



SEA CHANGE

BEHIND THE FAÇADE OF HIS HISTORIC HOUSE IN PROVINCETOWN, FASHION FORCE ROBERT DUFFY TAKES A FRESH, FREEWHEELING APPROACH TO A BEACHSIDE GETAWAY

TEXT BY DAVID COLMAN · PHOTOGRAPHY BY WILLIAM WALDRON
STYLED BY CARLOS MOTA



Facing page: Robert Duffy, president of Marc Jacobs, at his Provincetown, Massachusetts, home, which was renovated by architect Stephan Jaklitsch and decorated by Richard McGeehan. This page: The living room's reproduction Paul Laszlo chairs by Donzella are upholstered in Holly Hunt's Cuba leather, and the Nepalese rug is from Rug & Kilim. The fireplace wall is sheathed in green slate with a surround of ceramic tiles from Urban Archaeology, and the ceiling is of mahogany tongue-and-groove paneling; the 1955 painting is by Myron Stout, and the pottery figure is from the Eastern Han dynasty. See Resources.



WE'D ALL LIKE TO THINK we design our homes for ourselves. But if hooked up to a lie detector, plenty of us would have to confess: Yes, we also care if they look nice to others. Who doesn't?

Robert Duffy, for one. The longtime business partner of fashion designer Marc Jacobs, Duffy knows a thing or two about style, and you'd expect his getaway in Provincetown, Massachusetts, to be a major design statement, either a gleaming-white modernist masterpiece or some historic Cape Cod-to-the-raffers replica filled with glass fishing buoys and old oars. The fact that he has been coming to Provincetown since he was a teenager and even remembers this house during its incarnation as a swinging 1960s pad only increases expectations.

But the Manhattan-based Duffy wanted an idiosyncratic retreat, not a prescribed fantasy. So he did that rare thing in the design world: With the help of architect Stephan Jaklitsch and designer Richard McGeehan, he simply built a great space for himself and all the

The beach-level sitting area features a 1930s Indian armchair and a sofa covered in Holly Hunt leather; the mahogany center table is Art Deco, the painting is by Tracey Sanford Anderson, and the statue is an 18th-century Vietnamese grave marker. Facing page, from top: Vintage pendant lights from Historical Materialism, an antique Belgian butcher's table from Michael Trapp, an Aga range, and an Abbaka hood in the kitchen; the shelves hold a collection of Clarice Cliff pottery, and the walls are painted in Benjamin Moore's Ice Cap. In the breakfast room, Indian teak chairs surround a 1960s dining table; the antique Egyptian chandelier is from Liza Sherman Antiques, and the floor and wall are paved in Moroccan-style ceramic mosaic tiles. See Resources.



things he loves. "I'm a collector," he says. "My architect likes it when things are minimal, but I'm more comfortable in a room that has the things I love in it. Basically, what I more or less ended up saying was, 'This is my stuff, let's work with it.'" Fortunately, McGeehan and Jaklitsch were up for the challenge. "It's very personal and very passionate," McGeehan says. "Few people have the confidence to love what they love."

Even so, Duffy didn't want his new home to stick out in the historic neighborhood. (And not many places in America are more historic—the Mayflower dropped anchor mere yards from Duffy's door.) "I care about P-town," he says, using the common moniker. "This is a big house, and I wanted it to disappear."

Like many in the area, the building, a traditional Cape, had been expanded and modernized in ill-advised fits and starts. By the time Duffy bought it four years ago, the floor plan made no sense, the interior was covered in marble tile, and chandeliers hung everywhere. Old Cape Cod it wasn't.

The place still features the same long, low, white-clapboard front. But much of the structure and its additions turned out to be unstable and had to be razed. The beach side was transformed with a large

mahogany-and-glass façade. And the contrasts and curiosities continue inside. The interiors flow from colorful space to colorful space but rarely solidify into actual rooms or bloom into wide-open expanses. This in-between dynamic reconciles Duffy's desire for a traditional floor plan and his wish to maximize the ocean view to the lighthouse at the fishhook tip of Cape Cod. "The design did start in a traditional mode," Jaklitsch says. "But over the years, everyone's thinking evolved, and Robert really fell in love with that spectacular view."

Echoing the duality, different rooms and areas could almost belong to different houses. The stepped-down living room is a luxurious '40s-style modernist gem, complete with a Paul Laszlo sofa and chairs and a Milton Avery canvas coincidentally painted at this same address 60-odd years ago. The cool, shady master bedroom—carpeted, curtained, and wallpapered in tones of fawn and greige—looks as if it belongs to a Parisian aesthete. The library, where Duffy paints, has dark paneling, tufted-leather armchairs, and an 18th-century japanned secretary that seems right out of an Edwardian men's club. Meanwhile, the lower level is as clean and current as a Richard Meier



Clockwise from top left: Charles Hawthorne's *Boy With Fish* hangs above a vintage Paul McCobb settee on the landing; the walls are painted in Benjamin Moore's Abstracta. On the beach level, a 1930s Brunswick pool table, a 1982 collage by Fritz Bultman (left), and *Eye Love Monogram*, a painting by Takashi Murakami. Chairs by Willy Rizzo and a Hawthorne painting in the dining room. A view of the sea from the deck. The library's armchairs are by Gérard and are upholstered in an Edward Ferrell + Lewis Mittman leather; 1830s Russian objects are displayed on a mantel from Chesney's. The beach façade. Antique Chinese pottery in the dining room. Facing page: The library, where Duffy paints, features works in progress, a mahogany table from Jacques Carcanagues with a photograph by Jack Pierson, an antique Thai gilt-bronze standing monk, and a vintage T. H. Robsjohn-Gibbings side chair. See Resources.

In the master bedroom, a carved ceiling panel from an Indian Buddhist temple serves as the headboard; the wall covering is by Designtex. Facing page, from top: A painting by John Dowd and a headboard upholstered in a Mokum fabric from Holly Hunt in a guest room; the wall color is Ice Formations by Benjamin Moore. The bathtub is by Philippe Starck for Duravit, the mirrored cabinet and sink console are from Urban Archaeology, and the faucet is by Lefroy Brooks; the marble floor and wall tiles were designed by Richard McGeehan. See Resources.



“IF IT WERE UP TO ME,” SAYS DUFFY, “I WOULD HAVE STUFF EVERYWHERE. MY WHOLE HOUSE WOULD LOOK LIKE THE LIBRARY MANTEL”

loft space, with Indian Art Deco furniture and a striking red 1930s pool table. Then there’s the kitchen, a Moorish-Mediterranean blue-tiled grotto. “Kitchens make me uncomfortable,” says Duffy with disarming candor. “I don’t cook, so I want it to be like another room—I want to be entertained, I want things to look at.” Jaklitsch and McGeehan came up with the idea of the tiles, and Duffy said yes right away. He also selected the yellow Aga stove, which he adores—its looks, anyway. “I’ve never touched it,” he says flatly.

And then there’s his stuff, as Duffy modestly refers to his Southeast Asian temple figures, Clarice Cliff ceramics, scrimshaw, midcentury Provincetown art, and blue-and-white china. He was happy to let Jaklitsch and McGeehan set off his collections to their best advantage. “If it were up to me, I would have my things everywhere,” he says. “My whole house would look like the library mantel.”

Still, it’s Duffy who pulls the disparate parts of the puzzle together to form a clear picture. You might also say it’s Provincetown. This quirky bohemian property is in many ways as good an expression of the beach town’s past as any painstakingly restored Colonial. “I wanted to take this place back to my memory of P-town from when I was a kid,” he says. “It was very hippieish—all these writers and artists. I still feel that way here. You don’t need a car, and everyone is chill.” It may not be everybody’s idea of historic restoration, but to each his own. After all, isn’t that what the Mayflower was all about? ■

