

Confident Without





A large mirror bounces the color white from the upstairs hallway into the living room. The brick fireplace is painted the same color to maximize the effect. *Opposite:* The original saltbox house was enlarged in 1994. A swag of pink roses adorns the new entrance.

the white house

Flooded with light, this Long Island saltbox is classic country modern.



WRITTEN BY
JULIE MICHAELS
PHOTOGRAPHED BY
KING AU



From the outside, the gray cedar-shingled saltbox looks every bit a country classic. Located in the Long Island hamlet of Sagaponack, it's surrounded by potato fields. And it's so close to the ocean you can smell the sea air. But walk over the threshold, and you're in for a surprise. Instead of tiny rooms and cozy fireplaces, an open floor plan reveals a broad expanse of pine floors, white upholstered furniture, and walls of windows that let in the light.

"Sometimes I feel like I'm living inside a sundial," says freelance art director Richard Martino, who bought the beach cottage as a weekend retreat in 1982. "I tend to follow the light as it moves through the house during the day: morning coffee in the living room, cocktails in the garden room—wherever the sun is shining."

There were few light-filled rooms when Richard began decorating the 1,800-square-foot, 1½-story cottage almost 20 years ago. "The first thing I did was tear down the fake beams, sand the floors, and get out my paintbrush," he recalls.

He painted ceilings and walls a single shade—a linen white—and coated pine floors with polyurethane. Keeping with his minimal palette, chairs and couches were upholstered in white cotton. "Maybe it's the art director in me," says Richard, "but I love white. I like the cleanness of it, the way light reacts to it in a room."

In 1994, Richard decided to add a two-car garage and a new master bedroom to the small cottage. Eager to entertain more, he also wanted to enlarge the kitchen, add a dining room, and double the living room. "My architect, Will Schulz, suggested I rip out the entire

east wall of the house," he explains. Extending one end of the tiny cottage's footprint to envelope an outdoor deck, Richard then replaced the wall with glass—a mix of French doors and tall casement windows.

The resulting open space could be mistaken for an airy urban loft. But even with the addition of some distinctly modern 1950s-style furniture, the rooms retain a country feel. "The saltbox style of architecture is so strongly country," says Richard, "as are the beamed ceilings, pine floors, and painted pine walls, that you can risk using modern furniture without losing the warmth and friendliness of the space."

To keep the cottage's country charm, Richard made some deliberate decisions. In selecting windows and doors, for example, he chose ones with mullions, "even though they're harder to clean," because they complement the architecture. For furniture, he mingled antique pine cupboards and a sleigh bed with contemporary coffee tables and a 1950s Heywood-Wakefield dining table and chairs—all of which share pale finishes and a streamlined style. Other country elements complete the look: sisal floor coverings, lots of baskets, and, in the kitchen, butcher-block counters.

To add contrast to the rooms, Richard chose black as an accent color. It edges his sisal rugs, covers a leather sofa in his new bedroom, and appears in lampshades and art pieces throughout the house.

For extra color, Richard looks to the great outdoors. "In summer, all the French doors and casement windows open out," he explains. "As a result, the landscape becomes my wallpaper."

1. A garden room occupies one corner of what used to be an outdoor deck. New windows on the north and west sides of the house capture afternoon light, which warms a bluestone floor. Upholstered armchairs, along with a wood-burning Swedish stove, make the space cozy. 2. Richard Martino is an ardent collector of chairs, like the contemporary chair by Harry Bertoia in the photo below him. 3. A chimney rises from the original saltbox. 4. The doorway leading to a new cantilevered staircase was once the front entry to the old cottage.