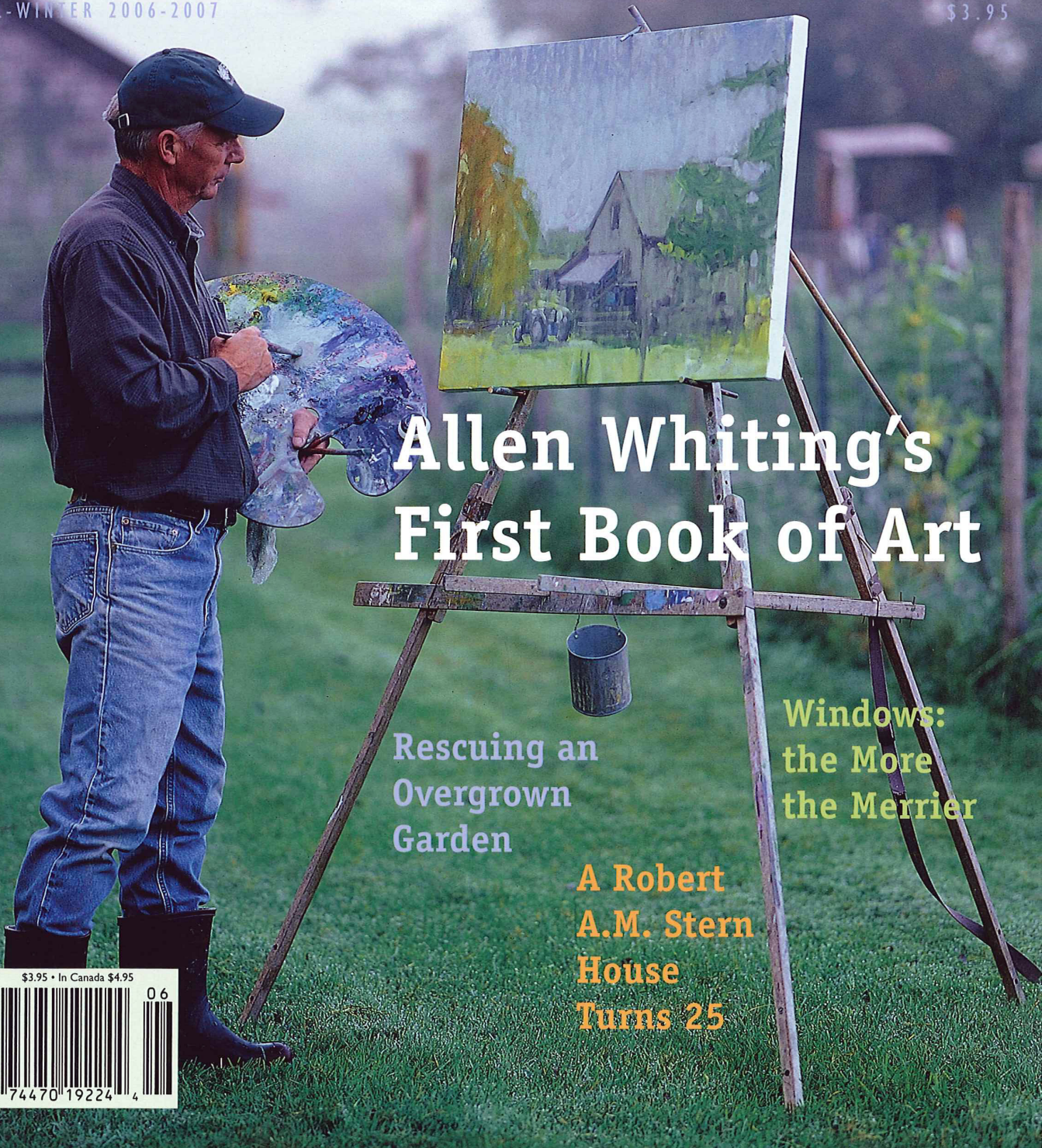


Martha's Vineyard

Home & Garden

FALL-WINTER 2006-2007

\$3.95

A man in a dark cap, long-sleeved shirt, and jeans stands in a grassy field, painting a house on an easel. He holds a palette and a brush. The easel is a wooden A-frame with a bucket hanging from it. The background shows a blurred field and a fence.

Allen Whiting's First Book of Art

Rescuing an
Overgrown
Garden

Windows:
the More
the Merrier

A Robert
A.M. Stern
House
Turns 25

\$3.95 • In Canada \$4.95



Visitors Center, Polly Hill Arboretum, West Tisbury

Maryann Thompson, of Maryann Thompson Architects in Cambridge, had quite a different challenge in bringing natural light into the Visitors Center of the Polly Hill Arboretum. “Because there are trees everywhere, there’s not a lot of light,” she says. “It’s very much a wooded kind of condition. What we ended up doing is bringing light in from above.”

She accomplished this with the use of huge skylights on one side of the roof and large, six-pane transoms on the opposite wall – a feat that she’s pleased with. “When you’re in the space,” she says, “you still feel like you’re in a forest.”

Thompson is an expert on transitions between inside and outside. She teaches a master’s course at Harvard on the subject. “One of the things that I always try to do is to create a continuum between the outside space and the inside space so you have a sense that it’s not a strong threshold. It’s a lot more of a blended threshold. You have an ambi-

guity between what’s inside and what’s outside.” With that in mind, Thompson, then in partnership with Charles Rose of Charles Rose Architects Inc. of Somerville, collaborated with landscape designer Michael Van Valkenburgh of Chilmark and benefactor David Smith to design the center.

The structure is a heavily timbered, light-filled, multi-purpose room with windows, windows, and more windows – besides the skylights and transoms. In addition to bringing in light, they blur the distinction between inside and out. The post-and-beam construction permits extensive glazing, even allowing glass panels to meet in the corners without mullions for a continuous view of the woods outside. The supporting timbers take their cues from the shapes of tree trunks. “When you’re inside, you feel related to a forest,” says Thompson.

Flat bluestone imported from New York, used in the landscaping, borders the Visitors Center, adding to the sense of continuity. A large pergola was installed immediately outside of the build-

ing, bringing together landscape and architecture. There is no air conditioning; it’s not necessary because all the windows can be opened to let in fresh air and breezes. (Though the arboretum is opened year-round, the Visitors Center closes in the winter.)

The main challenge was to design the building in a way that didn’t disturb the carefully planted flora; there are more than 2,000 plants on the grounds, which embrace more than sixty acres just off of State Road in West Tisbury, near the Agricultural Hall. Polly Hill of West Tisbury brought trees, flowers, and shrubbery from her beloved South and improbably grew them in the intemperate North. In the Visitors Center, a Scandinavian technique allowed the foundation to have a shallow underpinning that insulated the foundation against frost heaves, but disturbed little of the root systems of the surrounding trees. The forest stands close to the building, but it is undisturbed. “Everything I do, I try to do in a way that treads lightly on the earth,” Thompson says.



The Visitors Center at the Polly Hill Arboretum in West Tisbury uses large skylights and transoms to bring in light from above. Support beams of the pergola and the nearby woodland create a continuum between the interior of the Visitors Center and its surroundings.

