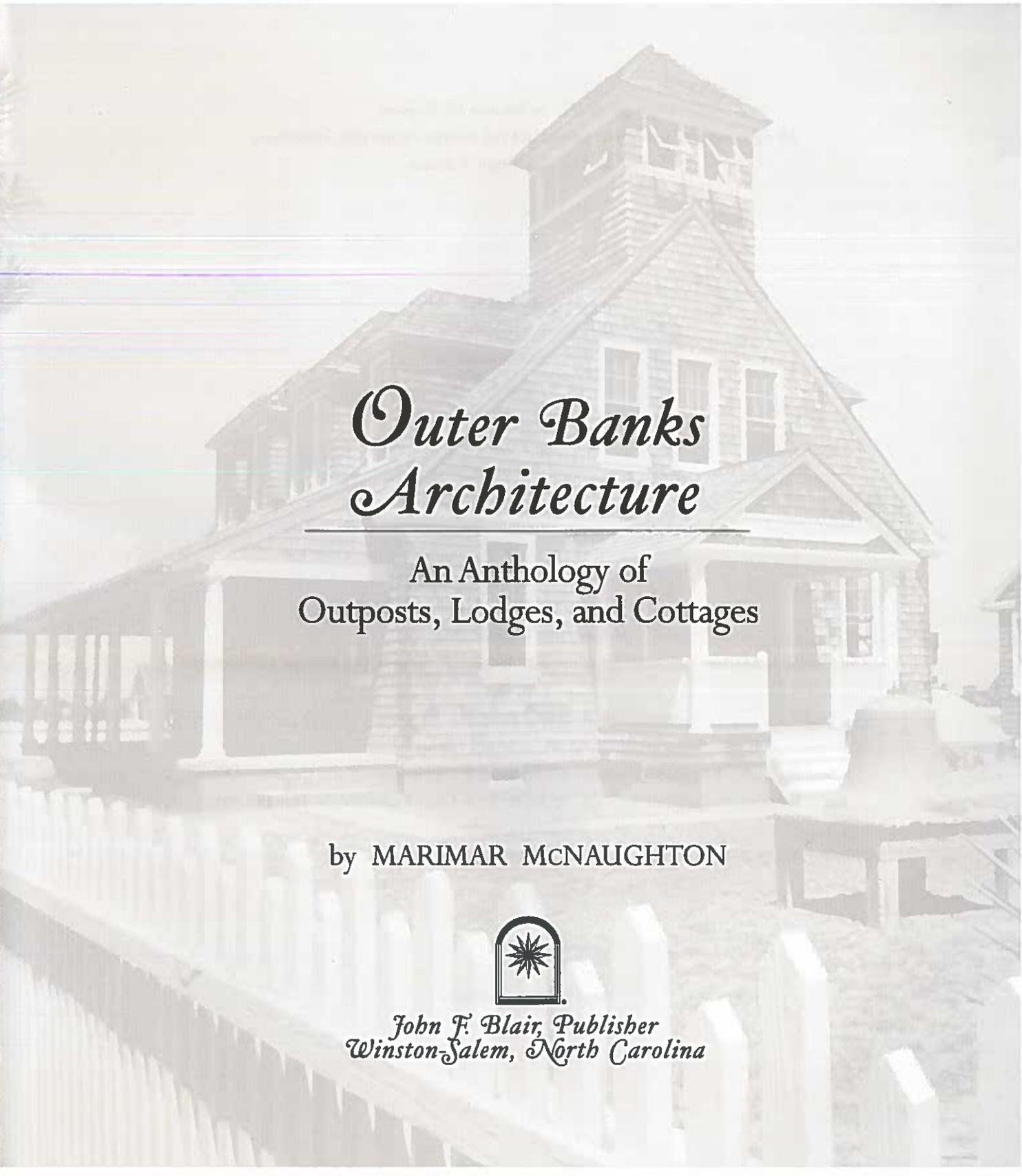


Outer Banks
Architecture

AN ANTHOLOGY OF
OUTPOSTS, LODGES,
AND COTTAGES

MARIMAR MCNAUGHTON





Outer Banks Architecture

An Anthology of
Outposts, Lodges, and Cottages

by MARIMAR McNAUGHTON



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Winston-Salem, North Carolina*

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
McNaughton, Marimar, 1955—

Outer banks architecture : an anthology of outposts, lodges, and cottages / by Marimar McNaughton.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-89587-192-0 (alk. paper)

1. Seaside architecture—North Carolina—Outer Banks. 2. Lighthouses—North Carolina—Outer
Banks. 3. Architecture—North Carolina—Outer Banks. 4. Outer Banks (N.C.)—History. I. Title.

Printed in Canada

NA7575.M37 2000

720'9756'1—dc21

00-023846

Design by Debra Long Hampton

Frank Stick and the Southern Shores Flat Top

Southern Shores, the first planned, ocean-to-sound community on the Outer Banks, was the site of an architectural accident—the Flat Top. Such accidents occur when need collides with visionary genius. When the first Flat Top appeared in 1947, it pushed the limits of what had been considered acceptable up to that point.

Frank Stick studied art under Howard Pyle at the Brandywine School in Wilmington, Delaware. His paintings graced the covers of the *Saturday Evening Post*, *Field & Stream*, and the fiction of Zane Grey. A model named Maud Hayes

was a frequent subject of his work, as well as that of his best friend and contemporary, William Koerner. Koerner's portrait of Hayes on the cover of a 1922 issue of the *Saturday Evening Post* launched the serialization of a story called "The Covered Wagon." From that time, Maud Hayes became known as "the Madonna of the Prairie." She also became Frank Stick's wife and the mother of his two children—a daughter, the late Charlotte Stick McMullan, and a son, David Stick, preeminent civic leader and historian of the Outer Banks.

After over six hundred illustrations, Frank



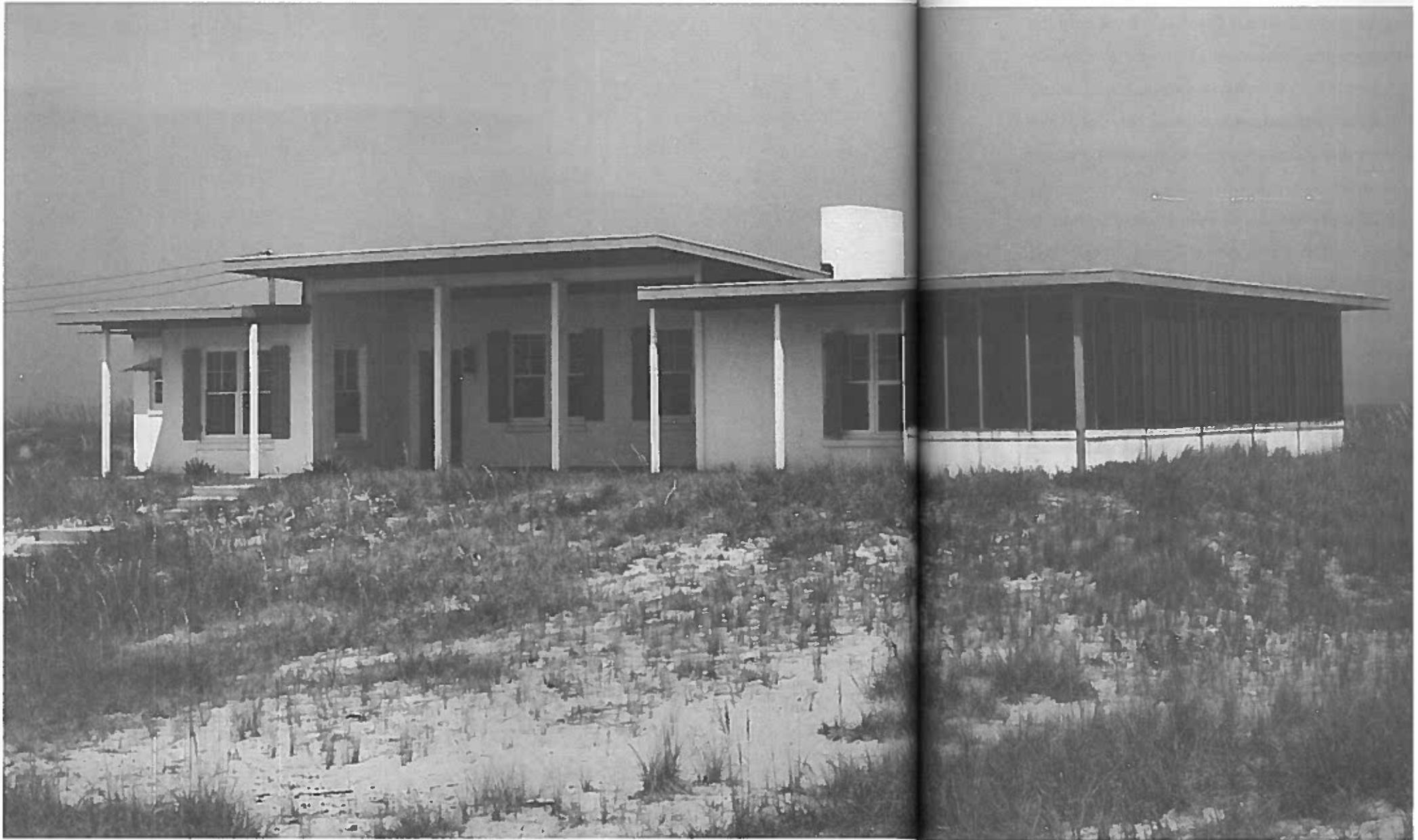
Aerial view of Ocean Boulevard in Southern Shores
PHOTOGRAPH BY B. J. NIXON / COURTESY OF OUTER BANKS HISTORY CENTER

Stick was ending his twenty-year career as a commercial artist when he first visited the Outer Banks in the early 1920s. Advances in photography and printing techniques were changing the look of mass-produced calendars, magazines, and books. Furthermore, America was ending its love affair with the pioneer, the roughrider, and the cowboy—images that figured prominently in Stick's work—and turning its heart over to a new cultural hero, the wealthy industrialist. Many of these moneyed privateers were coming to the Outer Banks to hunt and fish, and Stick was not far behind, visiting for a number of years before resettling his family here in 1929.

Stick became known locally as a conservationist and developer. His essays and lobbying efforts in the 1930s were instrumental in establishing three national-park facilities on the Outer Banks—Cape Hatteras National Seashore, the first national seashore park in the United States; Fort Raleigh National Historic Site on Roanoke Island, the site of the first English-speaking colony in the New World; and Wright Brothers National Memorial in Kill Devil Hills, which commemorates the first man-powered airplane flights in history.

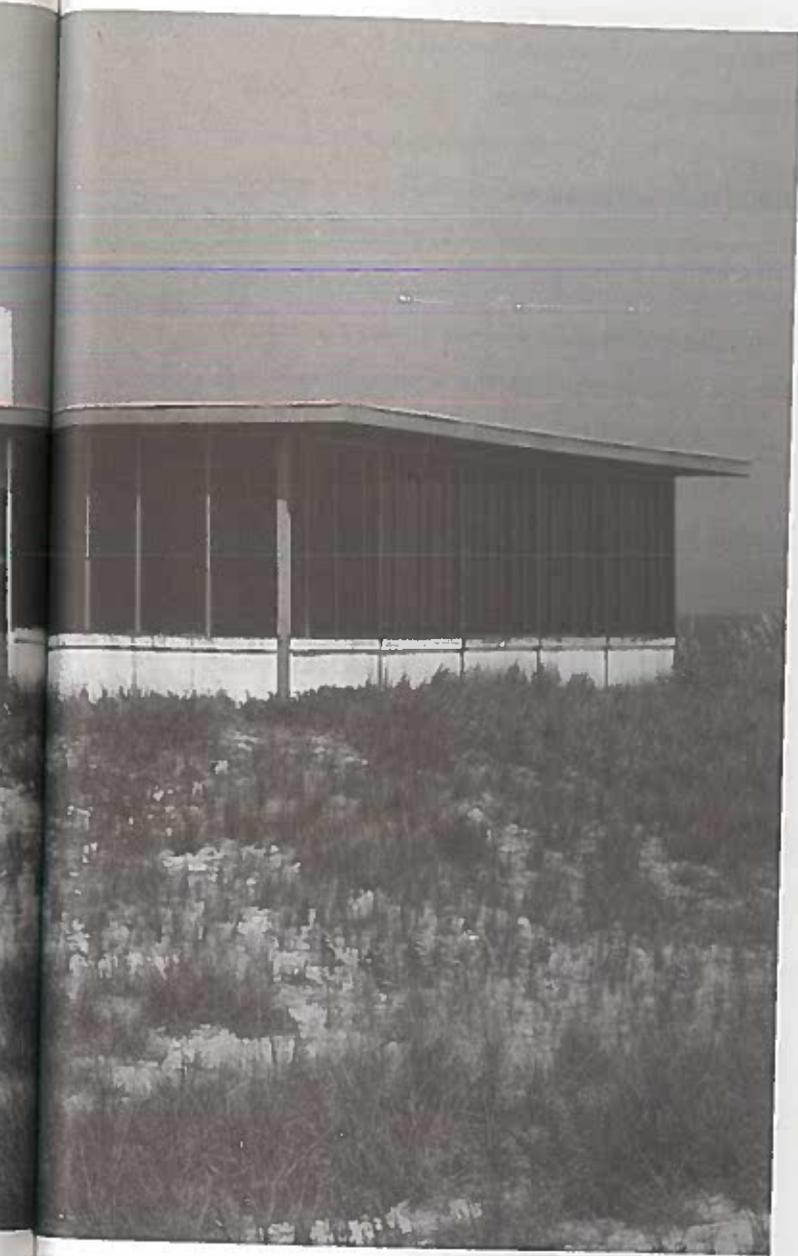
Stick also sought legislation to prohibit the use of the Outer Banks as an open range for grazing livestock. As a real-estate speculator he spent a decade—and every penny he had according to his son—buying, selling, and trading options on property from Hatteras Island to Colington Island. During that time, he formed many partnerships and made numerous attempts to develop the oceanfront. One early effort resulted in Virginia Dare Shores, a community in Kill Devil Hills. A sound-side dock and two pavilions he built on Kitty Hawk Bay were destroyed by a hurricane, but not before the site served as a backdrop for the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Wright brothers' flights and hosted a banquet attended by Orville Wright and Amelia Earhart in 1932. In 1933, Stick designed a cluster of large, Cape Cod-style bungalows on the Kill Devil Hills oceanfront. Collectively, they came to be called Millionaires' Row. Several of those homes are still in use today.

After World War II, Stick acquired an option on a twenty-eight-hundred-acre tract north of Kitty Hawk for thirty thousand dollars. It was to be the largest ocean-to-sound parcel subdivided for single-family home sites



The McMullan Cottage, designed by David Stick, was built in 1948.

PHOTOGRAPH BY AYCOCK BROWN / COURTESY OF DAVID STICK COLLECTION



in local history. In a singular act of foresight, Stick called this community Southern Shores, even though it represented the northern frontier of real-estate development on the Outer Banks.

Phase I of Southern Shores opened in 1946 with fifty oceanfront building sites. Only one sale was made that first year. The success of Millionaires' Row had taught Stick that improved building sites sold more quickly than vacant lots. But lumber and other traditional building supplies were still reserved for government use, stalling the construction of new homes. Desperate to show a profit, Stick decided to build himself a house. In the process, he created a new vernacular architectural form: the Flat Top.

To help with the construction of his house, Stick lured Hatteras Islander Curtis Gray to Kitty Hawk. Together, they set up a factory in Kitty Hawk village for the manufacture of cement blocks—forty-two pounds each, made from local beach sand. These blocks were the principal material used to construct Flat Top cottages until the mid-1950s, when the North Carolina legislature banned the use of beach gravel for manufacturing concrete. The Flat Tops built between 1955 and 1965 were made

from cinder blocks manufactured in eastern North Carolina.

The Flat Top was adapted for its barrier-island setting from the single-story, flat-roofed block houses of Florida. To those design elements, Stick added an extended overhang and a bright, whitewashed exterior. When combined, the two new features deflected the intense heat of the sun away from the house, so the interior remained cool in summer. Louvered doors and screened windows encouraged the flow of the prevailing southerly winds. The exposed soffits and storm shutters were painted in brilliant shades of crimson, jade, emerald, and sapphire, introducing color to an otherwise monochromatic Outer Banks landscape.

The Southern Shores Flat Top was simply built. Before the foundation was poured, plumbing and drain lines were buried in the sand, then sealed with a concrete slab. Cement blocks were arranged around the periphery up to floor-level elevation. More blocks were added to make the walls, up to twelve courses high. A Flat Top house took roughly four months to build and cost one-third less than a traditional home.

By 1948, the postwar economy was steadily

trickling dollars into the pockets of middle-class families, who now enjoyed the mobility associated with owning an automobile. Possessing a seaside vacation home—a privilege once reserved for the wealthy elite—was suddenly a possibility.

Like the founders of the Bauhaus school of design in Germany in the 1920s, Frank Stick overturned conventional architectural styles and used nontraditional materials to execute his house plans. Like Frank Lloyd Wright's Prairie-style homes, Stick's Flat Tops were an organic form. They reiterated the surrounding environment and emphasized wide-open spaces in horizontal planes that blended with bands of sky and sea. Furthermore, Stick's Flat Tops were second homes made in the likeness of Wright's more practical Usonian homes, which were designed so middle-income families could enjoy the same amenities as wealthier clients.

As the real-estate market fluctuated, site plans for Southern Shores were made, discarded, adopted, and abandoned during the early years of the community. Fifty-foot-wide oceanfront lots were surveyed and platted. They were sold in pairs for two thousand dollars, with a 10 percent discount if a house was built within six months. The Flat Tops became

the predominant local form. They remained popular through the 1960s, reaching their zenith as a stylistic idiom around 1965.

Once the Flat Top movement was under way, Frank Stick built himself a one-room art studio. Even though he had put down his brushes and vowed never again to paint for profit, he rendered pen-and-ink sketches to illustrate his son's book *Graveyard of the Atlantic*, published in 1952. In 1955, he retired from his real-estate dealings and returned to painting. He and his wife traveled to Waverly Mills, South Carolina, San Carlos Bay, Florida, and eventually Key West. The work he produced during that time—mostly maritime scenes—is part of the permanent collection at the Outer Banks History Center in Manteo. Those paintings evoke the work of Brandywine School classmates like N. C. Wyeth and contemporaries like Winslow Homer. Stick's final *oeuvre* was a watercolor series of magnificent Outer Banks sport fish. Those paintings were collected between the covers of *An Artist's Catch*, published posthumously in 1981.

In addition to resuming his painting, Stick took up the conservation cause, teaming with Laurence Rockefeller and others to establish a national park on St. John in the Virgin Islands

in 1965. Southern Shores, the Outer Banks town he created, was incorporated in 1974. It is the gateway to beach communities in Duck and Corolla to the north and a model for upscale residential resorts like Sanderling, Pine Island, the Currituck Club, and Corolla Light.

Today, more than fifty years after the first Flat Tops appeared on the oceanfront in Southern Shores, their number has dwindled. Their property values, which run consistent with the current real-estate market, range from \$250,000 to \$350,000. However, appraisals run little more than \$50,000 for the vintage structures themselves.

Year by year, the water line at mean high tide inches closer and closer to the Flat Tops. Time will tell whether the man-made protective dunes erected in the 1930s by the Civilian Conservation Corps will slow the encroaching sea. Fortunately, the Southern Shores oceanfront is considered by geologists to be one of the more stable Outer Banks beaches. And at forty-two pounds per block, the Flat Tops are not likely to be going anywhere for some years to come.

The biggest threat to this indigenous Outer Banks architectural form is popular cultural values, as reflected in current building codes.

These include a Southern Shores town limit on renovation costs that restricts remodeling budgets to 50 percent of the value of the house. Since their plumbing and drain lines are buried under the foundations, the Flat Tops are a costly challenge to upgrade. Furthermore, building codes have been amended to minimize the damage from hurricanes and nor'easters, and all new homes—along with any additions to Flat Top cottages—must be elevated at least twenty feet. Today's tourists demand more amenities from their vacation houses than they can afford in their permanent homes. Therefore, resort properties are large and lavish. These new homes not only cost more to build, they also support large gatherings of extended families and friends to help defray weekly rental

costs, thereby eliminating the need for single-family summer homes altogether. For these reasons, many realtors and contractors encourage buyers to demolish the old Flat Tops, especially since their generously proportioned oceanfront lots are suitable for much larger homes.

Fortunately, some of the authentic Flat Tops remain. Three of the first five built survive today. They are Frank Stick's own house (the Stick-Miller Home), the Taylor-Smith-Covington Cottage, and the Graves Cottage. Two of the old Flat Tops—the Graves Cottage and the Pipkin Cottage—are owned by members of the original families. In the past decade, as many as a half-dozen other Flat Tops have been judiciously restored.



The Stick-Miller Home (left) and The Huntington Cairns Cottage, built in 1948 (right)
Frank Stick and his studio are on the right in the foreground.

PHOTOGRAPH BY AYCOCK BROWN / COURTESY OF DAVID STICK COLLECTION

The First Southern Shores Flat Top
The Stick-Miller Home
1947

Frank Stick paved the first road in Southern Shores in 1947 and set his house equidistant between the street he named Ocean Boulevard and

the Atlantic. Even though the protective dunes erected in 1933 prohibited views of the sea from the one-story block cottage, there was no muffling the roar of the surf.

The floor plan for Stick's Flat Top became a blueprint for scores of others built between 1948 and 1965. It featured a central living

room with a twelve-foot ceiling and a fireplace on the west wall. The ceiling dropped to eight feet where a screened porch adjoined the living area along the east elevation. North of the living room were the kitchen and the dining room. A master bedroom—added later at the northwest corner—functioned for a time as a studio. Three additional bedrooms and a bath were located on the south side of the house, as was an attached garage. Stick whitewashed his house and trimmed the exposed soffits and storm shutters a deep forest green.

Stick's house had a multilevel roofline that was intended to vary the interior ceiling heights. But the leaks that developed at each intersection caused this motif to be abandoned. One central raked roof became the pattern with subsequent Flat Tops.

The home also had exterior accent walls that balanced the bulkiness of the block cottage. These exterior facades became part of the Flat Top idiom in future construction. Evidently, Stick added the walls sometime after the house was built, for they were made of cinder block and not cement. They appeared as low masonry walls and an arched doorway that hid yard tools and garbage cans and also screened a walkway from the kitchen door to

the porch. At the southeast corner was a low, L-shaped wall that marked a footpath to a neighbor's house.

Frank Stick occupied his Flat Top cottage at 60 Ocean Boulevard until he passed away in 1966. Maud, his wife, continued to live in the house until her death in 1973. Today, the Miller family of Warrenton, Virginia, owns Frank Stick's Flat Top, which remains little changed since his time. A new hot-water heater, a new kitchen stove, and a microwave are the only modest improvements. The leaks are authentic, as are the sloped ceilings, the curved walls, the lantern in the dining room, the Chinese red countertops, and the kitchen cabinets made by Kitty Hawk carpenters Charlie Spruill and Arnold Perry.

“Portsmouth Tide”
The Graves Cottage
1948

When Grandmother Graves came to the Outer Banks to fish in the spring and fall, she made many friends among the locals. Her son, Edward Spencer Graves, built a cottage for her in 1948. It was an atypical Flat Top—two sto-

ries high, with room enough to accommodate the constant parade of houseguests from the family's hometown of Lynchburg, Virginia. According to Edward S. Graves II, the youngest of Grandmother Graves's seventeen grandchildren, she wanted a big house so that she could bring her entire Sunday school to visit. There was always a group coming down to use the cottage a week at a time every spring and fall. First, the men of the church would come down to fish. Then the ladies would come to play bridge. Then the women would come down a few weeks later to fish, followed by the men, who would come to play bridge. Even though the tradition has declined in recent years, trophies with engraved brass plaques awarded to the victors of those fishing and card-playing marathons line the bookshelves of the cottage today.

The first floor included a living room, a dining room, a kitchen, a screened porch, Grandmother Graves's suite, and another suite for the family cook. The second floor was balanced on either side by two large, open decks. Uncle Edward's room adjoined "the grownups' porch," while the bunk room at the top of the stairs and a guest room adjoined "the children's porch."

The house rules, posted in the kitchen, began with this from Gilbert and Sullivan's *HMS Pinafore*: "When at anchor we ride, on the Portsmouth Tide, we have plenty of time to play." When the family's children were deemed old enough to begin helping out around the place, they were anointed into stewardship aboard the family cottage, Portsmouth Tide. Young Edward Graves II was ten or eleven when he received instructions on how to mix cocktails for his elders. He would subsequently be summoned from the children's porch to the grownups' porch and given drink orders. He then prepared the beverages in the "fanny kitchen," so named because it was so narrow that everyone bumped fannies when they walked through it. The elders' drinks frequently required freshening up, so there was much hollering back and forth between porches and a lot of running up and down the stairs. Even now, not-so-young-anymore Edward can proudly recite his steward's motto, "Wait, serve, and look after others," which he did for nearly twenty years before he was invited to join the adults.

It should come as no surprise to learn that the Graves Cottage was the social nucleus of a cluster of oceanfront cottages owned mainly

by families from Lynchburg. The homes were known collectively as “the Compound.” To the north were the homes of Vernon Giles and James Watts. To the south were those of Peter Dunne, Frank Stick, and Huntington Cairns.

The late Betsy Giles best described the perpetual party that went on at the isolated beach in those days. She told a story of how, one evening, a female member of the Graves family was walking along the beach when she met Huntington Cairns’s mother. Mrs. Cairns supposedly remarked, “My son is fascinated by what goes on at your house every night,” to which Mrs. Graves replied, “The children are playing kick the can. Tell your little boy to come over.” And sure enough, forty-something Huntington Cairns, who was then the chief legal counsel for the National Gallery of Art in Washington, came over that night to play kick the can with the children. Betsy Giles howled with laughter in remembering.

Another habitué of “the Compound” was Finley Peter Dunne, son of the author of *Doctor Dolittle*. Finley Peter Dunne was a poet himself, as well as a Capitol Hill lobbyist for the Presbyterian Church. Edward Graves II re-

members many lively conversations during cocktail hour, especially the perennial debate between Cairns and Dunne in which Cairns argued that there was too much religion in politics.

Another noteworthy personality was Henrietta Hoopes Heath, a renegade socialite from Wilmington, Delaware, who had disgraced her family by running off to Paris to study painting instead of coming out. Henrietta was a contemporary of Frank Stick’s, and the two often shared top billing at the Delaware Art Museum’s annual exhibitions. Her portrait of Huntington Cairns is part of the permanent collection in the National Portrait Gallery in Washington.

It’s no wonder that Edward Graves II relishes his grandmother’s old cottage while simultaneously lamenting the constant maintenance required to keep it up. Even though many neighbors sold their oceanfront property when the elders passed on—fetching more than ten times the initial investment—Graves remains steadfast. Put simply, the house has too many memories and so much character.

“Craving Nostalgia”
The Taylor-Smith-Covington Cottage
1947

Bat Taylor, an aviator, and his wife, Marian, an artist, built a Flat Top on the oceanfront in Southern Shores in 1947. It was one of a handful of block cottages designed by David Stick, the son of Frank Stick, who succeeded his father as developer of Southern Shores from 1956 to 1976.

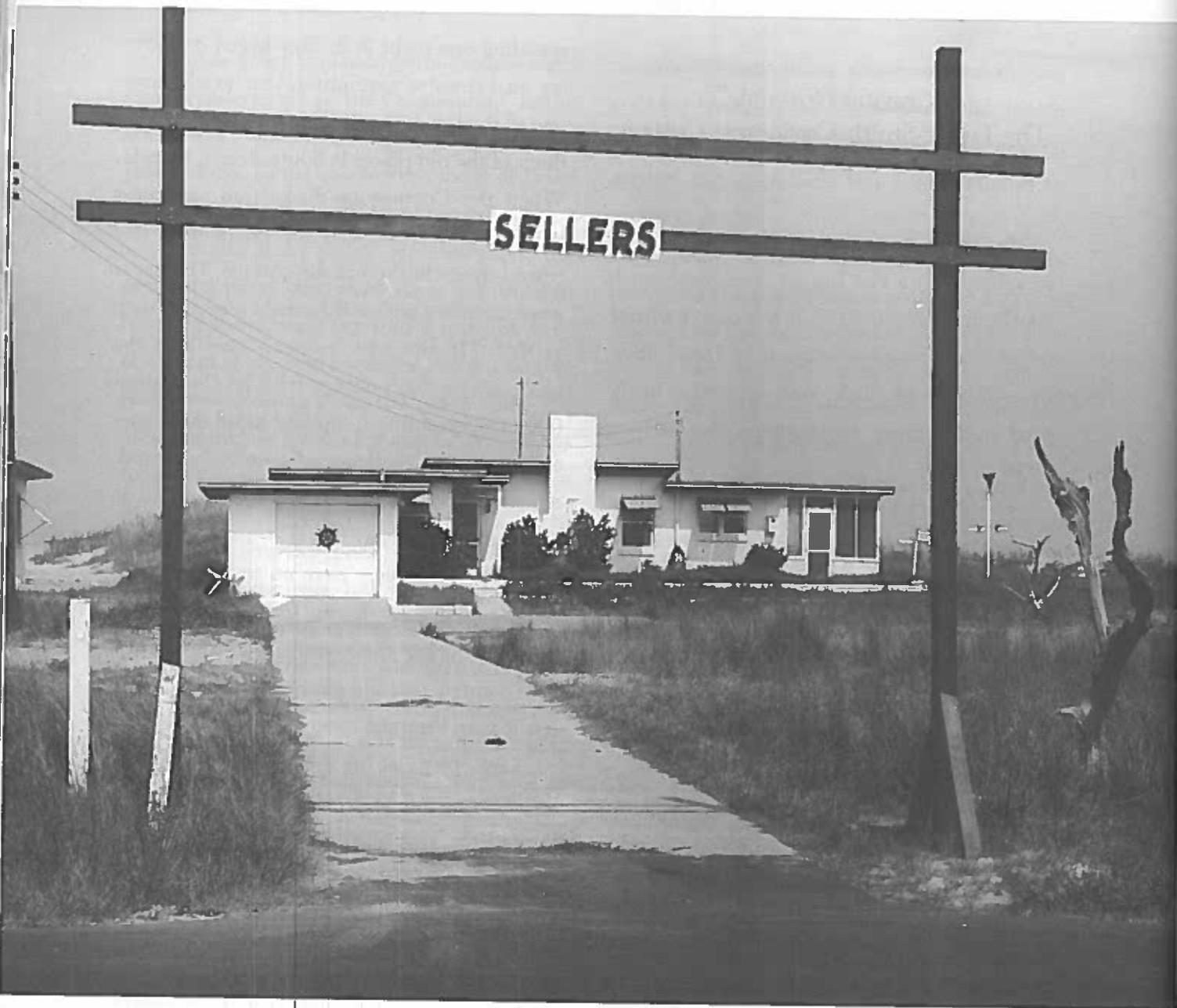
David Stick's design for the house followed his father's template for a central living room. But from there, the floor plan flip-flopped. The kitchen was placed at the southwest corner, instead of the northeast, and the bedrooms were located in the north wing, instead of the south. The most unusual element was the crescent-shaped hearth tucked into the northeast corner of the living room. On the property's north side was a detached wing that served as the maid's room and a garage.

Fifty years after the Taylors' house was built, Joe and Janet Covington bought it from Malcolm Smith for \$385,000. They initially planned to demolish the cottage, but after

spending one night in it, they began considering an extensive restoration that would spare one of the last authentic Flat Tops. It reminded them of the old places in South Beach, Florida. When the Covingtons discovered the guest book, they learned that several families had reared their children at the cottage. The pages were inscribed with soft-hearted messages such as this: “To the new owners—we love the place, please don't change it.” The Covingtons felt a responsibility to uphold those memories and accept the challenge of sensitively remodeling a home that had so much charm and so much appeal the way it was.

Fortunately, they were no strangers to the renovation process, having teamed up on many projects during their years of running their own construction and plumbing firm in Hampton Roads, Virginia.

Like other Flat Top owners, the Covingtons were restricted by town building codes that limited the cost of renovations to 50 percent of the value of the structure. In their case, the cottage itself was worth fifty thousand dollars. By dividing the project into phases, however, they were able to spend twenty-five thousand the first year and an additional twenty-five



The Sellers Cottage, designed by Frank Stick, was built in 1949.
PHOTOGRAPH BY AYCOCK BROWN / COURTESY OF DAVID STICK COLLECTION

thousand the second year to achieve their remodeling goals.

The Covingtons considered a renovation plan that would have linked the modest guest wing to the main house on the northeast corner. However, the flood line ran through the center of their living room. Therefore, any additions to the house needed to be twenty feet above the mean high-tide line (allowing for an eighteen-foot storm surge, plus two additional feet), with no ground-level obstructions. Such an addition would have disrupted the lines of the house and destroyed its authenticity.

Because they couldn't expand, Janet Covington, an interior designer, decided to furnish the house like a well-appointed, classic yacht, using built-in cabinets and a minimum of loose furniture. She succeeded in meeting the demands of today's rental market while choosing finishes and fixtures that the couple wanted for themselves. The result was a blend of old and new, vintage and contemporary—an eclectic, harmonious mix of textures and styles.

In the fall of 1997, the first phase of renovations began in the two-bedroom, two-bath guest wing. The plumbing and electrical systems were upgraded. The original white cedar

paneling was carefully removed and replaced with white drywall, after which the cedar was given a second life when the boards were used to construct built-in vanity cupboards and bedroom bureaus. Berber carpet, granite countertops, and new bathroom fixtures were added, and the window sills and doorframes were refinished.

Restoration of the main house began in the winter of 1998, when Joe Covington and his crew dug a trench across the concrete-slab floor to improve the kitchen and bathroom plumbing. Once again, drywall was installed and the original wallboards were harvested and transformed, this time into a built-in entertainment center and bookshelves in the living room. The entire east elevation was raised two feet, and all of the windows were replaced. New appliances arrived for the kitchen by the spring of 1999, but the original wooden icebox and the countertop built by Charlie Spruill and Arnold Perry remained intact. The interior entrance to the screened porch was moved to make space for a dining room. The guest room and bath were rehabilitated. And the master bedroom suite, which was semiprivate, was made exclusive.

Today, the quality of these interior spaces

is enhanced by “outdoor rooms”—a vintage 1950s shuffleboard court, a walled seaside garden, and a sixteen-by-thirty-two-foot lap pool and terrace—framed by low stone walls with glass-block details. Windows throughout the house extend the yacht metaphor and invite these “outdoor rooms” indoors.

The Covingtons rent their house for ten weeks out of the prime summer season. But from mid-August to late May, they spend as much time as possible at Craving Nostalgia. The first thing they do is grab the guest book. They are frequently gratified by the comments. Everyone raves about the place. The Covingtons’ meticulous restoration is in perfect pitch with the entry made by John and Becky Quann on July 19, 1997, and read by the Covingtons on their first, fateful night in the cottage: “Anything less would have been roughing it, anything more would have been too stuffy.”

“Barefoot Elegance” The Smith-Millican-Garrett Home

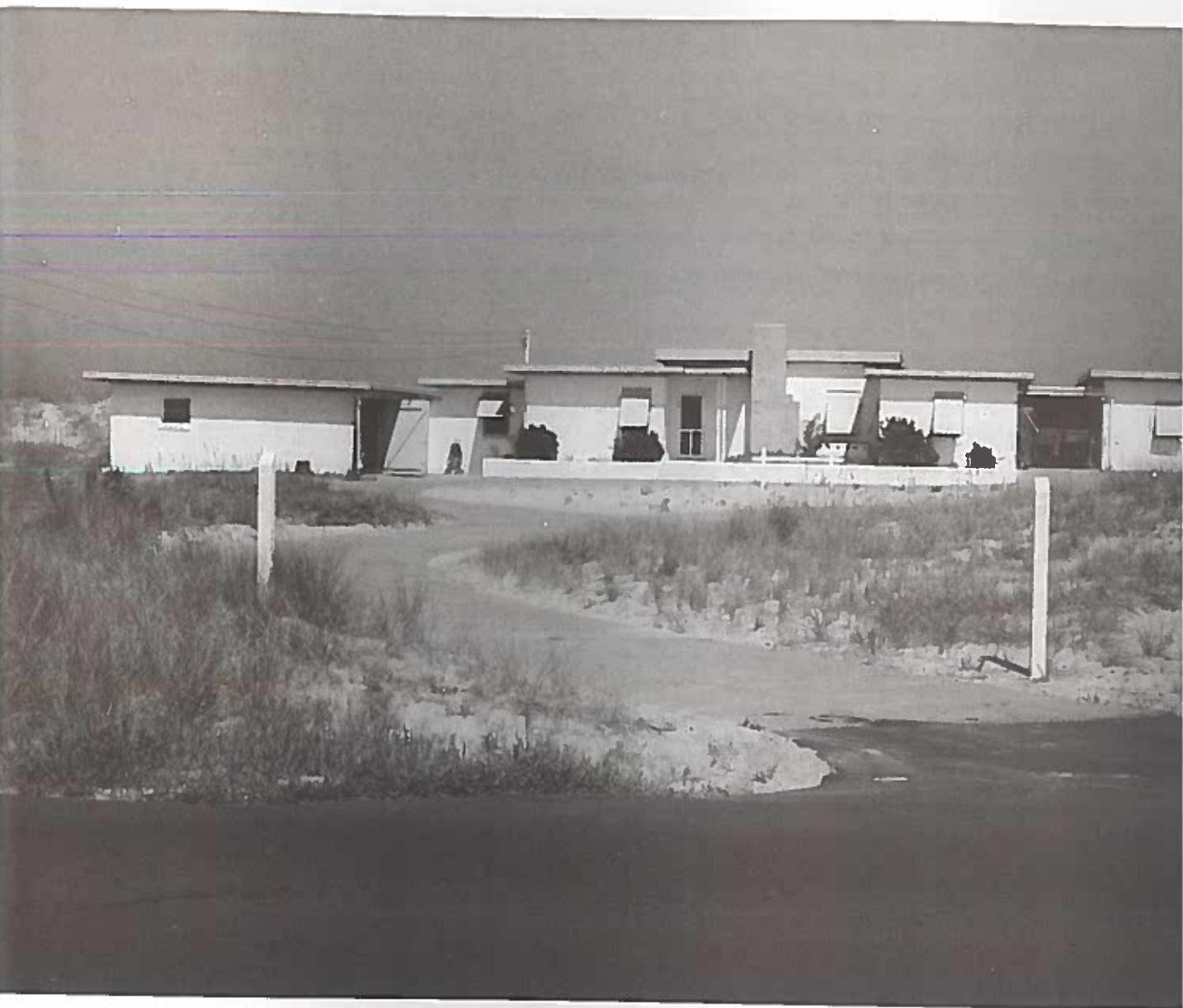
1950

“The purple martins left four days ago, but they’ll be back,” laughs Ben Garrett, standing beside an assortment of birdhouses in the front yard of his lavish Flat Top cottage.

Barefoot Elegance, the home at 100 Ocean Boulevard, was built in 1950 by Brad and Ruth Smith. It was extensively remodeled forty years later by Ted and Marylou Millican. Ben and Dee Garrett now own the Flat Top, as well as a property-management firm specializing in high-end vacation rentals.

The Garretts and Bob de Gabrielle bought the house in 1994 with the idea of leasing it as a vacation property. In 1997, the Garretts bought de Gabrielle’s share and took the house over. The following year, the couple tried living in the place for the winter, gradually transferring their personal effects from their Nags Head home to Southern Shores. They fell in love with the cottage and decided to stay permanently.

The original floor plan had a central living room balanced by two wings. The north wing



The Haserot Cottage, designed by David Stick and built in 1948, was demolished in 1998.

PHOTOGRAPH BY AYCOCK BROWN / COURTESY OF DAVID STICK COLLECTION

housed a master bedroom suite on the west side and a kitchen facing east. The south wing had two guest rooms and a bath. A screened porch wrapped the southeast corner. A separate apartment connected to the detached garage originally accommodated domestic staff in the 1950s. It was converted into guest quarters during the 1960s.

Architectural designer Jude LeBlanc drew the plans for the 1990 renovation, which included a substantial addition that doubled the square footage as well as the interior elevation. Without disrupting the living space, LeBlanc blew the roof off the east wall and created a central atrium filled with tropical house plants. The addition included a contemporary, open kitchen and dining area, plus a Florida-style sunroom and a wet bar. Through the selection of interior finishes, the old was blended with the new. Glass-block walls linked the original living room to the atrium. All of the exterior walls were stucco and the roof tiles terra cotta, which served to unify the house and its dependencies. The construction of another garage along the south edge of the property helped put the outbuildings and the main structure in balance. Low concrete walls—one forming a

courtyard near the front entrance and surrounding an indoor lap pool, the other flanking the roadway—extended the villa theme common to island settings and supported a level of privacy not usually found along Ocean Boulevard in Southern Shores. Today, the Mediterranean flavor distinguishes this house from all the rest.

The Garretts have perpetuated a decorative tradition handed down from one owner to the next. From a halyard on the ocean side, the original owners, the Smiths, raised as many as three or four flags at a time from their extensive collection; the flags were those of the countries that were in the news that day. The Smiths also created a series of steppingstones that led from the porch door to the beach. Each concrete rectangle was embedded with beach glass and seashells arranged into familiar icons—a crab, a sailboat, a candle, a Carolina Tar Heel. From those homemade stones, the second owners, Ted and Marylou Millican, selected the Tar Heel as the emblem for their house, *Barefoot Elegance*. They incorporated the symbol into the design of a house flag—a pair of hot-pink bare feet blazing inside a circle of green that floats across a sky-blue

field. The flag occasionally waves in the sea breeze today.

"The Pink House"

The Roth Cottage

1950s

Hot-pink cement blocks, exposed dovetail soffits, raised storm shutters, and louvered doors decorate the exterior of this Flat Top like frosting on a wedding cake. Inside, the pastel walls of the Pink House light up like a rainbow as the sun makes its arc across the sky.

Slender rays peek through tobacco-brown Plantation blinds in the living room. The exposed walnut-stained beams and the bare, uninsulated juniper ceiling contrast with the pale yellow stone walls. Bentwood rattan, four canes wide, frames the cushioned sofa and the oval swivel chair perched on a round rattan base. The bamboo end tables have a triangular shape, while the oversized, glass-topped coffee table is square. The suite of furniture faces the fireplace on the south wall, which is made of red bricks horizontally laid. In the niches are a pair of urns and in the corner a rattan

teacart, a sink, and a large watercolor in which palm trees flank a dark-skinned man in a sombrero who is riding a donkey across the horizon.

In the northeast ell is the dining room. The kitchen, a vibrant robin's-egg blue, is a brilliant contrast to the master bedroom it adjoins, which is painted pink. The bedroom and its private bath occupy the entire northwest-southeast axis, so as to benefit from the prevailing southwesterly winds in summer. In the south wing, three guest rooms painted varying shades of sea green share a bath. The screened porch attached to the east elevation is buffered by the dunes from the breakers beyond.

Barbara Roth and her husband, Lieutenant Colonel Martin E. Roth, came to the Outer Banks in 1963, after the Ash Wednesday Storm of 1962, to look around for something to buy. For twenty-five thousand dollars, they ended up with this Flat Top and everything that came with it—from the lawn buoy in the front yard to the monogrammed towels in the master bath to the 150 feet of prime oceanfront real estate. Barbara Roth made only two alterations, changing the exterior color from an ugly green



"The Pink House," also known as The Roth Cottage, c. 1955
PHOTOGRAPH BY AYCOCK BROWN / COURTESY OF DAVID STICK COLLECTION

to pink and adding a pair of kitchen cupboards with shelves tall enough for a large gin bottle.

“Pink Perfection”
The Pipkin Cottage
1953

“There’s nowhere such comfort, we think, as at Pipkin’s Perfection in Pink. There’s nothing lugubrious, all is salubrious. Good Talk, Good Food and Good Drink,” wrote houseguest William McKinley Eden on July 13, 1974.

It’s true. Pink Perfection is the epitome of a vintage Flat Top. It is one of only two architect-designed structures built along Ocean Boulevard in the 1950s, and the last one owned by members of its original family.

In 1951, Emily Edith Pipkin purchased two adjoining oceanfront lots from Frank Stick for twenty-eight hundred dollars. Miss Edith was a schoolteacher and the corporate secretary for her family’s business, the Cone Cotton Mill in Reidsville, North Carolina. She hired Edward Lowenstein, an architect from Greensboro, to design a summer house for herself, her brother,

his family, and their friends. The Kitty Hawk firm of Spruill and Perry completed the home in 1953 at a cost of twenty-six thousand dollars. Miss Edith named the house Pink Perfection, after her favorite camellia, and had the exterior walls painted pink and the storm shutters and soffits painted a leafy green.

The living-room entrance adjoined a screened porch that extended across the east side of the house. Three bedrooms lined up along the northwest-southeast axis to benefit from the prevailing southwesterly winds during summer. These bedrooms had transom windows along the interior walls to regulate the flow of air from the corridor, which also adjoined the screened porch. The kitchen occupied the northeast corner of the house, as did the service wing, which included a maid’s suite and a small apartment for Miss Edith’s chauffeur. Much of the cottage’s original furniture—the dining and coffee tables, the chests of drawers, a desk, bookshelves, and custom cabinets for the master suite and the kitchen—are still in use today. The floors throughout were black and white linoleum tile. The stone walls were aquamarine and the kitchen counters Chinese red.

In 1957, Miss Edith purchased an additional pair of lots for another twenty-eight hundred dollars. When she died at sea on a cruise to Bermuda in 1971, Pink Perfection and the adjoining property passed to her younger brother, Willis Benton Pipkin, and his two sons, John Benton Pipkin and Ashmead Pringle Pipkin. Both Pipkin boys had vacationed in Southern Shores since they were teenagers. Driving John's Jeep, they had joined their contemporaries Billy Giles and Skipper Taylor, who also had Jeeps, to go scavenging the beaches for treasures like the flagpole, the boat ring, the cottage door, hatch covers, and other Outer Banks artifacts still in use at the cottage today.

In 1993, the family arrived at a crossroads—Pink Perfection had to grow or go. At the time, the property was appraised at just over half a million dollars, but the house itself was valued at a mere sixty thousand. Since the town of Southern Shores allowed only 50 percent of a home's value to be invested in reno-

vations, the Pipkin brothers considered razing Aunt Edith's cottage, since its two oceanfront lots would support a much larger, more modern house for their growing families. But after searching their hearts, they arrived at a happy ending. They converted the chauffeur's quarters and the maid's room into a separate wing with its own entrance, a foyer, a guest room, a full bath, and a master bedroom suite, complete with central air conditioning and heat.

The changes were seamless, and the overall appearance of the house was not altered significantly. In fact, the description of Pink Perfection offered by North Carolina author T. R. Pearson in "When We Used to Go Where We Went," his autobiographical short story about boyhood summer vacations in Southern Shores, is still valid: "It was long and was low, but hardly troublesome to spy out on account of it was pink too, lively pink and in a spot where there was not anything else remotely pink at all."



"Pink Perfection," also known as The Pipkin Cottage, was designed by Edward Lowenstein and built in 1953.
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