



Photo © Steve Turner

Bluff House

Maryann Thompson Architects

Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts

Occupying the crest of a windblown bluff overlooking the Atlantic and nearby saltwater ponds, this four-bedroom, 6,850-square-foot summer house was intended to be reminiscent of the early camps in Martha's Vineyard. The house both shelters its inhabitants from the summer sun yet remains open to a visual panorama of ocean and pond views.



Design concept and solution:

The structure's complex form, organized between an earthen stone plinth and trapezoidal roof, is generated by the natural geometry of the bluff. The space between the planes allows for clerestory windows, which let in diffused light from above. The house becomes a visual extension of the landscape as the roof planes reciprocate the formal qualities of the bluff, windswept cedars, and cresting waves of the Atlantic below.

The colors and textures of the unfinished exterior material palette are meant to blend into the surrounding site over time, giving the house a feel that it is "of its place." The western red cedar siding will weather to subtle and varied shades of gray. The windows are framed in unfinished yellow cedar, which will also weather to gray, as will the zinc roof.

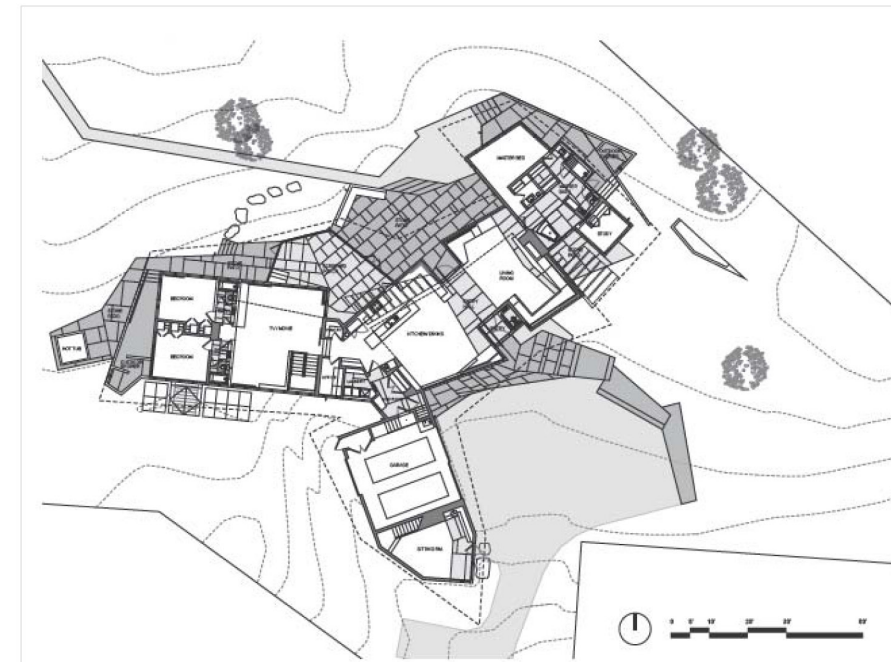
The building's interior continues the red cedar tongue and groove cladding of the exterior soffit, creating visual continuity on the outside, as well as offering a sense of craft reminiscent of the Vineyard's boat-building traditions. The interior layout revolves around the central living room/dining/kitchen space. Moments of intimacy are achieved within the open floor plan through the use of nooks and smaller spatial moments in the plan. A family room off the kitchen has a large folding door that opens the space of the room to the screened porch, essentially turning the family room into one large screened porch when the doors are open. One of the four bedroom serves as a guest suite, with a separate entrance and living area.

The house is designed to be comfortable in the summer without mechanical air conditioning—large overhangs shade expanses of glass, and all rooms have cross ventilation. The clerestory windows, when open, pull the ventilation through the house. As the hot air rises out, cooler breezes are brought in along the ground. The result is a house that is open to the site and views, yet is also shady and breezy.

Total construction cost: \$2,877,000

Architect:

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