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GLOBAL PROPERTIES

## A Dramatic Renovation On Martha's Vineyard Lists For \$4.4 Million

By Nicky Rampley-Clarke

After a down-to-studs overhaul spanning several years and costing several million, a once-tired West Tisbury cottage now stands reborn as a full pond-view Cape classic rich in bespoke detail.



Built in 1988, the three-bedroom home underwent a complete renovation—now it feels more Martha's Vineyard than ever. TEA LANE ASSOCIATES

It wasn't love at first sight for David Behnke and Paul Doherty—who met over drinks in New York and have been together for more than 40 years—at least not when it came to their home in the conservation area of West Tisbury in Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts.

“We both realized that it needed a lot of work,” David recalls. “It was completely brown—inside and out—and nothing much had been done to it since it was built in 1988. The primary bedroom was too small, the living room didn't have space for my piano and the kitchen and bathrooms needed to be ripped out. It had several things going for it though—good bones, a massive kitchen, four acres of land and, most importantly, a view of the gorgeous pond. We both love being on water.”



Owners David Behnke and Paul Doherty may have dropped anchor on the island in 2013, but their Vineyard credentials stretch back decades. TEA LANE ASSOCIATES

But dissent was rippling through the ranks. David thought it was *exactly* the right house, while Paul threatened divorce. “Luckily, with a little coaxing and an agreed list of things we'd renovate, he eventually decided it was the right house,” David says with a sigh of relief.

The couple—David a classical singer who retrained at business school and became a managing director at JP Morgan, and Paul a professional actor-turned-photographer—are no strangers to buying, gutting and selling homes (while usually agreeing about real estate). In addition to other properties, they maintained a penthouse in Central Park West and a 1920s Federal Revival weekend home in Washington, Connecticut, until they sold up and moved to the exclusive island



off Cape Cod in 2013. David had been coming for years before meeting Paul and they began visiting together in the late 90s.



A new five-foot island reconfigured the kitchen's flow, turning pass-through space into the home's magnetic north.  
TEA LANE ASSOCIATES

David says: “The first property we bought here was a 100-year-old house on William Street in Vineyard Haven. When I began thinking about ‘real’ retirement, we decided our next move would be to downsize and move out of the town into the countryside. We were just about to list the house when Covid hit. But a broker for one of the properties we had looked at prior noted that we were selling and told our agent that he had a buyer.”

The couple agreed they would do just the one showing—in gloves and masks, of course—and if nothing came of it, they’d wait for the pandemic to play out. But those first viewers made an offer and, after some negotiating, David and Paul accepted. The only problem? They were about to become homeless. “We were told that there was a house going on the market the following week,” David recalls, “and that we could see it on the Thursday before it was due to be listed on the Saturday. We had the viewing and, after 24 hours of intense discussions and several Johnnie Walker Blacks on the rocks, went to contract two days later.”

**“As with most projects, you end up doing a lot more than you ever imagined.”**

The couple wasted no time in getting to work, starting with a complete overhaul of the electrics, plumbing and windows—specifically, the dated skylights that almost put Paul off entirely—followed by a reconfiguration of the space and the addition of multiple dormers to create the classic façade of a Cape Cod house. “What started out as a \$500,000 project to update the kitchen and bathrooms turned into a multi-million-dollar gutting of the entire house,” David says rather candidly. “As with most projects, you end up doing a lot more than you ever imagined.” As evidenced in the primary suite, which the couple extended to accommodate walk-in closets and a larger bathroom. It was during this process that they decided to ‘cathedral’ the bedroom to the upper rafters to make the bedroom feel even more open and luxurious. David remembers the nine-month construction process as a series of “Well, we’ve come this far, so why not?” decisions.



A newly vaulted ceiling elevates the bedroom with a grander sense of space. TEA LANE ASSOCIATES

Elsewhere, oak fireplace surrounds were replaced with modern iterations, the kitchen was renovated to house an expansive island with a utility room and access to a new two-level back deck, and interior doors were removed to create a better flow across the entire main level. Other major projects included installing oak and limestone flooring, replacing the roof and exterior cladding and removing the screen porch to expand the interior—allowing for the addition of a conservatory and a larger living room with a nook for the piano and views of the pond—before finally turning their attention to the outdoor space.





Following a dramatic renovation, the primary bath pairs a deep soaking tub with basketweave tile underfoot and walls clad in crisp shiplap. TEA LANE ASSOCIATES

“We’ve done a huge amount of landscaping to give the garden structure,” says David. “There’s a natural meadow leading down to the pond, more formal gardens around the house, a large sitting area that leads to the raised-bed vegetable garden, a small fenced orchard and a dedicated area for our dog, a Gordon Setter called Rufus, to play in.” Key to what the couple achieved was to ensure the garden has year-round interest with something blooming most months among evergreens and hollies to keep winters green and vibrant.

The transformation of the interiors is an inspiration for anyone considering a renovation. While the couple’s tastes and style have naturally evolved over their four decades together, David admits that their preferred look is “still pretty classic. One thing that’s remained consistent is the color of our favorite wall paint, Benjamin Moore HC 1529 Gray. It changes in different light and is perfect for art.”



Formal gardens weave specimen trees from Polly Hill with 5,000 spring daffodils, keeping every season in bloom.

TEA LANE ASSOCIATES

And what art it is. As you'd expect from a couple who ran an art consultancy business and owned a gallery together before arriving in Martha's Vineyard, the house is filled with curios collected over the years. Their Washington home was furnished almost entirely in 18th-century Persian carpets, antique American furniture and Impressionist art. "Gradually, we began adding mid-century American art, classical Chinese blue-and-white porcelain, Chinese deco chairs, Ming furniture and Japanese scrolls, woodblock prints and ceramics," David says. "Along the way, modern touches were incorporated, so today our style is pretty eclectic."





Beyond the manicured edge, untamed fields and wild-blueberry meadows wander down to a mirror-still pond.  
TEA LANE ASSOCIATES

The couple have loved living in the home they’ve so meticulously created—and curated—whether it’s cooking in the kitchen, enjoying cocktails in the living room, gathering for dinner with friends on the back deck or retreating to the den with Rufus. But now, David and Paul are turning the page to their next chapter in Essex, Connecticut, with a property that, rather surprisingly, doesn’t require a major refurb. “Famous last words,” laughs David. Their message for the next custodians of their beautiful art-filled home surrounded by daffodils this spring? “Love it as much as we have and build on what we’ve done, changing it to reflect who you are and how you want to use it.”

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