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CARRIAGE HOUSES

The mini-me's of old-house architecture, these small gems still captivate



PHOTOGRAPH BY GREGORY WOSTREIL; COURTESY HISTORIC NEW ENGLAND

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FETCHING LITTLE BUILDINGS ADORNED with louvered cupolas, buggy-width doors, and painted window boxes, carriage houses charm us primarily because of their scale. They were the original architectural accessory—small, yes, but carefully articulated to complement the main house they served—from colonial days onward. These secondary buildings where the gentry stored their broughams, surreys, cutters, and buggies had a presence of their own, contributing to the architectural landscape of New England.

Handsome brick carriage houses attended late-18th- and early-19th-century Federal period townhouses in Boston, Providence, and Newport. Italianate mansions of the mid-1800s often had carriage houses with matching square towers. And late-1800s Shingle-style cottages

in New England's seaside summer colonies featured carriage houses with the same distinctive sweeping roofs and wood-shingle cladding, not to mention the requisite brick floors and beadwork paneling inside.

And then the automobile arrived. Today, the words "carriage house" still evoke a romantic image of bygone days, and efforts to preserve old carriage houses have resulted in them being pressed into use as everything from studios and offices to primary residences.

So captivating is the charm of authentic carriage houses that many people are building new structures in the same style. Patrick Ahearn, a partner in the architectural firm of Ahearn/Schopfer Associates of Boston and Edgartown, Massachusetts, has designed more than fifty of these minor-key masterpieces on Martha's Vineyard alone. "In Edgartown, a lot of the properties are on long, narrow lots," Ahearn explains. "There isn't enough room on the property for a guesthouse and a garage to be part of the primary house."

In keeping with their provenance, most of Ahearn's carriage houses serve a garage function, but also tend



THREE NEW CARRIAGE houses on Martha's Vineyard (ABOVE), all designed by architect Patrick Ahearn, feature such traditional elements as cupolas and window boxes. Ranging from 1,500 square feet (TOP) to 725 square feet (BOTTOM), the structures serve modern-day uses. The 1820 brick carriage house (LEFT) built for the Stephen Phillips House, a Federal mansion in Salem, Massachusetts, includes a louvered cupola and arched doors.

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to have an implied history based on context. For a property that was once part of a farm, for example, Ahearn designed a barnlike 1,800-square-foot carriage house/garage with one window that mimics a hayloft door and a row of outward-swinging awning windows over the three garage doors. A cupola, evocative of 19th-century carriage houses, provides air circulation to the one-

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bedroom apartment on the second floor. And the building is linked to the main house by a glass vestibule, in keeping with the New England vernacular of connected farm buildings.

Architect Ron DiMauro of Jamestown, Rhode Island, used a classic carriage house layout—double doors front and back, high center aisle, stalls to either side—for the horse barn of a 35-acre equestrian estate he designed in East Greenwich, Rhode Island. The 36 by 36-foot building also features small ground-floor windows of the type associated with stables, as well as a pair of vent cupolas and a central cupola. The freestanding barn takes its vocabulary from the main house, which was built in 1890s Shingle style. “It was designed as a true carriage house,” says DiMauro, who has restored several Newport carriage houses, “but the new owner doesn’t have horses, so they want to turn it into a studio.”

Indeed, carriage houses are nothing if not adaptable. On Oyster Harbor Island off Cape Cod, Patrick Ahearn designed a carriage house that serves as both garage and boathouse, giving it doors at both ends so the owner can tow his sailboat in one side and drive out the other.

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For a restored 1930s house in Edgartown, he created a carriage house/guesthouse with a gambrel roof, Palladian windows, and a fireplace.

“They really became an architectural icon with time,” says Ahearn of the carriage-house conceit. “They’re like little jewel boxes.” ■