

Classic American SHINGLE

Rambling and free-form, with its air of informality and focus on family comfort, this architectural style, on discreet display everywhere in the Hamptons, is as American as a buffalo nickel.

By Stuart Disston, AIA



SHINGLE STYLE



I grew up summering in Quogue and learning to paint watercolors there. From the moment I could drive, I would tour the Hamptons, looking over the hedges at the summer compounds. My favorite houses were always the Shingle Style residences, with their long, sweeping roof lines, their rambling, roomy porches, their spacious interiors. The shingles seemed to cover these houses like skin, moving and undulating over the various architectural forms the owners had chosen to include (these houses were not derivative copies of any particular style). Large bay and double-height windows and roof shapes from gables to gambrels spoke of timeless ease and individual character.



The Shingle Style is as American as the buffalo nickel. It was born on the East Coast and parented by the Queen Anne movement of the 1870s (a style often credited to the English architect Richard Norman Shaw) and the Colonial Revival Style (which flourished briefly during that period).

Queen Anne residences, which were usually large, made their appearance in the wealth-producing "Gilded Age." They featured an eclectic mix of materials and forms: brick, stone, shingles (often slate shingles), half-timber detailing, many gables and dormers, banded windows, and intricate, detailed leaded glass. The Greek Revival, Colonial Revival, Georgian, and other traditional styles that we see along the East Coast have a prescribed form, requiring extensive

In Westhampton Beach, a windmill was transformed into a pool house, and renovating this 1880s house included a wraparound porch and a gambrel roof.



hallways, closed rooms, and an air of rigid formality. Queen Anne houses featured a more open plan. A large hall—often two stories high—opened up to the various living room parlors.

Colonial houses influenced Shingle Style through the many additions added to the old structures over time. This additive quality allowed for an organic feeling that the architects of the period liked. It is exemplified in the simple gables of McKim, Mead & White's 1887 "William Low House," in Bristol, Massachusetts, and the complex massing of Peabody & Stearns's 1883 "Kraggsyde," in Manchester, Massachusetts, which looked like a Colonial house that had been fancifully expanded over many years.

Architects used shingles to convey the impression of the passage of time. To attain a weathered look on a new building, some architects even had the cedar shakes dipped in milk paint, dried, and then installed, in order to leave an aged tinge to the surfaces.

What is important to note about Shingle Style is the continuous and almost seamless skin of the shingles these houses wear. The shingles allowed the surfaces of the structure to sweep and bow, undulate and move, uniquely encompassing the best of the Queen Anne and Colonial architectures: the expressive asymmetries, volumes, and additive qualities of each.

What was American about this sort of structure? It embodied a cultural

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democracy that was essentially American. The Shingle Style celebrated the individual. Every home can be as unique as its owner. These residences were not grand or pretentious, and the houses were not built to mimic any particular style. Many Shingle Style homes—and certainly the best ones—were not large.

The particular charm of a Shingle Style house is its structural openness and its focus on use and *function* rather than on formality, a novel concept in the 1880s. Shingle Style houses are amorphous, and therefore very accommodating to informal gatherings and a casual lifestyle. The rooms are more open, with a visual connection from one to another, and often they lack extensive hall-

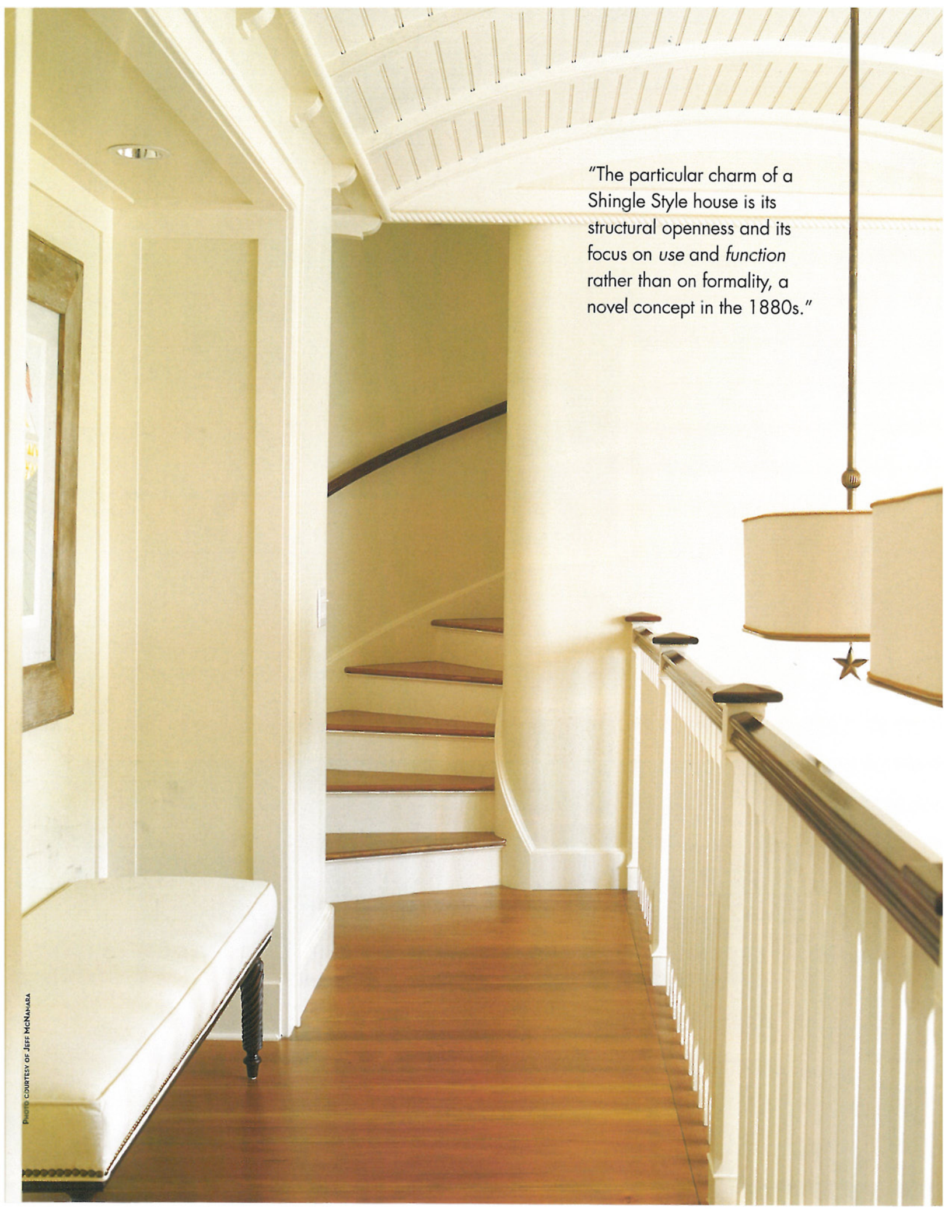
ways. That openness, plus the style's versatile roof system (gambrel, hippe and gabled roofs all work well), gives the architect many design choices and opportunities for expression.

And they were built with the intention of gathering the members of an extended family together under one roof. (After the Civil War, the expansion of the railroads expanded the reach of any family that wanted to establish a summer residence.) There would be a bay window for sitting, an inglenook for enjoying the cozy fire, extensions of the living space for music and games, a large landing on the staircase with a bench for reading, verandas for taking the summer air.

BELOW: The dining room in a new Shingle Style house in Rye maximizes the water view with single-pane doors. **OPPOSITE:** A vaulted ceiling and painted paneling lend warmth to the second-floor landing of a house in Quogue.





A photograph of a Shingle Style interior. The scene shows a curved staircase with dark wood treads and a white balustrade. A large, white, fluted column stands next to the stairs. The floor is made of dark wood. In the foreground, there is a white cushioned bench with a dark leg. The ceiling is white with a curved, ribbed design. A pendant light with a white shade hangs from the ceiling. The walls are white with a simple molding.

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After falling into a decline with architectural patrons in the first part of the 1900s, the seeds of the Shingle Style were reborn in 1955 with Vincent Scully's book, *The Shingle Style and the Stick Style*, and his subsequent book, published in 1974, *The Shingle Style*, which refers to the shingle designs of Robert A.M. Stern and Robert Venturi. In the late 1980s, at the beginning of a new age of wealth, came another revival of Shingle Style.

Today we live far less formally than Americans did in the 19th century, and Shingle Style accommodates an informal lifestyle beautifully. For the past 30 years, its appeal has been universal, for houses of any size. In designing a Shingle Style house, I work very hard to have all the public spaces connected. In the late 1800s, the kitchen area was secluded, used by the staff only; today it comprises the family room and kitchen. I tie the kitchen and family room together visually and put them adjacent to the liv-

OPPOSITE: Shingles form a seamless skin around this bell-shaped Westhampton Beach roof. **RIGHT:** Versatile shingles undulate over the horizontal and vertical surfaces. **BELOW:** The stone-and-brick paving of the porte-cochere of this Westhampton Beach house (left) creates an "outdoor foyer."







Although this house in Lyme, Connecticut, is relatively small, it has a two-story central living room, which makes the interior feel spacious.

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ing room, rather than separate them by a hall or dining room. That way, circulation runs directly between the more formal and the informal parts of the house. No rooms are relegated off to the sidelines.

In our firm's work, we tend to keep our interiors light, the painted woodwork reflecting the brighter, less formal spirit of our times. The interiors of the early Shingle houses were more often natural wood, which is visually heavier. For me, solving the problems of scale and proportion on the trim system of the interior is also key. Paneling that is two-thirds of the wall's height and having transoms over windows and doors add a sense of scaled proportion—as does, of course, adeptly incorporating cabinetry into a room's design.

The property's landscape design should "furnish" the outside as the inside is furnished, to invite the use and enjoyment of the residence. So I connect the house to the exterior landscape, with its porches and terraces, both visually and physically, by drawing the eye to the exterior "furniture"—walls to sit on, garden walls, and exterior fireplaces. These elements along with hedges, garden gates, and fences, can define and furnish exterior rooms. **TME**

Stuart Disston, AIA, is one of three partners at Austin Patterson Disston Architects, with offices in Southport, Connecticut, and Quogue, Long Island. He designed his first Shingle Style house on the Greenwich waterfront in 1985; that work won him his first American Institute of Architects design award, and he has been designing Shingle Style houses ever since. 203.255.4031 (Connecticut); 631-653-1481 (Long Island); www.apdarchitects.com