also took the photo.

TEXT BY CAROLYN WATTS



architecture  
**Lisa Botticelli**

Botticelli & Pohl Architects  
 Photography by Jeffrey Allen



On Nantucket, where every project—whether it is a shed or a 9,000-square-foot summer home—has to go before the historic commission for review, residents and architects alike are tied to tradition. Lisa Botticelli, who has spent the last eleven years of her career working on the island, is no exception. And that suits her just fine.

“Traditional is what a lot of people want on Nantucket and for me it just feels right. It’s how I want my own house. It’s just something that developed over the years,” she says.

To equate tradition with stuffy or prim would be a mistake in Botticelli’s case, as her designs are anything but. Instead, the architect offers a contemporary interpretation of traditional architecture with a twist. High ceilings, open floor plans, stainless steel appliances, and an abundance of windows are just a few of the contemporary elements she throws into the mix. Yet, she insists that one of her main goals is to design structures that look like they’ve been around forever. It’s an effect

■ ABOVE: As in the hallway of this guest house (shown opposite), the exposed fir beams of the ceiling in this bedroom frame the V-groove ceiling. The house is insulated from the outside, ensuring a cottage feel inside. Oversized gable end windows let in abundant natural light.

■ TOP LEFT: Large, open living spaces can feel vacuous and cold. To counteract this in the guest house, Botticelli added antique trusses to warm the expanse of the great room. The continuous shelf above the doors and windows not only offers space for displays, it acts as a transition from the V-groove paneling to the plaster above.

■ LEFT: The children's bunk room makes efficient use of space. The two sets of mahogany beds are built flush against the wall, leaving floor space free for play. The platform where the beds meet acts as a step to the top bunks and to the reading loft.

*(Botticelli continued on page 44)*



■ THIS PAGE & OPPOSITE: Looking from the butler's pantry toward the kitchen, the centerpiece stove hood and hand-painted tiles depicting Winslow Homer's "The Fog Warning" take center stage in the food preparation area. The client's greatest desire was for a home that was informal and open for entertaining. "They have an open-door policy," Hewitson explains, "and wanted the house to be group friendly." The long, curving island accommodates several guests and allows the host and hostess to prepare food unencumbered.

■ Botticelli's Nantucket clients asked her to build a guest house that didn't interfere with the view lines of the main house. To give family and friends the room they need without occupying precious vertical space, she designed a low-lying building with three staggered gables. In the entrance hallway, the beadboard wainscoting and plastered walls keep the look light. The antique chestnut floors and rough-hewn exposed framing add character and contrast.



she achieves not only by using traditional Nantucket touches like white trim, white cedar shingles, and red cedar roofs, but also by incorporating salvaged materials into the plan. Antique barn beams, old oak, pine and chestnut flooring, and reclaimed river wood—logs that have been dredged up from rivers—are just some of the vintage materials she favors. “People respond to a traditional touch. They see the warmth and depth that it brings to a house,” she says.

Creating inviting interiors, many with a clean, contemporary country look, is one of the things Botticelli likes most about her job. “I enjoy getting into the character of the interior. That’s where you have the most fun; that’s where people live. I enjoy starting from the inside and developing the relationship between the rooms. The interior should generate how the exterior of the building is going to be, not the other way around,” she explains.

Botticelli and her husband, Ray Pohl, met at the Rhode Island School of Design, while working toward their architecture degrees in the early eighties. In 1994 they founded their firm Botticelli & Pohl Architects. Since 1991 they have made Nantucket their workplace and home, where they are raising their two daughters. They work mainly on-island but also

manage to take on two to three off-island jobs each year.

While the couple often works as a team, Botticelli says their approaches to projects sometimes differ. Instead of seeing this as a hindrance, she thinks it’s their firm’s strong point. “The work of the firm has good balance because we offer the male and female perspective. We don’t always agree. We look at things differently,” she says.

Her male and female clients also see projects from different vantage points. “Men are into the windows, the roof, the mechanical aspects of the house, but I generally work with the female when it comes to the details,” she says. Botticelli encourages all of her clients, male and female, to get excited about the design process and to become involved.

“Designing a house is one of the most exciting things you can do in your life, so you should really try to enjoy it. I like to work very closely with my clients. You’re designing a custom-built project so you have to get to know how they live. The client also has to be willing to put in the time. If I have to pick out everything for my client, it becomes my house. It takes the personal touch out of it,” she says.

After all, designing a home is the perfect opportunity to start traditions of your own. ■



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■ **ABOVE:** This Cape, with views looking across Barnstable Harbor to Sandy Neck, suffered from a cramped second floor. Porter shored up the second floor structure, redesigned, and deepened the pitch of the roof, and added a new entry space to the living room and a bedroom.

■ **TOP RIGHT:** When faced with historic renovations and additions, Porter doesn't necessarily want to make the new look old, but she does want additions to look like they have grown from what exists. For this Yarmouthport home, she repeated a one-story bay added onto the home centuries ago. The new two-story bay enlarged the kitchen, while other additions helped to open up the family room and a bedroom.

■ **TOP LEFT:** For this Greek Revival, Porter's goal was to respect the home's distinctive elegance, while adding on a back family room and pergola. She also redesigned the kitchen and added dormered windows to the room above it to increase its space.

## architecture Sara Jane Porter

Sara Jane Porter, Architect  
Photography by Terry Pommert

In buildings designed by Sara Jane Porter, history really does have a way of repeating itself. A master of renovations, Porter strives to maintain the historical integrity of the original structure.

If the house is Gothic and has a steeply pitched roof, Porter tries to match the pitch. If the house is a small Cape, she tries to ensure that the addition won't overpower the original house. As much as possible, she tries to repeat existing architectural elements and details. For example, if the same style of windows is no longer available, she at least positions the new ones according to the placement of those existing.

"When I do alterations or additions, people always tell me it looks like it's been there forever," she says. "I try to take leave from what's there, but I also take cues from what's there."

A graduate of the architecture program at City College of New York, Porter is an expert on Cape Cod architecture. In addition to the nearly 200

*(Porter continued on page 50)*