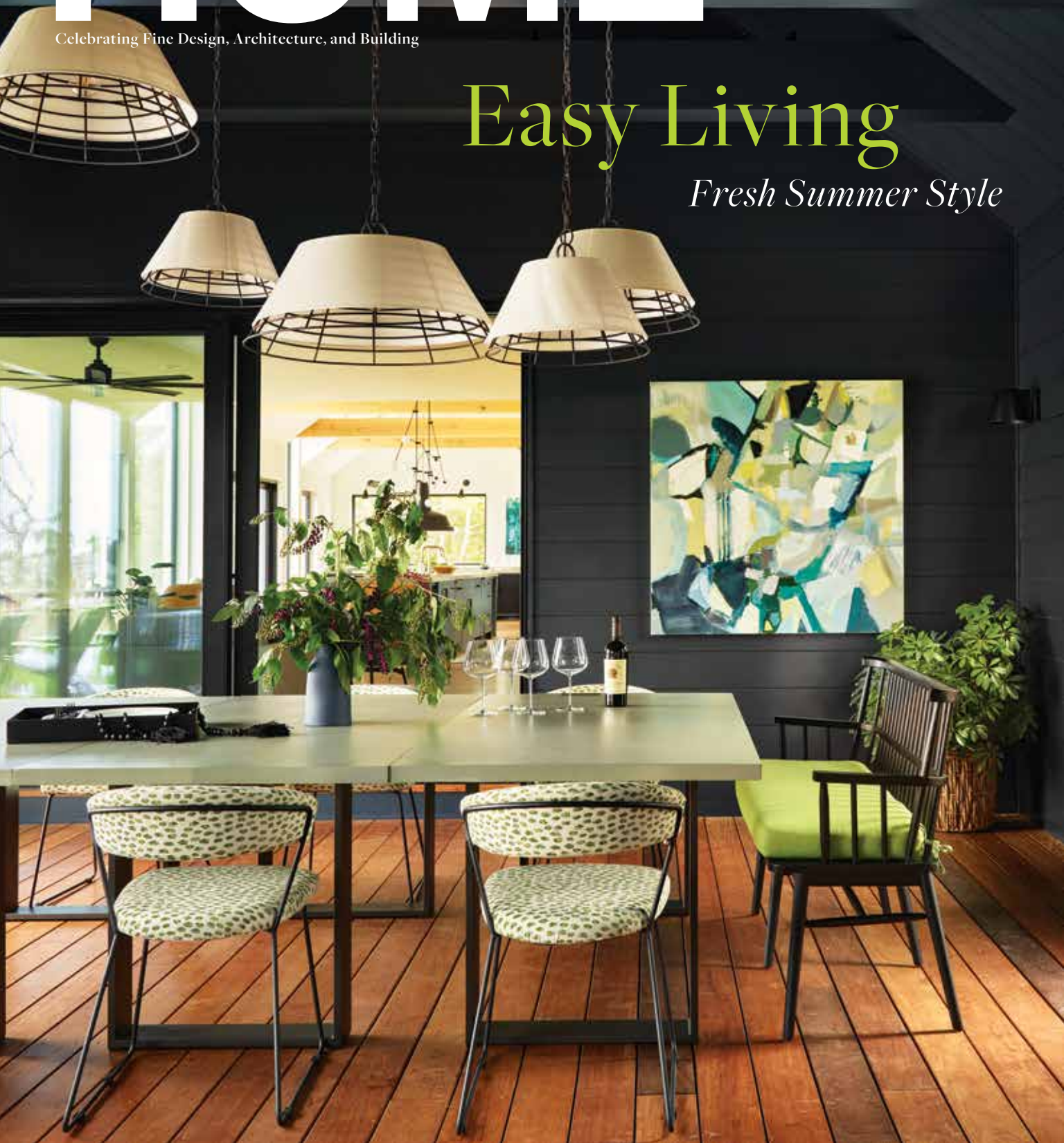


New England HOME

Celebrating Fine Design, Architecture, and Building

Easy Living

Fresh Summer Style



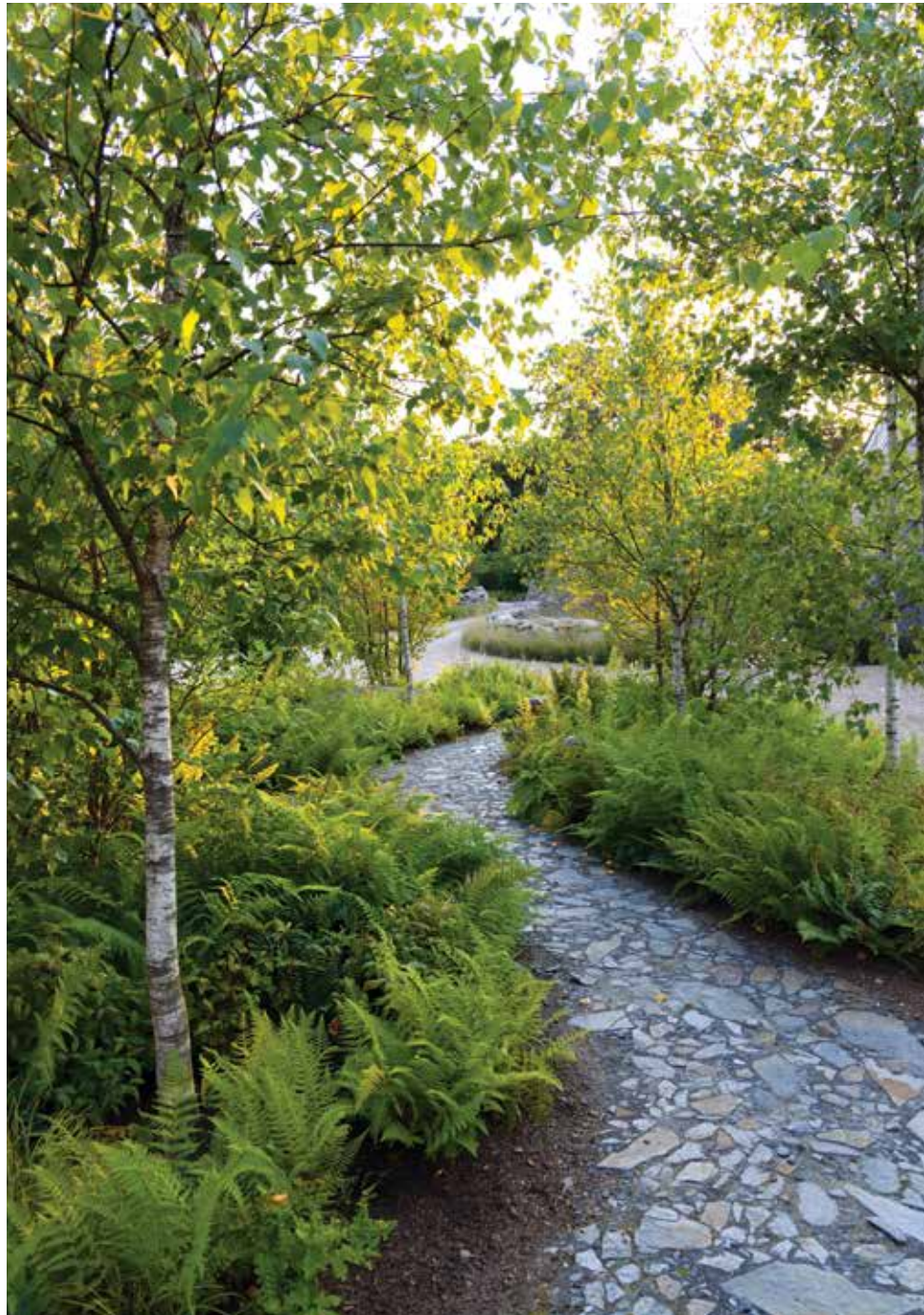
Into the Woods

When Michael Van Valkenburgh lays a walkway, the path does more than just deliver you to the destination. BY TOVAH MARTIN

“Greeting to Martha’s Vineyard is a journey,” says landscape architect and Vineyard resident Michael Van Valkenburgh, “so the moment of arrival must be special. I draw the greeting out.” That was the driving force behind the miniature forest that welcomes visitors from the circular driveway of a Maryann Thompson-designed home on the island. Part odyssey, part screen to veil the house, the forest is bisected by a stone shard pathway that cuts through a stand of interlacing white birches wading in a froth of ferns.

Informed by the same whimsical aesthetic that inspired Van Valkenburgh’s design of the Monk’s Garden at Boston’s Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum and Teardrop Park in Manhattan, the mini forest essentially shrinks the designer’s signature curvaceous concept into a residential setting.

Guests are greeted by a schist-shard path winding through a central-island miniature forest in this Martha’s Vineyard circular driveway. A froth of hellebores and ferns obscures the bases of the slender birches and stewartias to give Michael Van Valkenburgh’s design even more depth.



*“THE HOUSE HEIGHTENS
THE EXPERIENCE OF
THE LANDSCAPE,
PRIORITIZING THE SITE,
WATER, AND SKY.”*

—Project Manager Gentley Bondeson



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: From the front door, a sight line frames the waterside garden out back. The “sleeping rock” water feature along the mini-forest path was the client’s idea; it adds a muffled gurgle to the experience. The landscape weaves together curvaceous stone walls, conifers, and deciduous trees to vary volume and form.



Thompson and her team were completely onboard with the warm-welcome motif. Known for her contemporary designs, Thompson nonetheless veered traditional on this project to comply with neighborhood regulations. The shingled house, the homeowner’s first island getaway and first experience building a home from the ground up,



seemingly extends an embrace with two outstretched wings: between the garage and the front door, a covered passageway is draped in roses, while guest quarters form the other side of the U-shaped entry court. Aside from the forest, Van Valkenburgh treated the four-acre property to a series of destination gardens, naturalized woods, and meadows punctuated by sinewy stone walls.

The fact that Thompson earned two master's degrees, one in landscape

architecture and one in architecture, from Harvard University speaks to her desire to balance home and land. At 9,500 square feet, the house is extensive but wears its floor plan modestly. Gentley Bondeson, project manager and lead architect, explains: "The house heightens the experience of the landscape, prioritizing the site, water, and sky." Windows maximize light and views of the ocean and nearby Chappaquiddick. Porches and terraces—screened

To give the pool pavilion/outdoor kitchen additional interest, architect Maryann Thompson created a crossbeam double scissor truss. A rot-resistant black-locust deck stays cool in the heat of summer when bare feet are prevalent. Informal plantings create a textural tapestry.



ABOVE: The gardens turn meadow-like further from the house to frame the water view with a smattering of perennials and hydrangeas that plays against the strong vertical lines of ornamental grasses. **RIGHT:** The periphery grasses are left purposefully unmown to add volume and nurture insects through late autumn when they turn a ravishing flaxen hue.

and open—invite everyone outside. A dramatic pool pavilion/outdoor kitchen showcases crisscrossing beams above billowing shrubs chosen for blossom and texture.

During construction, Van Valkenburgh revisited the site often to refine the details, all the way down to the crunchy pine needle walkway that leads to an outdoor shower. “The feet deliver an experience that reacts throughout your body,” he explains, illustrating that, on this property, the journey is equal to the destination.

EDITOR’S NOTE: *For details, see Resources.*

LANDSCAPE DESIGN:

Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates

ARCHITECTURE:

Maryann Thompson Architects

INTERIOR DESIGN: Freya Interiors

BUILDER: Holmes Hole Builders

