

A Tree Grows on Martha's Vineyard

The only resident landscape architect on Martha's Vineyard creates outdoor homes

by Sarah Tompkins '10



KRISTEN REIMANN '91

A 12-foot Japanese maple tree bent gently over the porch of Kristen Reimann's '91 childhood home. "It had this arching dome with twisting branches inside. It was the most beautiful tree," Reimann remembers.

The unique maple started as a sapling in the 1920s, and was part of a rather eclectic collection of flora surrounding Reimann's house. "The man who lived in our house prior to us collected plants from around the world, so there were lots of plants that were not very common," Reimann recalls. "That landscape really influenced me."

Although it might seem natural that Reimann would pursue a career in landscape architecture, the path to designing landscapes was less than straight forward. "When I started at William Smith, I was a double major in economics and Chinese because I thought that I was a different person. I thought that I wanted to be in the business world," explains Reimann. "I did that for two years, and I finally realized: this is not me."

While her classmates were spending time abroad, Reimann did some soul and career searching. "I interned with the Bank of Boston. I wanted to find out if I could wear a suit and stockings every day." After a few weeks, Reimann had her answer. "I found out: no, I couldn't."

When she returned to HWS, Reimann declared an independent major in environmental studies, but it was not until the summer before her senior year at the Colleges that she finally found a career that felt like home. "I did an internship with the Brooklyn

Botanic Garden," explains Reimann. "It was during that time I learned how the gardens were laid out. That whole summer I kept thinking: who does this kind of work? This is what I want to do!"

Discovering landscape architecture eventually led Reimann to Cape Cod, where she was able to nurture her love of natural sciences as well as harness her artistic side. "After I graduated, I was home for four weeks when Carolyn Coleburn '91 called me up and said, 'Hey I'm down on the Vineyard. You want to come down and work?'" recalls Reimann. "I was supposed to be there a month, but I ended up being there a year. Eventually, I married a builder who was also in love with the island, and together, we knew that we were going to make a home on Martha's Vineyard."

The isolation of the island, however, proved to be a challenge. "I knew that if I wanted to live on Martha's Vineyard, I would have to commute," says Reimann. "I also knew that I wanted a family, and that I couldn't commute and work long hours while maintaining the kind of relationship with my kids that was important to me."

The challenge was no match for Reimann's determination and hard work. After receiving her masters in landscape architecture from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst and completing the necessary three years of internship, Reimann was able to sit for the landscape architecture national examination. She is now the only registered landscape architect on Martha's Vineyard.

"I do what I love here," says Reimann, sitting in the office she



STAIRS TO THE CHILMARK HOME ON MARTHA'S VINEYARD.

and her husband built next to their Oak Bluffs home. "And my kids always know where to find me if they need me," says Reimann, mother to eight-year-old twins.

Designing landscapes on Martha's Vineyard is unlike creating outdoor space anywhere else. "Out here, the edges are very different," explains Reimann. "Unless you live in town, there are no fences; property lines are blurred."

The island is naturally rich with twisted oak trees and huckleberry blankets the ground.



Reimann embraces these plants, and uses them to create a sense of home within nature. “A lot of people have a difficult time visualizing landscape,” says Reimann. “You have to readjust your definition of ‘floors, walls and ceilings’ and of what those words mean. Instead you have the ground, trees, and sky.”

Design, Reimann says, is also personal. “You need to get to know the family and their lifestyle,” she says. “You need to know how your client lives. Do they have children or grandchildren? How much

entertaining space do they want?”

It’s that marriage of personal style, function and solid design that makes a landscape feel like home.

So Reimann has found that she has had to redefine her own Japanese maple inspired vision of beauty. “Even though I have my own expectations about how my own landscape should look, I set aside space for trampolines,” admits Reimann, “because to me and my family, those are just as important landscape features as anything else.” 🏠

At Home on Stage

KS Stevens '94 redefines the concept of home



KS STEVENS '94

by Jessie Meyers '10

“The purpose of my plays is to bring people together by first acknowledging their differences and then peeling back the layers so that we can see how similar we are. I create characters for cultural art and public consumption. I put myself into these characters,” says playwright KS Stevens '94.

Born in Vietnam and adopted by an American family during the Vietnam War, Stevens knows firsthand the importance of home. “Growing up, I took comfort in the messages of hope and belonging that I saw in productions like *Annie*, *The King and I*, and *Oliver*. These are what I tap into when I write, trying to make those universal themes current and heartfelt.”

As a butch lesbian, Stevens also felt alienated and uncomfortable in her skin for much of her young adult life. “At some point, I started telling myself, ‘God could not have put me on this planet to be miserable.’ I knew there had to be a way to reframe my life and live up to my potential,” says Stevens, who feels more at home in her own body since embracing the similarities and differences in everyone.

With a new outlook on life, Stevens has found love and acceptance in the NYC LGBT and theatre communities. She was crowned Miss Lez 2009 in Murray Hill’s annual New York City queer pageant. In 2010, *GO Magazine*, the nation’s most widely distributed free lesbian publication, named her as one of “100 WOMEN WE LOVE.”

“It is my hope that my works inspire dialogue and motivate individuals to look at characters, situations and stereotypes with fresh eyes so that we can empathize and have more respect for ourselves and each other,” she told *GO Magazine*.

Her most current project is co-hosting and co-producing a web series titled *Queer Arts Now*. “Queer Arts Now gives queer artists a voice,” says Stevens. “Many of these artists and events are unlikely to get covered in the mainstream media, so we’ve created our own discussion.” 🏠