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aging gracefully

Zeff Design's careful update of a Southampton, New York, beach house reflects the owners' evolving lifestyles



In a way, houses are like people—even the beautiful ones eventually show signs of age. Those in the Hamptons, like the towns' ritzy celebrity residents, aren't above having a little work done. And after 14 years of salt air, sunshine, and family vacations, the owners of this 4,500-square-foot beach house in Southampton, New York, decided it was time for a touch-up. Designer Mark Zeff stood holding the scalpel.

His namesake firm had originally designed the interiors in 1989 as a "very organic home"

filled with antique Anglo raj pieces. "It was all sisal and earthy colors," Zeff explains. Now the same clients—a founder of an interior and architectural design-referral service and her husband—were ready for something cleaner, more streamlined, less formal, and even playful to match their more mature lifestyles.

"They travel quite a bit, and they're very busy. Yet they're also low-key and unassuming, having two grown-up married daughters," Zeff says. The time



had come for the beach house to evolve into a sharp, sophisticated retreat that would still seem family-friendly.

The renovation called for more nip-and-tuck than overhaul. To renew the exterior, for example, the designer enlisted architect Mark Matthews to modify the roofline, cantilevering it on all sides to create eaves that cut the sun's glare into rooms—but also imply winglike movement. Aluminum window frames updated the originals, which were pine, →

Previous spread: Mark Zeff's redesign of a Southampton, New York, beach house included replacing the painted cedar siding with mahogany, which ages better.

Opposite, top: Art glass and pillows add color against a palette designed to prefigure the effect of strong sunlight in rooms. The giraffe photo is by Peter Beard. **Opposite, bottom:** Grass cloth covers walls in the den where cotton-covered bolsters delineate space on a 20-foot-long cotton-chenille-covered sofa.

Above: Cotton chenille also upholsters the living area's sofas and an ottoman. The fireplace surround is hot-rolled steel. **Right:** A 1950's server lines a wall in the family room.





Opposite from top: The *Maxime Old* armchairs are late 1960's. A walkway outside visible beyond the living area leads over dunes to the beach. Norman Cherner's side chairs surround a table designed by Zeff. The chandeliers are clustered glass bubbles.

Right: Zeff replaced the kitchen's terrazzo floors with ebonized oak but kept terrazzo on counters and the backsplash. The cabinets are clear glazed cherry. **Below:** A staircase with a steel-and-glass banister leads from the foyer to bedrooms on the second level.



and resilient tropical mahogany has replaced the old cedar siding to erase years of abuse from sand and wind. "It doesn't cup, crack, or bend," Zeff observes. "And the best thing is that all the mahogany will be gray in six months, so it will still have that beach-house look."

Inside, the designer traded in the previously earthy palette for "jewel tones—amethyst-colored carpet, sea-foam-green pillows and shelving. Real colors," he says. He also swapped out the sisal for wool carpet, and wood for steel and glass on the stair banister and balustrade.

Two plantation chairs in the den and sleek rolled-steel con-

soles in the living area, and two more rolled-steel circular tables in the den, were all that survived the raj-style era. Zeff revived these by surrounding them with modernity—from common areas to the six bedrooms, an array of mid-century-style chairs, sofas, ottomans, and lamps.

In the living area, cotton-covered sofas mingle with the couple's collection of art glass, which accents the minimalistic consoles. For coffee tables, Zeff simply filled his own low steel tray-top versions with beach pebbles and topped them with glass.

Rounding out the chic modernistic atmosphere, the →

"I see this house as a boat—everything is sleek and quiet, like a sea vessel."





Left: In the master suite, the headboard doubles as storage for linens. The cotton-chenille daybed and chair are by Zeff. On the floor, a traditional Chinese headrest, one of a pair, is now a sculpture. **Opposite, bottom:** The master bath is the lone dark-colored area. Its walls are painted drywall; the floor is concrete tile.

Below: A guest bedroom overlooks the bay. An Eileen Gray table, 1970's chair, and vintage 1950's lamp round out the spare furniture.



designer used a vintage server as a bar for the den and walnut Norman Cherner chairs around his table in the bay-windowed dining area. The vignette is topped off by two pendant fixtures made from clusters of grape-shape glass bubbles; Zeff found these in London.

In the streamlined master bedroom, a custom canvas-covered headboard conceals storage for linens. The designer's armchair and daybed provide flexible cotton-chenille-upholstered window seats. In the sparsely furnished guest room, you can take in the bay

view from a vintage 1970's armchair. Zeff did include a side table by Eileen Gray for keeping a book handy in those hours after the sun goes down.

The house's generous fenestration offers unobstructed coastal views upstairs and down on three sides—overlooking the ocean, a bay, and headlands. Perfect for anyone wishing to take in the view but challenging for Zeff, who needed to select colors that stand up under such extreme brightness. "The daylight that comes in is harsh," Zeff explains. "Most color that would be bright in →





a normal situation turns dull as dishwater in this environment.”

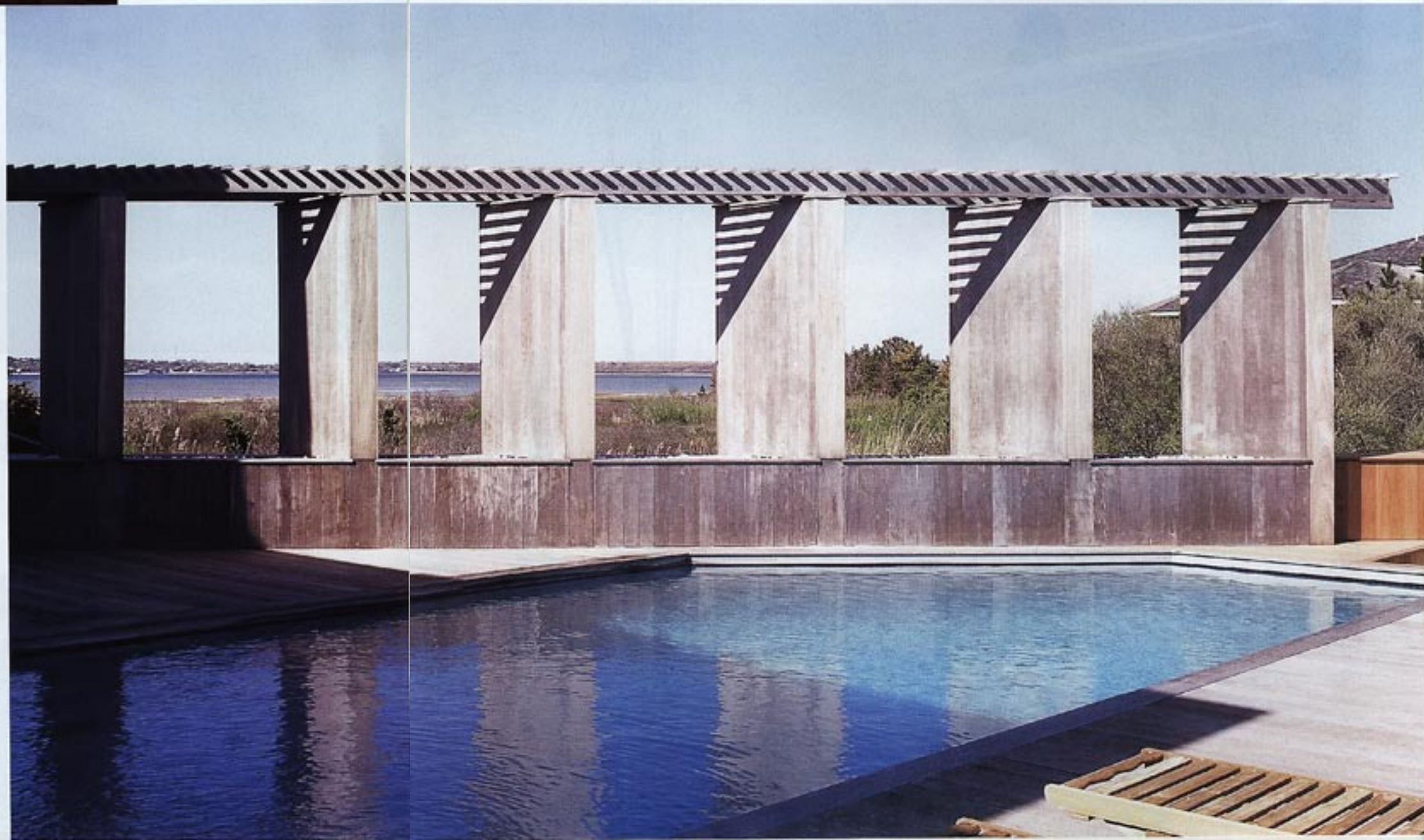
Rather than fight nature, Zeff embraced it with a palette that prefigured the sun's bleaching effects. Citrine-colored chenille upholsters the living area sofas, for example. And the pale yellow of an oversize canvas ottoman looks as if it were already sun-washed.

Meanwhile, the wall-length sofa in the den gains color from its light-green bolster pillows. The prewashed look of the fabrics, Zeff says, was preferable to shielding them with window coverings that could have mini-

mized the gorgeous scenery. (He even relocated the bedroom's fireplace from the center, where it blocked the ocean view, to a sidewall. Now it blocks a view of the neighbor's house.)

With the colors he selected, “you feel the interior itself comes from the ocean or that field across the bay,” he says. Given these references, it's no surprise that Zeff also describes the atmosphere in outdoorsy terms: “I almost see this house as a boat. Everything is sleek and quiet, like a sea vessel.”

PROJECT MANAGER: DANIEL ESTES.
 ARMCHAIR: H. MINERVA; OTTOMAN: DAUPHIN-DESCOURS ANTIQUES. OTTOMAN FABRIC: A.M. COLLECTIONS. PILLOWS: H. GROOME. PLANTS: TOWN & GARDENS. SOFA FABRIC: BURNING AREA. DEN: CHAIR FABRIC: (MASTER BEDROOM) ZIMMER + RHODE. OTTOMAN FABRIC (DEN): CHRISTOPHER HYLAND. WALL COVERING: TRI-KES. BAR: KNOLL THROUGH LOST CITY ARTS. GLASS ACCESSORIES: THROUGH THE END OF HISTORY. CHAIRS (DINING ROOM): CHERREL. TABLE (KITCHEN): SONRISA FURNITURE. (BATH) FABRIC (MASTER BEDROOM): ZOFFANY. BEDDING FABRIC: LULU DK THROUGH HINSON & COMPANY. DRESSER (GUEST ROOM): THROUGH CENTURY DESIGN. ARMCHAIR: LAS VENUS. TABLE LAMP: EINSTEIN MOOMJY. GENERAL CONTRACTOR: DUNHAM GENERAL CONTRACTING.



Top: A brise-soleil shoots past the last column support and points the way to the beach. The second-floor roofline was extended and cantilevered to give shade to a deck and rooms. **Above:** Stairs to the front door lead up from parking alongside the exterior wall of the pool. **Right:** On the pool terrace, the brise-soleil breaks up and frames bay views.