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Summer *by* the Sea

Cottages from Watch Hill to Little Compton

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MONACELLI

CHAMPLIN FARM

Families discover Block Island for a host of reasons: a friend's invitation, a business trip, or a short holiday stay. A desire for change brought this family to the island. After years of rentals on Long Island's eastern tip, they decided to look farther afield for something quieter. Poring over the *New York Times* classifieds, their eight-year-old daughter spotted a modest Block Island farmhouse for rent. At only eight hundred square feet, the diminutive building was dubbed "The Dollhouse." It was one of a number of buildings on the landlord's property. The daughter grew up spending summers there, eventually marrying and sharing the island with her own family.

When a sixteen-acre farm in rolling hills overlooking the Atlantic went on the market, the owners grabbed it. Not sure of next steps, they mulled over ideas for several years. Eventually they hired a trio of prominent designers: architect Gil Schafer, interior decorator Miles Redd, and landscape designer Deborah Nevins. The brief was simple: a five-bedroom house that was elegant, understated, and everything Rhode Island.

The history of the island is rooted in farms like this one, owned by the Champlin family, who pastured livestock and grew crops like corn and alfalfa. Schafer, relying on the wisdom of the farmers, recommended putting the new structures—main house, guesthouse, and barn—on the existing building footprints. After all, the farmers had worked the land since 1780, and they had generational knowledge of the wind, sun angles, and views to boat traffic. Working within these parameters would also help the new designs conform to the island's size restrictions. The result is a grouping of appropriately scaled buildings that evoke the island's architectural past and agricultural roots.

The main house massing is that of a farmhouse that has been elevated with classical detailing and motifs that hit all the right notes: pedimented entrance porch on attenuated columns, detailed rake moldings, crisp window trim, and colonnaded porches. Cottage-style six-over-nine double-hung windows flank the front door. Shingle style elements abound; shingle patterns— straight, wavy, fish scale—and walls that curve into a second-floor balcony. An eyebrow dormer and at least three other dormer types enliven the roof. Rather than bright white trim, a soft, off-white paint tones down the contrast with the gray cedar siding.

Redd has decorated several houses for the owners. Here, they wanted a sophisticated interpretation of a summer home. The interiors come together in a soft palette, ranging from creams to the palest of pink and light blue. The entrance hall floor is weathered wood, with textured walls of overpainted grasscloth. The newness of the ground-up construction with its crisply detailed millwork and cabinetry is softened by the patina of antique furniture. Flat weave rugs anchor the rooms. The bar is paneled in reclaimed white oak, and its gently faded appearance looks as if there is no applied finish at all. The stair hall and passageways are lined in the kind of painted boards found in older houses, but here they have been set into a lightly classicized architectural framework. The roofscape is evident in the second-floor bedrooms where the sloped ceilings come down low, recalling older Rhode Island cottages.

The landscape retains the history of the site, holding on to the old farm feeling. Native grasses and tall sedges are woven into a pattern of paths and stone walls above a view of the ocean. The renovated barn is part of a stone-walled pool enclosure, the structure now serving as pool house. Stone steps set into the grass descend the hillside toward a pond on the property. A verdant amphitheater made up of stone seats and native grasses introduces a subtle geometric structure where the hardscape and plantings meet. Nevins carefully anchors the house to the land, creating a feeling that the building had always been there. During construction, care was taken to protect a giant elm that stands near the main house, a sentinel from generations ago. More delicately, climbing roses scale trellises attached to the shingled walls. These intersections of plants, terraces, stone walls, steps, and house are reminders that the landscape can be the defining aspect of any home.

A shed extension nuzzles into a bank of hydrangeas. Climbing roses thread through the weathered trellis, a charming motif found in cottages throughout the islands off the New England coast.

The main house and guesthouse overlook pond and ocean. The landscape moves from tailored to wild: a stone wall at the house, stone steps set into the lawn, and native grasses leading to the water.

Tapered spindles support a winding mahogany handrail as it descends, coming to rest on a turned newel.

Light reflects softly off beautifully painted woodwork. The screen door rails and stiles echo the panel layout on the front door.

Open shelves stocked with white and blue dishes, baskets, and vases line the walls of the white-on-white kitchen. The conical brass pendant light centers the room.

The bar is lined with character-grade wood, knots and varied grain patterns that give the room a relaxed quality.

Soft colors, a shore-inspired palette, tie the house to its island environment.

A painted white tester bed slips cozily under the sloped ceiling.

A white-columned porch wraps the house. An array of shingle patterns adorns the walls of this island retreat.