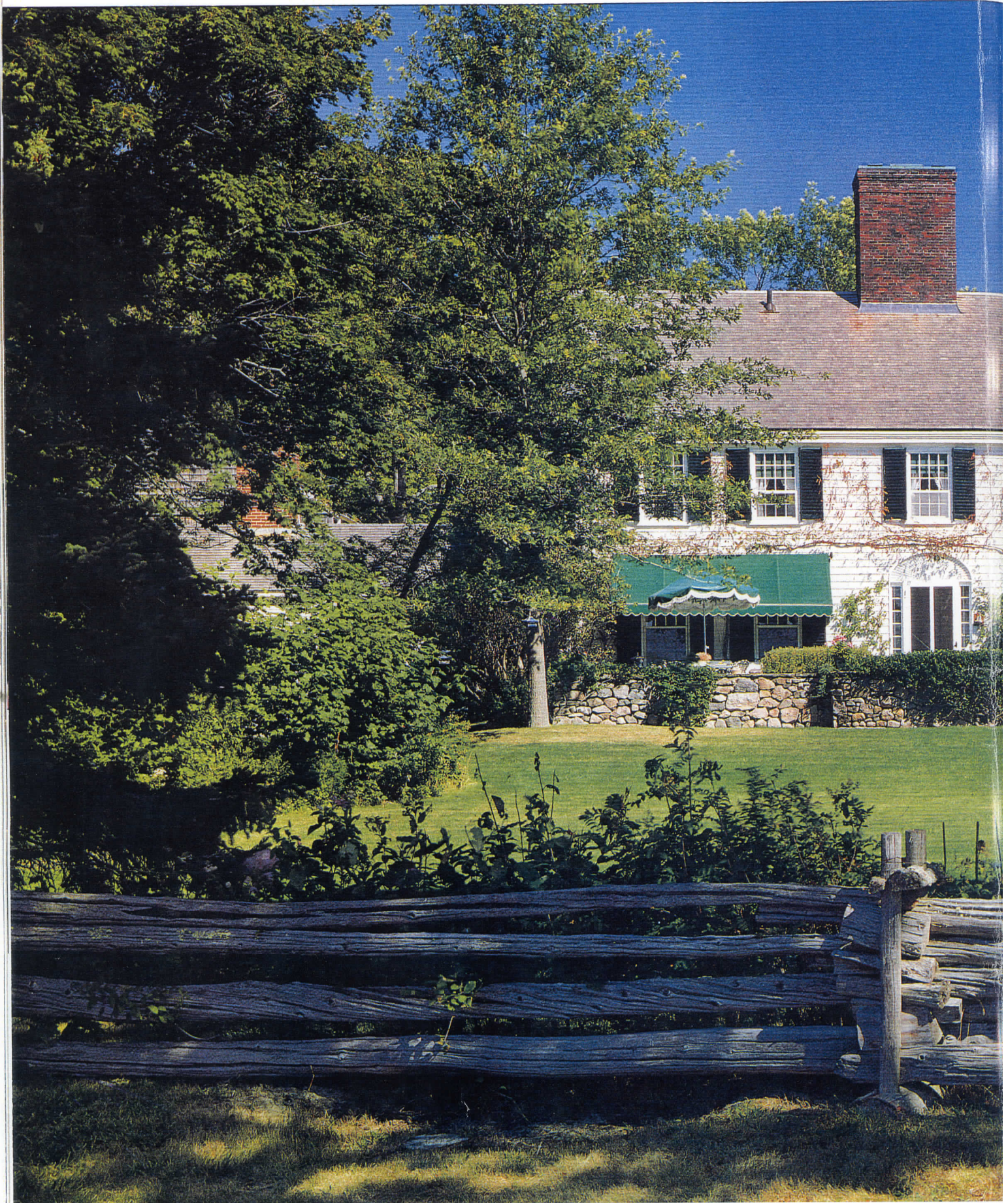


BROOKE ASTOR'S COVE END

SUMMERS ON MOUNT DESERT ISLAND IN MAINE



*Interior Design by Mark Hampton, ASID, and Nancy Pierrepont
Landscape Architecture by Morgan Wheelock, EASLA
Text by Susan Mary Alsop
Photography by Brian Vanden Brink*



"Everybody's happy and in good humor in Maine," says Brooke Astor, who spends summers at Cove End, her 1920s Colonial Revival residence on Mount Desert Island. "I enjoy a simple life there. It's so wonderful and peaceful."



"My late husband, Vincent, and I bought the house and everything in it on the spot," recalls Mrs. Astor. ABOVE: Shelves of blue-and-white 19th-century ceramics surround an antique English tall case clock in a front hall alcove.



When Mrs. Vincent Astor arrives in Northeast Harbor, Maine, for the summer, her friends know exactly what to expect when they welcome her, for it never changes from year to year. She is invariably worn out, too tired to face a soul or hear the sound of a human voice; the very thought of houseguests exhausts her, so she isn't going to ask anyone up this year. Oh, the

joy of being back in her dear, quiet house on Mount Desert Island with nothing to do but watch the sailboats go by.

This mood lasts about a week, and then the telephone calls to her neighbors begin: "Are you by any chance free for dinner on the tenth? I had completely forgotten that when I was in London last month I suggested to X that he might like to see Maine, and he has chosen that weekend and wants to bring Y and his

wife, so I felt I had to ask Z, too, as he is crazy to meet X. Do come. It will just be a tiny party—don't think of dressing up." X, Y and Z are world-famous writers, or museum directors, possibly politicians or diplomats, it doesn't matter. Brooke Astor's zest for life and gift for making those around her happy are as strong as if she were still the young woman she describes in her two-volume autobiography, *Patchwork Child* and *Foot-*



prints. The dinner party goes off most agreeably, and when the houseguests have left the island she is free to seek the peace for which she has longed. She finds it every morning in a secret garden that she has recently created.

Once she told landscape architect Morgan Wheelock what she wanted, he understood her perfectly, and by last summer the project was completed. She asked for a swimming pool; it had to be in a

very private place with a hidden entrance. Indeed, one could stay in the big house for days without suspecting that just a few hundred yards away lies a little gate all but submerged in piny shrubbery. Just outside the gate is a gong that Mrs. Astor strikes to warn Buddha, as if to ask him, "May I come in?" Buddha, a graceful bronze, sits beside the pool under a wisteria parasol. The pool itself is long enough to provide the brisk of morning exer-

Interior designer Mark Hampton redid the living room in colors inspired by the Victorian needlepoint rug. Chinoiserie table, right, from Hyde Park Antiques. Schumacher slipper chair and balloon shade fabrics. Sofa and club chair fabric from Brunswick & Fils.



"The room was already so pretty that we decided to keep the same feeling and tempo in it," says interior designer Nancy Pierpont of the library. "We had Scalaman-dré reprint the floral chintz originally used by Sister Parish."

cise for its owner, who swims toward a low wall that carries two bronze seals enthroned on a huge block of granite. The plantings around the pool reproduce the vistas that Mrs. Astor has always loved on the mountain walks for which the island is famous.

A small pavilion provides a comfortable chaise longue for resting before or after her swim. These are the precious hours in which she can read or dream alone, and she says that her mind often goes back to China, where she spent happy years long ago when her father, a distinguished officer in the Marine Corps, was assigned to the United States' mission in Peking. In the summers the family moved out of the city to a villa in the Western Hills, where the fragrant woods were very similar to

what she has around her in her garden beside the pool.

When she and her husband were married they had imagined spending their summers abroad, motoring and yachting. But as she has said, "We both hated it after the first summer, and it was a glorious moment when we decided that we both loved Maine." Vincent Astor bought the big white-shingled cottage in 1953, and they called it Cove End. The Astors wanted coziness, and the deep blue cove beyond the wide lawn suited them, as did the quiet road leading to it and the several acres providing room for vegetable and flower gardens.

Coziness is the note struck throughout the interior of the house. The Astors had grander residences elsewhere; in Maine

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they wanted space to entertain their friends, but above all they wanted no formality—they envisioned the sort of rooms in which, at the end of a foggy day, one could count on finding a blazing fire and a comfortable armchair beside it.

Mrs. Astor made few decorative changes in the years after her husband's death, for her winter life in New York was intensely busy—she was directing the affairs of the foundation that bears his name—and Cove End was her summer retreat. However, just recently she resolved to make some improvements and called in three friends to help her: designers Mark Hampton and Nancy Pierrepont for the interiors, and Morgan Wheelock for the swimming pool and its surroundings.

Says Hampton, “Mrs. Astor’s rooms lift one’s spirits just the way she does. So when she decided her big living room needed to be redone, she knew from the beginning exactly what she wanted. The pale yellow walls would stay, but the cool blues and greens would have to go. Instead, she wanted to emphasize the colors in a large Victorian needlepoint rug she found last year. That meant, to me at least, that we would start out thinking of warm reds and shades of cream and off-white, and that’s what we did.

“It’s a very large room, down a few steps, making the ceiling higher than in the rest of the house,” he continues. “There are four tall single windows on one wall, a fireplace at one end and a triple window at the other end. It’s a room

“The master bedroom is full of mementos that Mrs. Astor has always had around her,” notes Pierrepont. The small Arthur Rackham drawing, above the round portrait, was given to her when she was a child. Brunswick & Fils floral fabric.



“When asked to lay out a personal garden for Mrs. Astor, I decided to create a secret room reached by a remote path,” says landscape architect Morgan Wheelock. “The stone is from Maine, the pool coping is granite from nearby Deer Island, and the plants are all native.”

flooded with light, and on long summer days the play of sunshine and shadows gives the space that bright sparkle that makes American seaside summer houses so enormously appealing.”

The cheerful library on the first floor was originally decorated by Parish-Hadley. Nancy Pierrepont felt that it should be left as it was, and Mrs. Astor agreed. “Sister found the chintz first, and in 1980 I had it printed again for Brooke,” explains Pierrepont. “I often keep what is already there in a room, if it’s marvelous.”

Upstairs, Pierrepont has given the master bedroom fresh life while retaining much that is evocative of the past. The porcelain ornaments on the mantelpiece and the drawings on the walls come from far back in Mrs. Astor’s life. There is a big French armoire and a four-poster bed, beside which is a low bench that is placed there as a takeoff platform for her small dogs, who are allowed to jump up on the bed. The chintz used for the draperies, the bed, the bench and the armchairs was copied from an old French fabric. The



view from the windows is of the cove beyond the croquet lawn.

It is a serene room, perfectly attuned to its resident. Mrs. Vincent Astor is often referred to as a grande dame, a phrase that makes her sound intimidating. In fact, there is nothing intimidating about this great lady, for her charm and spirit are unchanged since her childhood days when she fell in love with the piny fragrances of the Western Hills outside Peking. The pines of Maine suit her well. □



JOHN DOMINIS

"I grow not only lots of flowers but a variety of vegetables too," says Brooke Astor (left). "I love to garden. And the air is so fresh and invigorating that I make dates for walks in the afternoon as well." BELOW: Neoclassical-style cast-iron garden furniture rests on the terrace facing Gilpatrick Cove.

