

## ARCHITECTURE

With this suspenseful, multilayered design,  
an architect mimics one of nature's most



# From

Some houses convey an air of intrigue—usually brought about by the history of the building, or by the people who might have inhabited the structure in centuries past. How often, though, are we presented with a dwelling that creates its own sense of mystery, combined with an earthy, spiritual ambience? A house in Aquinnah, on Martha's Vineyard, is one of those rare entities that draws you to it, hinting that you can be part of something special, while concealing its unfolding story within the confines of its walls—a story that begins to reveal itself as soon as you enter the front door.

# Fallen

BY ANDREW CUNNINGHAM  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHUCK CHOI

common and wonderfully subtle effects.



Situated on a wide hill open to fierce island winds is the Fallen Leaves House, so named because of the sense one gets when looking at the structure—the horizontal lines suggest an image of brown fallen leaves layered one on top of the other. Off a busy island road, the property's unassuming dirt lane leads up a wooded hill, revealing no hint of the beauty that awaits you. Once inside the house, you realize that you are actually being moved through the rooms by careful design, your path leading ultimately to a grand ocean view, which is almost unimaginable from the home's unassuming entrance.

# Leaves





■ In this daring design, open and closed spaces create a sense of drama and excitement. Based on a "hide and reveal" technique often used in Asian stroll gardens, such a design "creates a greater emotional resonance," says Thompson.

■ Blurring the boundaries between internal and external living spaces was a primary goal of architect Maryann Thompson, who also has a landscape design background. The sophisticated yet comfortable living room (above) features complementary natural tone furniture such as a sectional sofa by Lima, a graceful metal-arm chair by Lomas, and a striking fireside chair by Windy.

The home was designed by Maryann Thompson of Maryann Thompson Architects in Cambridge. Thompson is a multiple-award-winning architect—with degrees in architecture and landscape design—who opened her firm in 2000. Before that she was the founder and senior partner of another architectural firm. Her landscape design background made Fallen Leaves House a favorite project.



■ Stunning yet simple lines in the dining room area move the eye outdoors to a glorious Aquinnah landscape. An elegant table by Brera and chairs by French Line are part of the home's open-to-the-elements living, dining, and kitchen area. An unusual, multilayered lighting fixture captures the feeling of fallen leaves, a design motif used throughout the home.

"The house is generated by an unfolding spatial sequence that is based upon a landscape processional," says Thompson. "It's similar to a garden layout. We are trying to create moments of epiphany using suspense where you're not meant to experience the space in one moment. We took a small site and made it seem more expansive, which is a common technique in landscape design."

## ARCHITECTURE From Fallen Leaves

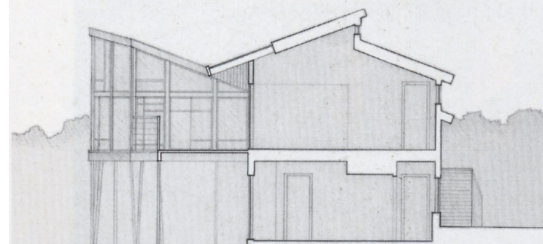




■ Clean white stainless steel finishes and a minimalist stove top communicate a serene feeling in the kitchen.

## ARCHITECTURE From Fallen Leaves

### NORTH-SOUTH SECTION



■ A sleek and sophisticated kitchen, designed by Arclinea Boston, reflects the vivid setting surrounding Fallen Leaves.



STEPHEN LEE

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■ The kitchen's wide-open design is built around extravagant counter space, making dinner preparation a fun and participatory experience. Extensive under-counter storage space let the designer free up wall space for windows and doors, allowing continuous light and air into the kitchen.

A journey through Fallen Leaves begins with stairs that double back in an “S” shape, leading up to a second floor where ocean views are revealed. But even here the house surprises, building suspense in a “hide and reveal” technique often used in Chinese and Japanese stroll gardens. “It creates a greater emotional resonance in the project,” Thompson explains.

Upon entering the front door, a low overhang gives the idea of compression, and a concrete fireplace at the top of the stairs continues to delay your view. Suddenly a high-ceilinged area, which includes the living room, dining room, and kitchen, opens out to a dramatic porch running along most of the structure's northern face.

“This is a technique we learned from Frank Lloyd Wright,” says Thompson. “We use expansion and compression to create a greater dialogue between the user and the architecture. By imbuing a sense that one has to discover the place, we assign value to the human being's movement through the space, which helps to create identity. It gives the user a sense of mystery, discovery, and suspense—sort of like a



## ARCHITECTURE From Fallen Leaves

Hitchcock movie. We try to draw the person in emotionally."

At Fallen Leaves there is little delineation between interior and exterior spaces. Essential to this blurred distinction is a sloping glass roof that

overlaps the north wall, allowing the view to become part of the interior living experience.

Although technically two stories, the layering design actually makes the structure seem more like a three-story



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house. The master suite is nestled between the living room directly above and the children's bedroom below, giving the owners a sense of privacy. Off the master bathroom are an outdoor shower and a private deck. A unique feature of the bedroom is a corner glass opening. The glass doors open in each direction, creating a screened-in porch—another example of the seaside landscape merging naturally with the inside.

"We use corner glass to break the box of the room, so that the space becomes more integrated with the outside. The experience of a walled corner makes one feel more enclosed. If you allow glass to occupy the corner, it ends up expanding the space. It's more powerful."

## ARCHITECTURE From Fallen Leaves



STEPHEN LEE

process for Thompson. With a busy road to the south, that side of the house just has two strip windows. "Since it's a summer house, we let in southern light very carefully," says Thompson, "and then opened the

house to the north so the owners don't have to rely on air conditioning. The nicest thing about the spaces of the house," she continues, "is the magical qualities of the light in them."

Thompson likens "bringing light in

■ What's inside is also outside in every living space in this Frank Lloyd Wright-inspired home. The master bedroom, featuring a handsome platform bed with a custom-crafted headboard, recessed wall units for storage, and very few distracting accessories, has access to a deck that opens out to a spectacular 180 degree water view.

In addition to the decks leading off the master bedroom and the living room, is a third deck accessible by a short flight of stairs from the living room, opening out to an amazing 180 degree water view.

"This is an inland site," explains Thompson. "The owners didn't even know they had a water view. We had to stand on top of the cars to try to figure out if we could see the water."

Bringing light into the house was an important part of the design



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Graceful yet strong outdoor furniture pieces (above), made by High Frame in France, have a wave-like design perfect for this ocean-side home. Panoramic views can be seen from many angles of the home, such as from the porch that opens out off the kitchen (below). "We were trying to create an unfolding spatial sequence that is like a landscape procession," says Thompson.



from above" to light filtering down through trees in the woods. She says that she loves creating this effect in architecture, explaining, "It helps to create a continuum between inside and outside. The light quality you get outside blends gently with the light quality inside, experientially merging interior and exterior spaces."

Additionally, light passing through the clerestories on the home's south side



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creates an interesting effect. "The light through these strips moves around the room as the sun moves," says Thompson. "It's really beautiful. The walls of the room become the surface of a sundial."

Thompson has even brought in the colors of the landscape by choosing a light green hue for the inside, including light green marble countertops and white walls that have a touch of green in them.

The house is a complex mix of rustic—exemplified by the weathered wood exterior—and ultra-modern. The kitchen, an extension of the high-ceilinged living room, gleams with stainless steel fixtures (which help reflect light), while the bathrooms and the beech-lined powder room have a rustic aura.

Inside and out, Fallen Leaves House





■ Adjacent to an outdoor shower is an uncluttered bathroom in rustic tones that contains simple forms such as a long trough sink.

creates an air of mystery and suspense. Comfort, functionality, light, and spatial flexibility are the layers of this ground-breaking design. As Maryann Thompson says, "It's all about sensitivity to a site and how a site works." This daring, unique home is all about communication—among the land, the house, and those who are part of both.

FOR MORE INFORMATION,  
SEE MARKETPLACE ON PAGE 141.

*Andrew Cunningham is a freelance writer and frequent contributor to Cape Cod Life Publications who lives in Falmouth.*

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