



MARTHA'S  
VINEYARD NEW  
—— ISLAND HOMES

KEITH MOSKOW AND ROBERT LINN

INTRODUCTION BY WILLIAM MORGAN







# INTRODUCTION

Martha's Vineyard, that magical island nestled between Cape Cod and Nantucket, is an unlikely avatar of contemporary domestic American architecture.

Alone, Chilmark, one of the six towns that make up Dukes County, could provide enough material for a study of significant second-home design in the Northeast in the last decade. These new houses are tucked away among the narrow dirt tracks and scrub flora, ponds, and inlets of that hundred-square-mile area. The far-away-ness, the isolation, and hiddenness of this wildest and least arable part of the island is exactly the town's appeal. The varied Vineyard landscape that for centuries offered only a hardscrabble existence for fisherman and sheep farmers now provides the perfect canvas for the exercise of creating these handsome reflections of a bucolic and breathtakingly beautiful island.

Contemporary architecture came to Martha's Vineyard in the revolutionary 1960s, when architects arrived in search of affordable land upon which to build. Their own summer homes, retreats, and studios enriched the island's legacy of farmhouses, fisherman's shacks, and substantial mansions built on whaling fortunes, along with more modest late nineteenth-century resort cottages. Over the next forty years, the Vineyard became the playground of celebrities and the wealthy. But the warmer-month rusticators also included literati who encouraged themes of exceptional architectural design, all respecting the island's



varied ecologies and topographic patrimony. This story has been ably chronicled by Keith Moskow and Robert Linn in *Houses of Martha's Vineyard* and *Martha's Vineyard: Contemporary Living* and is now brought up to date with *New Island Homes*. All three volumes demonstrate that the island has been an incubator for some of the most outstanding residential architecture on the East Coast.

This selection of houses reflects the evolution of style and environmental sensitivity on the Vineyard over the past ten years, addressing the pressures of trying to maintain a small and fragile place whose population quadruples in the summer. Once the pioneers of modern design on the Vineyard were impecunious architects and academics, while today only the very wealthy can afford to build on what has become incredibly desirable real estate. Seemingly under siege, love of the special topography of moors and pine forests, rocky cliffs, and sandy shores has inspired a tradition of building that goes hand in hand with conservation and stewardship of the land.

The New England seashore dwelling has evolved since the earlier Moskow Linn books. The span of a decade demonstrates increased environmental awareness, and, given the cost of labor, materials, and transport required to build, there seems to be greater attention to detail and craftsmanship. Yet, the response to the landscape of the Vineyard, as well as its intellectual zeitgeist, has imposed a reassuring continuity of purpose.

That said, we ought no longer refer to the new houses of Martha's Vineyard as "regional." The designers represented here include island-based architects and

landscape architects, plus a group based in and around Boston. They are joined by colleagues from Seattle, New York, Cleveland, and Washington. Recognized talents such as Toshiko Mori, Tom Kundig, and Michael Van Valkenburgh alert us to the Vineyard's drawing power as an architectural research laboratory. While well-known architects give the island cachet, the Vineyard's fragility, along with restrictive building codes and significant costs, form a crucible that demands the best from everyone who designs on the island.

Although the island makes exacting demands upon those who build, a certain conservatism keeps the architects from being too experimental. *New Island Homes* can be divided into two general camps, traditional and modern, although they share similar characteristics. Cedar shingles are ubiquitous in all construction eras on the island. The muted gray weathered shakes, along with gambrel roofs, porches, and white clapboards, offer a familiarity that reinforces the idyll of family vacations, days of tennis and sailing, and drinks on the deck watching the sun go down over the ocean.

Agricultural structures such as barns and sheds inform many of the designs. Height restrictions, environmental considerations, and a dose of nostalgia are themes in a number of houses composed of series of human-scaled farm sheds. Barn-like configurations are ideal for housing multiple generations and also provide privacy and separateness for guests. Strong forms, "born out of utility and shelter," recall the eel-drying shacks of Menemsha, or the nine linked sheds of an Aquinnah beach house that "romantically takes its simple collection of forms from a gathering of fishing villages."

The penchant for the Vineyard vernacular precludes much historicism, with surprisingly few references to the shingle style, that inventive use of humble cedar shakes that found expression in posh watering holes such as Newport and Bar Harbor. One house explores "the line between modernity and tradition" with a tribute to the English arts and crafts architect C.F.A. Voysey. A stone house is "massed to suggest the idea of a farmstead," its rugged masonry echoing Yankee antecedents in Cornwall or Wales.

Other respectful nods to a more recent past honor the Vineyard's half-century of modernism. The "geometry of barns" overlooking Lambert's Cove strongly evokes the iconic Sea Ranch, progenitor of the eponymous shed-roof style. Next to the island's oldest working farm, an existing shed has been transformed into a poolside pavilion, while the main house displays solid modernist credentials, complete with brise-soleils, flat roofs, and insertion into the land worthy of Frank Lloyd Wright. Even the one prefabricated house is a hand-some exercise in modernism.

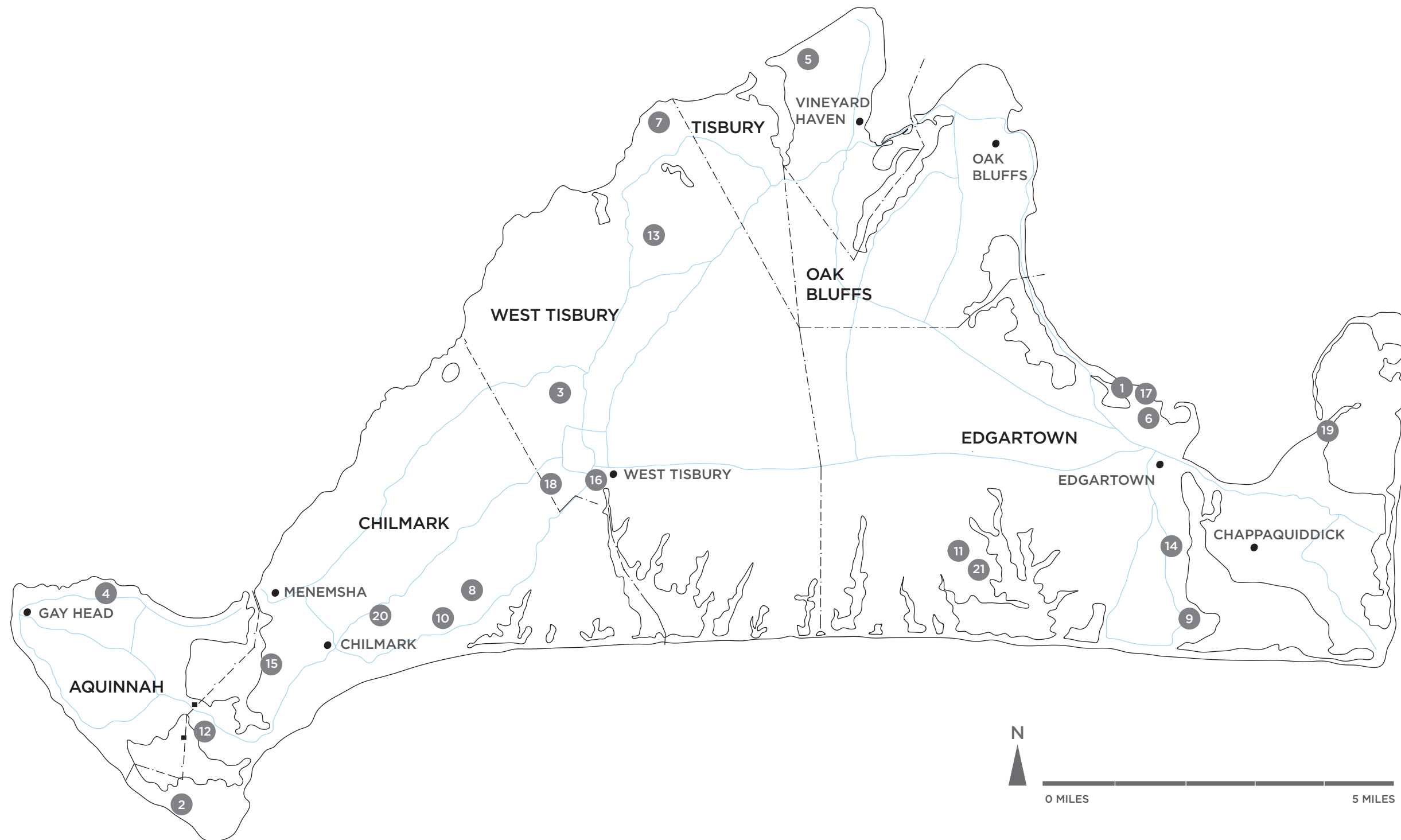
Knowing the pull Martha's Vineyard exerts upon its contemporary practitioners, it is no surprise that so many describe their work with phrases such as "traditional farmhouse aesthetics with modern form," "sailor meets farmer," or "independent modernism." Although these houses embrace the Vineyard aesthetic, there are a handful, such as one on Chappaquiddick, which would be exemplary examples of "high modern" anywhere. An array of glass pavilions, dramatic cantilevers, and a sliding shutter system to defend against storms marks another contemporary classic.

All but two of these new houses are constructed of wood. The exterior wall, and often the inside as well, of the new Vineyard home is cedar, sometimes yellow, mostly red, and sometimes vertically applied, mostly shingled. The spirit of the economical (and easily replaced) shingle still prevails. There may be some steel framing, Vermont slate flooring, concrete foundations, but overall these are houses of wood.

Today no architect would build on the Vineyard without careful attention to sustainability and energy efficiency, with all design consciously harnessed to minimize a house's impact on the land. The real focus is the landscape, and it forms the overarching theme of this book. From the flat ground of Edgartown to the bluffs of Aquinnah, few islands offer the combination of seascape, woods, cliffs, fields, and moors. To travel across the island is like unfolding a painted scroll variously decorated with pastoral or dramatic scenery. Whether it is visible at the end of a field, tucked into the scrub oak, or commanding a view of sea, the way a house responds to the land is of primary importance.

To design and build houses on Martha's Vineyard is to pay homage to the unique landscape and to the rich patrimony created by previous architects. *New Island Homes* recognizes that responsibility to the island, the challenge of enriching such a special place while at the same time protecting it. Keith Moskow and Robert Linn bring these threads together and allow us to share in the larger tapestry while maintaining the island privacy that these patrons sought.

—WILLIAM MORGAN



- 1 BLUFF HOUSE
- 2 STONE HOUSE
- 3 THE OAKS
- 4 BEACH HOUSE
- 5 OVERLOOK HOUSE
- 6 HALF GLASS HOUSE
- 7 LAMBERT'S COVE HOUSE
- 8 HOUSE ABOVE THE SOUTH SHORE
- 9 KATAMA BEACH HOUSE
- 10 VINEYARD FARMHOUSE
- 11 NEBRASKA BY THE SEA
- 12 CHILMARK HOUSE
- 13 MODERN FARMHOUSE
- 14 KATAMA BAY HOUSE
- 15 MENEMSHA POND HOUSE
- 16 MEADOW HOUSE
- 17 VINEYARD COVE HOUSE
- 18 TOWN COVE RETREAT
- 19 ISLAND HOUSE
- 20 OCEAN'S EDGE
- 21 GREAT POND HOUSE





# THE OAKS

WEST TISBURY /  
2012

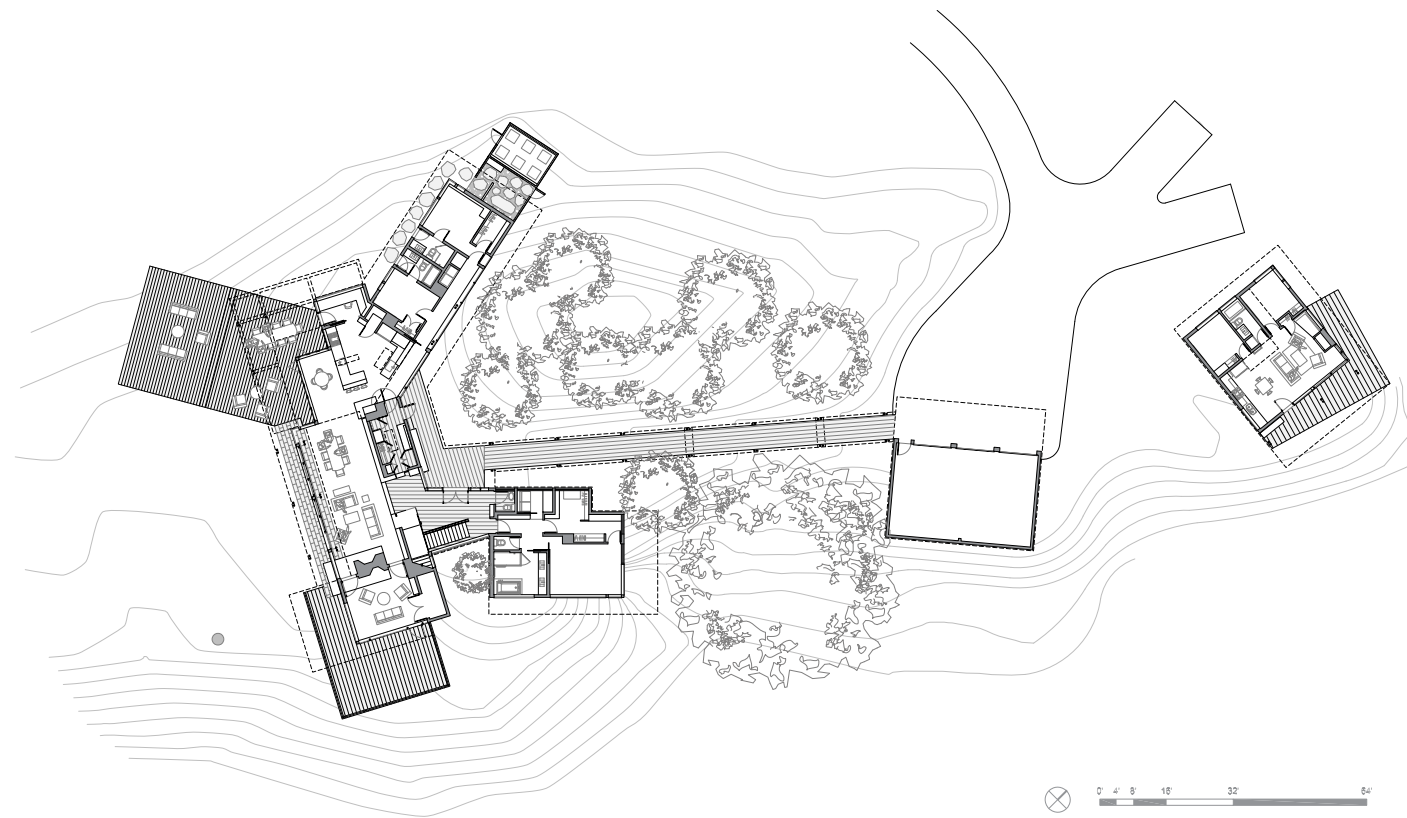
MARYANN THOMPSON ARCHITECTS

The plan of this woodland house wraps the existing hilltop knoll, rather than dominating the top. This siting strategy allows for the primary reading, and figure of the project, upon approach, to be that of the landscape—the ferns, trees, and the sloped ground of the site. The house remains mysterious and de-objectified, and the landscape is perceived as the primary object of the project.

The interior of the house develops along an unfolding

spatial sequence that constantly orients and reorients the viewer to the site in moving through the spaces, knitting the site and the house together. The entry orients axially to a wild highbush blueberry; turning to the right, the path unfolds into the main living area, which is oriented to the low sculptural branches of the large oaks at the top of the hill and angled to the south to capture sunlight. Overhangs and trellises shield the interior from the summer sun, but they are sized to let





SITE PLAN



PRECEDING PAGES AND ABOVE: Nestled into the oak forest, the house responds to the landscape in form, color, and material.





in winter light. The light shelf under the clerestory is topped with a mirror that throws a line of light, dappled with the play of leaves in its reflection, onto the ceiling, bringing the patterns of the site deep into the structure.

The house is perforated with light and air. Clerestory windows bring light in from above. Columns are doubled to hold space and a slice of view between them. The stair is kept light and airy and reads like a bridge. The intent is to create a house that is nestled into its woodland setting and treads lightly on that setting both physically and psychologically.

The U-shaped house has its main living areas at the center. Flanking the living/ dining room space is the kitchen at one end and the screened porch at the other. The principal bedroom suite with a second-floor study forms one wing and the guest rooms occupy the other wing. Both wings flank the main living areas, and all are outward-facing to take in the views through, and dappled light of, the surrounding forest ecosystem.

A garage and a guesthouse beyond the bedroom wing are pearls strung on the necklace of the plan.

The house responds to the site in its material palette. Cedar shiplap siding is untreated to weather to gray, matching the natural textures of the woods. The wood windows will also weather to gray. The moss-covered boulders clustered at the edge of the clearing help to shape the outdoor space, and their colors inform the light gray paving stones, the maple floor, the integral colored plaster of the chimney, and the green glass accents.

OPPOSITE: Sliding glass doors and clerestory windows open the interior to the terrace and the sky.

OVERLEAF: The solid mass of the fireplace and chimney contrasts with the glazed wall overlooking the woods.







Custom shelving displaying a diverse collection of art and decorative objects wraps a storage room next to the entrance.





Tucked behind the main living space is a more intimate study.

