

PREMIERE ISSUE

WaterfrontTM home&design

Room with a View
in St. Michaels

St. Croix Hideaway

Nantucket Style
in Hilton Head

Guide to 59 new
waterfront communities

SUMMER 2005

\$4.95US \$5.95CAN

51 >



DISPLAY UNTIL SEPTEMBER 2005

Shopping, landscaping
and bright ideas for
shoreline living

From the Lighthouse

*A historic beacon on Maryland's Eastern Shore
inspires the design of a waterfront guesthouse*

*By Deborah K. Dietsch
Photography by Maxwell MacKenzie*



T

he first rule of architecture school is to never work for your in-laws," says New York architect Robert Miller with a smile. "I was lucky that the

two liked my idea so much that they wanted to build it." In-laws Grace and Don Mulvihill also consider themselves fortunate in realizing Miller's design, a captivating guest house on the banks of the Miles River just outside St. Michaels, Maryland. "It's become a wonderful gathering place for the entire family," says Grace Mulvihill.

Empty nesters who commute from Bethesda to St. Michaels on weekends, the Mulvihills are parents of six grown daughters—the third oldest, Gigi, is married to Miller. They built the freestanding addition to provide extra room for visitors and large family get-togethers during the summer and holidays. "We thought it would be nice to have a private, separate place for guests to get away and be near the water," says Don Mulvihill, a Washington lawyer. But far from being off-limits, the picturesque building with its airy living room has become a hub of shared activities. "We have parties here and family games," says Grace Mulvihill. "The grandkids use it as a playhouse."



© MICHAEL VENIURA

Stretching toward the Miles River, the guesthouse is entered through a porch enclosed by latticework (right). Bedroom suites are reached from a gallery with six arched doorways (previous spread). St. Michaels' lighthouse (above) inspired the pavilion at the end closest to the water.

Architecture: Robert J. Miller, New York, New York
Interior Design: Jamie Merida, Bountiful, Easton, Maryland
Contractor: Ilex, Easton, Maryland





The long, narrow guesthouse is pushed to the side of the property and built a few feet from the rear of the main house to extend toward the river. "I didn't want to obscure the water views from the house," explains Miller. Simply organized, the clapboard cottage houses two bedroom suites within a gabled shed.



© IEN DE PINS

The bedrooms are reached from a sunny hallway along one side that's designed as a picture gallery. As if designed to symbolize the Mulvihill daughters (Miller says it was unintentional), six arched doorways lead from this hallway-gallery to a brick patio. At the end of the hallway through another arch is the building's main attraction: a two-story, octagonal room that opens to water views through paired windows.

Inspiration for the design came from St. Michael's most recognizable landmark, the Hooper Strait Lighthouse. Built in 1879, the hexagonal structure was originally located 60 miles south of the town's harbor but after being condemned, it was moved in 1966 to Navy Point where it is now part of the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum. Miller says he drew on the architecture of the historic lighthouse to create "a beacon—both literally and figuratively" for passing sailors and for Mulvihill relatives finding their way back home.

Striped walls in one of the bedrooms (opposite) are repeated in the bedding and shower curtain. Ceilings mirror the pitched roof to add height. Frequent guests include the six Mulvihill daughters (above), pictured at Gigi's wedding.

Though the guesthouse wing is octagonal and firmly planted on the ground, its architecture of pitched metal roofs and cupola recalls the distinctive profile of the St. Michael's lighthouse. The likeness is especially apparent at night when the small pavilion lights up like a lantern. Round windows resembling portholes punctuate the façades to reinforce the nautical feeling.

Inside, the spaces are small, well-proportioned and filled with charming details. "It's kind of like a dollhouse," notes Miller, whose experience working for noted New York architects Michael Graves and Robert Stern is clearly evident in this design. Outlined in beadboard and decorative moldings, the rooms translate the maritime style of the old lighthouse into a more elegant expression.

From the main house, the guest quarters are entered through a small porch framed by latticework. In the hallway-gallery, white walls are hung with bright beach scenes painted by Grace Mulvihill. From this space, beadboard-covered doors open to the two bedrooms where slanted ceilings give the illusion of more space. In the adjacent bathrooms, curved ceilings over the tubs add architectural interest to these small spaces.

The same attention to detail is applied to the octagonal living space. Here, the nautical theme continues in beadboard-trimmed walls, bracketed moldings and an aqua-painted cathedral ceiling. In the corner of the room furthest away from the water, a small kitchen with a porthole window provides a place to prepare a snack.

After their son-in-law's design was built, the Mulvihills tapped interior designer Jamie Merida to decorate the rooms. Merida, who owns Bountiful, a store based in nearby Easton, had previously remodeled the couple's main house in a cheerful French country look. For the guesthouse, he applied a similarly upbeat palette to more casual furnishings. "The building is almost like a folly for an English country house," says Merida. "Because it's a folly, the interiors could be more quirky. Each room is its own fantasy."

In one bedroom, the designer painted the walls in bold stripes of navy and white, matched them in the bedding and mounted an antique corbel on the wall to create a bedside table. In the second bedroom, he reflected the owners' love of French country in red and yellow toile bedding.



Enclosed by paired windows, the lighthouse-inspired living space offers a relaxing place to watch the river. Interior designer Jamie Merida transformed the once sparsely furnished, octagonal room (above) into a comfortable setting for cocktails, games and parties (opposite) with chairs and ottomans upholstered in bright fabrics.

But the octagonal, lighthouse-inspired space initially had him stumped. "It took a long time for us to decide what to do with that room," says Merida. "At first, we saw it as a living room with sofas, then we thought it should be like a summer dining room. Eventually, it ended up as a place to have cocktails."

Grouped at the center are four British Colonial-style armchairs and cube ottomans upholstered in vibrant, striped and seashell-printed fabrics that are arranged on a wool sisal rug. Matching floor cushions are stacked around the room's perimeter for extra seating. "Our grandchildren mostly use them to slide down the hallway," notes Grace Mulvihill.

On summer evenings, the Mulvihills enjoy sitting in this airy space watching the sailing vessels in the river. The two are hardly ever alone, however, as Grace's brother lives across the street and their daughters frequently visit with husbands and kids in tow. "Because this room is octagonal, it's great for playing games in a circle," says Miller, who often travels down from New York with wife Gigi and two young daughters. "We even use the water views out the window as clues during charades." And, the architect adds, his in-laws are happy to join in the fun. ☺

Maxwell MacKenzie is an architectural photographer based in Washington, DC.



© BLOUGH SCHWAP