

hamptonstyle

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Bruce Nagel

The master Hamptons architect invites us in to discuss his craft and life on the East End. Come inside...

by Cindi Cook

HOUSE WATCHING. It could qualify as the next great spectator sport, at least in this corner of the world. Making buildings that blend deliciously with the rich beauty of the Hamptons is tricky especially in a community that values in that rich beauty, as well as its preservation. The dwellings that dot the landscape of the East End do the trick better than most. Century-old farmhouses abut recent construction, all against the Hamptons sky. Those in search of their dream abode can probably find it—or build it—here.

Few architects understand the importance of melding the organic with the manmade better than Bruce Nagel. A little background on Bruce: He was raised in San Antonio, achieving his Bachelors in Architecture from the University of Texas at Austin and his Masters from Harvard. Even at the age of 15, Nagel knew what he wanted to be.

"My high school offered an architectural program," he says. "I did summer internships and put myself through college. It's always been a passion."

Nagel has made the East End his home for twenty years now. He is known nationally but is most celebrated among his peers in the architectural community. A few projects have taken him to other parts of the country, and plenty of opportunity has arisen to travel abroad to create beautiful buildings. Nagel finds enough opportunity in the area though, to keep him flush with work. He has done over 400 houses, 300 in



the Hamptons alone.

A glimpse of any Nagel-designed structure surely gives one pause—his work is varied, but tends toward the modern. Many of the projects built out here reflect the past, embodying a rustic appearance, while possessing modern amenities that only twenty-first century construction can

than be categorized, he defers. “My purpose is to be a reflection of my clients’s needs and dreams. I ask them to bring in scrapbooks, photos, things that mean something to them, I don’t just do the same thing over and over.”

Nagel has taught at Harvard and the Boston Architectural Center, and been a guest critic at the Universities of

renovations to the Maidstone Club, Faneuil Hall in Boston, the Handicap Special School of the Child Development Center of the Hamptons—even Girl Scout Camps! Current work includes the Jewish Center of the Hamptons as well as the First Presbyterian Church of East Hampton, both of which he says are immensely gratifying.

Lifestyles in the Hamptons can embrace the opulent at times, and many people have the ability (and the budgets) to fashion what they want. Nagel tells of one recent client, Linda and Jeffrey Chodorow (famed for Manhattan restaurants Tuscan Steak, Rocco’s, and Alain Ducasse’s Mix), who had a 35-foot-tall tower built onto their house—crowned with a hot tub—and a two-lane bowling alley and race car track installed in the basement.

Other famous folk have chosen him to fashion their Hamptons homes as well: The Blackstone Group’s Stephen Schwarzman; Debbie and Michael Culp; and Michael Lynne, of New Line Cinema, Bedell and Corey Creek

Vineyards—and Paul Goldberger, architectural critic of *The New York Times*. A tad nerveracking? “Not very,” reports Nagel. “It was just like working for any other client.”

As for community preservation, Nagel is all about it. “There’s a strong need to have a conservationist attitude toward growing our communities,” he says with conviction. “All of us have a responsibility.” Nagel feels that construction on the precious land of the Hamptons should be done with great respect by all parties involved.

Is there no place like home? Nagel thinks so. Separating the public world from the private is what it’s all about. The house is the most important place, Nagel feels. “It’s where people live.” ♦



accommodate. The more forward-thinking look as if made for a movie set, so sleek are their lines. They are structures with striking dimension—buildings with stature. Nagel’s creative process is linear, letting ideas evolve out of the needs and desires of both parties. His true inspiration, he says, comes from his clients.

“It’s enormously important to me to solve the problem, so to speak, to put the pieces of the puzzle together,” says Nagel, which includes asking a lot of personal questions to make even the tiniest detail realized.

Can you spot a Nagel house on sight? “One of the things I’ve spent a huge amount of energy avoiding is having a ‘style,’” answers Nagel. Rather

Pennsylvania, Virginia and Yale among others. Early on he spent time at the firms of two architectural greats: Richard Meier and Charles Gwathmey. “These were really rich opportunities that opened up my horizons to how creative one can actually be,” says Nagel. When the opportunity presented itself, Nagel took the leap to go it alone. Carter Evans, a client, wanted to build a large house in Greenwich. After looking at some big name architects, he interviewed Nagel, who got the project—along with an \$8 million check to start.

His projects (which have garnered him 19 awards) run the gamut: the School of Architecture at RISD, William Doyle Gallery in New York,