



BY KARLA ARAUJO

PHOTOGRAPHS BY RANDI BAIRD



CRAFTING A
colorful summer retreat

Historic musicians' cottage gets a new life





Facing: Gussied up with a bright white coat of paint, Linda's first piano still presides at family gatherings. Above: A late-1800s photograph shows the cottage, right foreground, part of the Innisfail summer musicians' colony. Today the area is wooded and hidden from view.

It's a happy house, singing a song of summer in vivid shades of orange, fuchsia, citrus green, persimmon, and yellow. The wide open porch and colorful wicker furniture beckon, promising cool breezes and a respite from the brisk pace of the Vineyard at peak season.

Surrounded by two tranquil acres in Vineyard Haven, the house sits high atop a bluff with commanding views of Lagoon Pond. Boston-area residents Linda Mason and Roger Brown, with their three children and faithful ten-year-old beagle, Chloe, have transformed this once-forgotten Victorian cottage into a haven for summer fun, music, art, sports, and the simple joy of gathering with family and friends.

But when Linda, accompanied by her close friend and long-time Vineyard resident, musician Livingston Taylor, discovered the property in 2006, it took an optimistic eye to discern its potential. "The view was obscured by overgrown landscaping," she explains, "and the house was very dark and in disrepair." In spite of its cosmetic shortcomings, both Linda and Livingston recognized the jewel that lay beneath the somber gray exterior and black wide-plank pine floors. "We looked at many, many houses but something about this one just called out to me right away. It was like a small, enchanting playhouse," she recalls.

Twenty years earlier, as a birthday surprise, Roger had whisked Linda off to the Island for a first visit. "We fell in love with the Vineyard and dreamed of owning a second home here since that weekend," she says. Relaxing on the porch together, overlooking the broad swath of lawn that offers glimpses of the water through the trees, Roger nods in agreement, adding: "Although we traveled worldwide for work and pleasure, we

always found our way back to visit."

The intervening years were busy for the couple and their family. As the children matured, Linda explains, she and Roger wanted them to see the world and broaden their perspectives. Humanitarians and successful entrepreneurs, the couple often took their brood to witness how others live in developing countries. "Now that two of the kids are in college and leaving the nest, we felt it was time to have a place to come back to instead of traveling so much as a family," Linda says.

With its brightly painted walls and artwork created by the family and collected from their trips to Europe, Africa, the Caribbean, and Mexico, the house has become a reflection of its owners' aesthetics and world views. Much of the art is music-themed, which is no surprise since Roger – in addition to being an accomplished drummer – is the president of Boston's prestigious Berklee College of Music, and Linda studied classical piano at the Sergei Rachmaninoff Russian Conservatory of Paris.

Rich in history, the house was built in the 1870s as part of a hotel complex called Innisfail (named after the early Celtic word for Ireland – meaning "the abode of peace and rest" – by one of its Irish developers who found the site reminiscent of his native land). The resort, including five additional Victorian cottages, became a summer colony of musicians and singers and was known for festive gatherings and concerts. For thirty years, Innisfail flourished, attracting famous performers, media personalities, and prominent teachers of voice and stage. During the day, according to Vineyard lore, sounds of melodies floated across the Lagoon, while in the evening, the hotel's music room was the setting for lighthearted, informal concerts.



Lime-green rockers line the raspberry-red porch overlooking Lagoon Pond, and Roger and Linda enjoy a quiet moment together on the porch steps.

In May of 1906, a brush fire swept across the Island for miles, on the third day burning the main building of the hotel to the ground. It was never rebuilt; the only access to the area at the time was via an inexpedient steam launch to and from Vineyard Haven harbor, since the cost of constructing a road was considered too expensive. The cottage that captured Linda and Roger's imagination a century later is one of three original musicians' cottages that remain today.

While the couple shares a passion for travel and the arts, they also have spent many years as working partners. They met as graduate students at the Yale School of Management and journeyed to the border of Cambodia and Thailand together on a humanitarian mission under the auspices of CARE and UNICEF, helping to direct the largest famine relief program ever attempted at the time. "It wasn't your typical courtship," Roger observes wryly.

Returning home, they were working as up-and-coming management consultants when they experienced what Roger terms a "watershed moment." At a New Year's Eve party in 1984, they reflected on the past year and their accomplishments. "We were living in Cambridge, earning a good income, traveling," Roger recalls. "We'd logged miles, written reports, but we asked ourselves if it had any deep meaning." They stayed up all night talking and vowed to make a change.

Just days later, David L. Guyer, then president of Save the Children, called to ask if Linda and Roger would co-manage a critical famine relief initiative in Sudan. He needed an answer by

the next day. "Three weeks later, we were in Khartoum," Roger says. When their mission was completed two years later, they returned to the United States, this time with entrepreneurial ambitions and a strong desire to serve the needs of American families.

It was 1986, and there was an acute shortage of quality child care and early education options for working parents, so the couple founded Bright Horizons, creating what would become the world's leading provider of employer-sponsored child care. Today, with Linda serving as chairman and Roger as vice chairman, the company operates more than six hundred child care centers worldwide with more than twenty thousand employees.

Now, both have embarked on new ventures: Roger was named president of Berklee in 2004, and Linda serves as chair of Mercy Corps, a three-hundred-million-dollar international relief and development agency. They also co-founded Horizons for Homeless Children, a Boston-based nonprofit. Somehow, amid raising their own three children, running a thriving business, and launching a nonprofit, they've authored books, created music CDs for children, and garnered awards for entrepreneurship and corporate leadership.

But on this sticky summer day, Linda and Roger face a typical Vineyard dilemma: bike, kayak, or stay on the porch reading *The New York Times* from cover to cover? "This is our time to relax, connect with friends, great neighbors, and family," Linda explains.

Facing: The dining area seems to have an expandable waistband when it comes to accommodating gatherings of friends and family.





From left: The construction crew spent many hours repairing and replicating detailed trim; the guest bedroom offers a peek of the water.

Putting it all together

The couple credits Joanne Gosser, principal of Vineyard Haven's Synergy MV, for directing the cottage's dramatic two-phase restoration. An architect with more than twenty years of experience on the Island, Joanne assembled a team consisting of interior design assistant Kathy Holliday, Christopher Reimann, owner of Reimann Construction, and his wife, Kristen Reimann, a landscape architect. The first phase involved what Chris calls "making the house livable": a renovation of the existing structure, including interior and exterior painting, the addition of two outdoor showers, and the renovation of a full bath. "The floors were black and there was a super dingy feel to the house," he says. "We brightened it up."

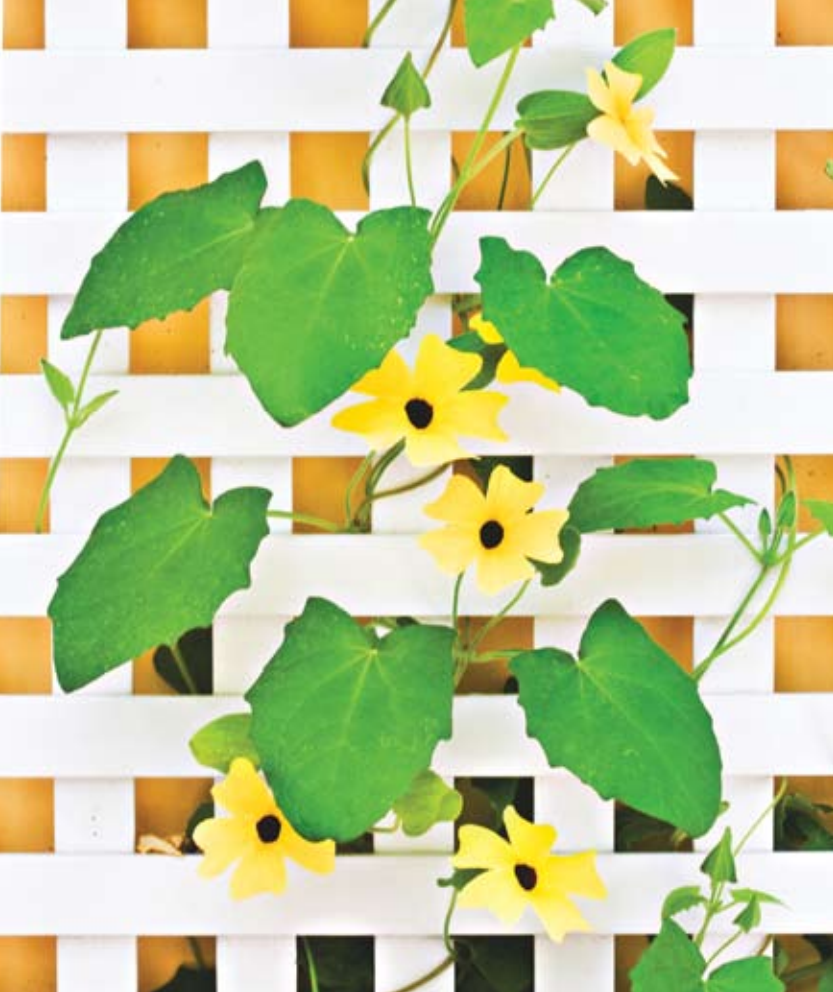
The second phase of the project was far more extensive. The kitchen was gutted and expanded; a wall was removed between the kitchen and dining room; an eight-hundred-square-foot master bedroom suite including private bath, a walk-through closet, an office alcove, and air conditioning was added; the second-story roof was insulated and replaced; and the porch was enlarged to wrap around the new living space. While the four bedrooms on the second floor remain largely unchanged, closets in the three children's rooms were converted to lofts, and a "secret nook" accessible only through a small hidden door in one of the bedrooms was created.

Both Joanne and Chris agree that the project's toughest

challenge was preserving the home's vintage character while incorporating much-needed updates. "It's a testament to Linda and Roger that they decided to use it as a summer house only," Joanne says. This allowed them to retain the original exposed joists, board walls, and open ceilings, keeping the feel of the Victorian cottage intact. "They wanted the neighborhood to like the house," she explains. "It's not a mansion; it still feels like a relatively simple summer cottage."

During the family's first summer, they realized that the uninsulated upstairs bedrooms grew unpleasantly hot. Chris's task, as part of the second phase of construction, was to add foam insulation on top of the existing roof, replace the old asphalt shingles, and tie it into the new wings of the house. The project had its challenges. "We had to hide the new steel pipes, incorporating modern engineering around an old structure, and make it look traditional." He built two new gables, one on the expanded kitchen wing of the house and the other on the master bedroom wing, meticulously replicating the ornamental gingerbread trim from the original structure.

Kristen was brought on board to solve a perplexing issue: Where should cars park and how should people approach the house? The large lot afforded a choice of options but the one Kristen favored kept the views from the house unspoiled. She recommended creating a parking area on an elevated section of the property behind the house, adding granite stairs and a unique feature: an accompanying granite-block car ramp to



A black-eyed Susan vine climbs a trellis along the back of the cottage, and two outdoor showers flank an old-fashioned sink by the kitchen door.

enable vehicles to pull up to the side entrance. “The owners do a lot of entertaining, so they wanted easy access to the house for loading and unloading,” Kristen explains. “I was inspired by medieval European villages where there are ancient stairs supplemented by new stone runners to accommodate vehicles.”

Once she developed the approach to parking and access,



Musicians stayed at the Innisfail cottages, and the mellifluous sounds of their evening performances drifted out over the Lagoon.

Kristen moved forward to create a “Vineyard-friendly” lawn – a blend of seed that doesn’t require much water or fertilizer – as well as a private garden area adjacent to the new master bedroom wing. Because the house sits close to a well-traveled road, she also planted a hedgerow to screen it from noise and traffic. The plant palette for the property mirrors that of the interior decorating scheme: bold yellows, reds, and oranges that are tempered, Kristen says, by a few blues.

Indoors, Joanne and Kathy worked closely with Linda to turn the new house into a home. “We used the hot colors that Linda loves,” Joanne says, “and relied primarily on Maine Cottage furniture to achieve a casual summer style.” Along with furnishings from Pottery Barn, Anthropologie, and Vineyard stores, the house offers cheerful accents of color grounded by crisp white paint. The real fun, Linda says, was shopping Island yard sales and antiques shops, where she picked up such favorites as a white marble-topped wrought-iron table that serves as the kitchen island.

The contemporary conveniences of the new master bedroom suite are countered by what Linda and Roger deliberately omitted in the rest of the house: a dishwasher in the kitchen (“We all pitch in and wash dishes as a family,” Linda explains), air conditioning, and television (though they have a monitor for watching movies). They also added a “painting porch,” a designated section of the wraparound porch with a sink for washing paintbrushes and hands. “We enjoy working on creative projects,”





The porch serves myriad pursuits: reading, relaxing, dining, painting, playing music, and enjoying the view.

Linda says. In fact, as a family activity, Linda, Roger, and the kids hand-painted the knobs on the kitchen cabinets and many of the dishes on the open shelves.

Raising their family and spending time together is the couple's number one priority. "We encourage our kids to find their own passion and direction," Roger says. Linda chimes in: "We support their choices and their idiosyncratic natures. Life doesn't have to be a straight path." All three children are self-directed, with very strong focuses, their parents say proudly. "We introduced them to the things that we love, but they've discovered their own," Linda concludes.

A humble upright piano sits in the corner of the airy living room. "It was my first piano," Linda says. "I bought it for two hundred dollars right after graduate school at a yard sale in my hometown." Spray-painted white to complement the living room, it has made five moves with her over the years and now serves as a central focus in the family's Island life.

According to an old adage, "A house is built with boards and beams, a home is built with love and dreams." This home, built more than one hundred thirty years ago, withstood the threats of fire and neglect to return for a rousing encore.

The creative team:

Synergy MV Architecture and interior design

Reimann Construction General contractor/builder

Kristen Reimann Landscape Architect Landscape design

Cedar Fields Stone masonry and landscaping

David C. Hearn Painting Interior and exterior painting

New Upholstery Shop (Scituate) Window treatments

Bianchi Tile & Marble (Falmouth) Tile and counter tops

Karpet Kare Vinyl tile

DogWatch of Cape Cod (Marstons Mills) Hidden dog fencing

Automatic Lawn Sprinklers of Martha's Vineyard Irrigation

Michael Capen Plumbing & Heating Plumbing

Ronald Pine Electric Electric

Lawrence Heating and Air Conditioning Air conditioning



Ever creative, the family hand-painted the kitchen's cheery knobs.

Show your true colors

Scientists have found that colors can raise and lower blood pressure, boost and diminish appetite, improve vision, induce the fight-or-flight response, and create feelings of warmth or cold. Several ancient cultures, including those of the Egyptians and the Chinese, said that colors have the power to heal. And yet, with all the modern research compiled on the psychology of color, most homeowners rely on one basic tool to help them choose a palette for their surroundings: instinct.

Vibrant colors, like those chosen by Linda Mason and her architect, Joanne Gosser of Synergy MV, are not for the tonally timid. While many coastal homes rely on a more neutral or serene palette, interior designers and paint experts agree that bold hues, thoughtfully applied, can help make a house come to life. The science of color has yielded visual aids like color wheels and color saturation charts, but a seat-of-the-pants approach – how a color or a combination of colors makes you feel when you walk into a room – allows you to rely on your own innate sense of style. If you, like Linda and her family, love a house that makes a statement, here are some tips on making room for more color in your life.

"I'm not afraid of color," asserts Mary Rentschler, owner of Rentschler & Company Interiors in Vineyard Haven. While Mary recommends using neutral tones to ground more intense colors, she likes to inject what she calls "spice" into the usual Vineyard palette of "sand, stone, and bark."

She explains, "Color gives space an exclamation point." Mary advocates using a family of colors, starting with a neutral. "They have to add

up,” she cautions. “Few rooms are totally isolated. I like to use color to enhance an heirloom rug or an art collection. You should have places of calm and places of spice and variety.” She suggests using a vibrant color on one wall only or on the back of bookcases for emphasis.

Liz Stiving-Nichols, owner of Martha’s Vineyard Interior Design in Vineyard Haven, also advises that homeowners start with a neutral base to ground the living area. “It doesn’t have to be white or tan,” she says. “It can be navy blue. Then add chartreuse to contrast with the navy. A punch of vivid color can be pulled in with accents, pillows, or art-work.” Liz says she likes to use what she calls “the perennial elements of the site,” such as the view, the water, or wildflowers in the garden, for instance, as a starting point for the palette. “Then turn it up a notch,” she says, by using different values of the colors that are outside the house. “Color,” she sums up, “should be a true reflection of the owner’s lifestyle and personality.”

John Casey, owner of MV Color and Finish in Vineyard Haven, has been a painting contractor for nearly thirty years. He’s watched as the industry has shifted from oil-based paints for vivid colors to new and even more effective acrylic paints. “Oil paint has gone downhill due to environmental regulations,” he explains. “Manufacturers like Benjamin Moore are developing no-fade latex-based paints that are far better than the remaining oils.”

When working with vibrant colors, he suggests putting all the color elements – including rugs, furniture, upholstery, draperies, and art – in view so you can see the complete effect. “Look at the whole picture, including your paint color options, in the environment at various times of the day,” he says. Remember too that nature offers the best examples



Each of the three children helped customize their bedrooms.



of vibrant colors and combinations. “Bring the outside palette inside,” he says. “It’s always in harmony.”

Because bold colors are challenging to apply, he suggests working with a professional. But if you’re a confident do-it-yourselfer, John recommends adding what he refers to as “color breaks,” using a rag or brush to lighten or darken the paint slightly when applying it. “It warms it up,” he explains. Finally, he suggests using an eggshell finish; its slight gloss will allow light to play a part in how the color appears.

Chad Seaver, owner of Tivoli Paint in Vineyard Haven, carries multiple lines of paint products from several major manufacturers. He advises customers to buy a quart of paint before committing to gallons, particularly when risky colors are in the palette. He – like Mary, Liz, and John – recommends testing paint colors on foam core, poster board, or scrap sheetrock, then propping the samples up against the wall in the actual space. “If homeowners are having trouble making color choices, we can help,” he says. “Many of the paint companies also offer complementary color tips on the back of swatches.” When using deeper colors, he recommends starting with a tinted primer to help achieve better paint coverage.

Dramatic, serene, or anywhere in between: Experts encourage homeowners to enjoy the decorating process and to choose a palette confidently. “We were brave,” Linda acknowledges about her own vibrant color scheme. “I knew the house would be playful and happy when it was completed.” ♦

Left: One of Linda’s favorite finds from an Island antiques shop is the marble-topped wrought-iron table that serves as the kitchen island.