

AVENUE

JUNE 2014

ON THE
BEACH

RUN FOR SHELTER

Inside the Shelter Island home
of Katherine and Marco Birch

**GETTING THERE IS
HALF THE FUN**

The Hon. Henry Broughton
dishes on the classic
Jaguar XKE

**UNDER THE
PARASOL**

with **Fernanda Niven**,
the ultimate East End insider

BY WILLIAM NORWICH

imme Shelter

Away from the city crowds,
Katherine and Marco Birch have
found a summer idyll on Shelter Island.

by *Helena Gautier*
photographed by *Eric Striffler*

AWAY FROM THE hectic bustle of the Hamptons, the packed restaurants, traffic jams and crowds of people, Shelter Island lies as if forgotten in time, with small country roads framed by massive trees, quiet sandy beaches and small wooden sailboats bobbing gently in the marina and kids on bicycles—everywhere.

Shelter Island is known as the “un-Hamptons,” and for this reason, or maybe because the trip from Manhattan takes just 27 minutes by seaplane, Marco and Katherine Birch have chosen this sanctuary for their country retreat.

Their house is on Little Ram Island, a small spit of land that juts out between Coecles Harbor and Gardiners Bay, and faces the two farthest points of Long Island, Orient Point to the north and Montauk to the south. The road is guarded by imposing large Osprey nests that line the long, deserted stretch of beach that connects to the rest of the island.

A visit to the Birches’ home finds Katherine Birch reclining casually on a couch in the large living room of her estate, which is fully outfitted with an enviable wine cellar, vegetable and herb gardens, a full spa and squash and tennis courts.

A deep-water dock just outside the house comes in handy whenever the family arrives by seaplane after a half-hour flight from Midtown, travels to Nantucket to visit the grandparents or explores nearby Block Island on biking excursions.

Hair and makeup by Sara Strand





Clockwise from top: A hallway with antique prints of hunting and fishing as well as assorted mirrors found in Paris; an Erard piano designed by famous French artist Louis Majorelle graces the living room. All sofas and bookcases are custom made. The center table and chandelier come from a Danish castle while another table is from a Belgian monastery; an antique model of a sailboat found at an auction



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"Shelter Island is so ideal for us because it is situated in the middle of everything we love to do outdoors, like playing tennis, swimming, water skiing and hiking," Katherine says. "There are some of the most beautiful beaches here, world-class sailing on the bays, wonderful vineyards and fabulous local and fresh food; it is truly a magical place," she adds, adjusting her sun-kissed blonde hair as she cuddles her 11-month-old daughter, Annabelle, and keeps an eye on son William, who periodically zooms by in his toy car.

The Birches' vast house, of about 18,000 square feet, was designed by Brandes Maselli Architects and built by Robert Plumb of Sag Harbor. It's designed in a traditional "shingle style," drawing inspiration from Shelter Island's rural history as well as its own picturesque setting—a crescent knoll overlooking Coeques Harbor.

"The intention was to make the house feel as if it had been lived in for generations," Katherine says. Her husband, Marco Birch, a portfolio manager at Moore Capital Management, decorated the house himself. An avid sailor, Marco kept his nautical theme consistent throughout the house, from the large model sailboats that adorn the living room, and marine art, to the wall murals of the dining room that were handpainted by artist Ann Harris to depict maps of Shelter Island. A 7-foot copper and brass replica of America's Cup yacht *Endeavour's* weathervane adorns the roof while the interior of the weathervane hangs high in the domed ceiling above the grand staircase.

As the wind changes, both internal and external vanes respond in unison to the directionally correct compass hand-painted on the floor.

All bedrooms in the house are whimsically themed. "Our son's room is nautical and is designed to feel like the inside of a galleon, while our daughter's room is encased in our favorite vignettes of the Mashomack Preserve," Katherine explains, referring to that 2,000-acre natural area. One guest room displays Shelter Island historical memorabilia, like a large wooden kayak suspended above the bed, which was made by a local craftsman, Mike Loriz, from the oak of the largest tree on the island that fell after a storm.

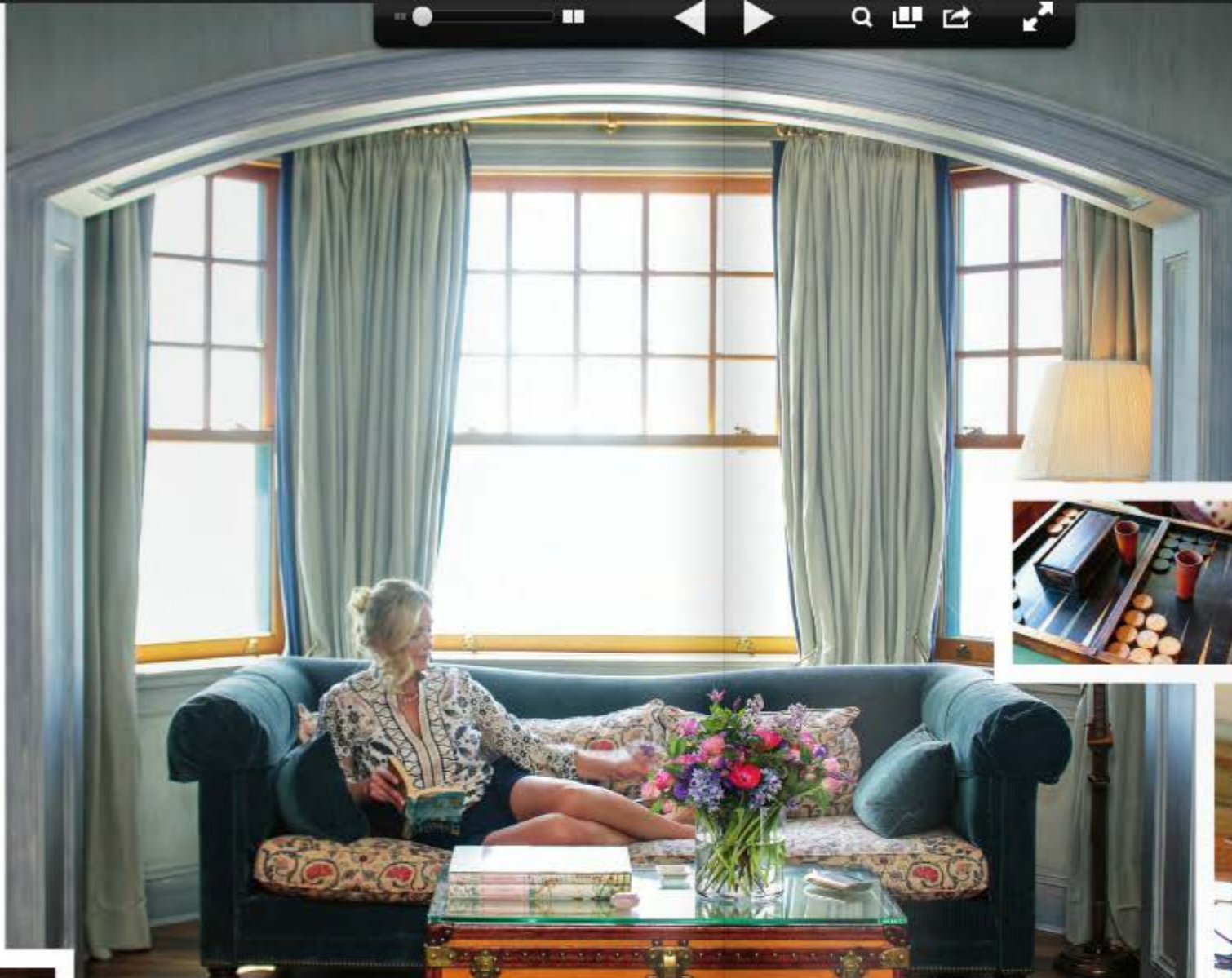


"The house was built to be enjoyed all year," Katherine says. "We get just as excited to hit the beach and go out on the boat as we do to bundle up and play paddle tennis in the fall or go snowshoeing and watch the ice boats race on Coecles Harbor in the winter."

The house was clearly built with a love for entertaining in mind, which the Birches do willingly and often. Their doors are always open to family and friends; events range from small intimate dinners in the garden room, to holiday feasts, to epic parties in the disco room that doubles as a movie theater and is equipped with 30 speakers, disco balls, laser lights and a DJ booth.

In the summers the great lawn that overlooks Coecles Harbor is also used to entertain. "We can have a rock concert for hundreds of people in the backyard," Katherine says. "We have hosted the B-52s, the Barenaked Ladies and John Fogerty for the Group for the East End, as well as Rufus and Loudon Wainwright III and [the late] Lou Reed for the 4 Poster tick program."

Although they are always up for entertaining, the Birch family also appreciate the low-key lifestyle of Shelter Island. "There is something here for everyone and it is a wonderful community that I feel a part of," Katherine says. Being involved in the community and having the desire to protect the local environment led Katherine to get involved with the Group for the East End, for which she serves as vice chair, a commitment she is passionate about. "The Group's work is based in advocacy and education," she says. "They inspire people to embrace a conservation ethic by teach-



Clockwise from top: A sea star was found at a Paris flea market; a large chandelier completes the Garden Room—it was found at a Paris flea market and then restored and rewired; an antique chair the couple came upon in Paris—with ram heads on the arms and feet, the chair is evocative of Ram Island; a backgammon table is French early 19th century, found at an auction.

Opposite page: Bedroom couch is custom made with Ralph Lauren fabric. All the bedroom walls are created by Orazio De Gennaro; a bronze chandelier; William racing through the billiards room.



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Clockwise from top: A wine cellar holds 2,800 bottles and is often used for intimate dinners and wine tastings. The walls of the cellar are decorated with paintings by Sophie Matisse whose maternal grandfather was Marcel Duchamp and paternal grandfather, Henri Matisse; an antique wine barrel and wine press are the unique finds from Paris flea markets. **Opposite page:** The family in the Scandinavian Room; a magnifying glass; Katherine and Annabelle over a Scrabble board.



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ing children and adults alike what it means to take care of a place you love. Then, they use their expertise to protect what we all love by advocating for policy change. Water quality, open-space preservation, beach erosion, wildlife habitats—they work at every level to protect and preserve the East End as we know it—and inspire change for generations to come.

“We are working hard to protect the nature of the place we all love and teaching our kids to protect their future.”

Preservation for future generations is also a deeply personal cause for Katherine, as her own children are growing up in these idyllic surroundings. “We have chickens and my son picks fresh eggs; he also loves helping me plant vegetables and flowers and is very excited about how things are grown,” she says. “I am looking forward to teaching my daughter as well when she is older.” Most of her kids’ time is spent outdoors, having picnics, riding bikes with their parents or going on the boat and to ice cream outings. Once they turn 6, they will join in the footsteps of their father by joining a children’s sailing program at the Shelter Island Yacht Club, which was founded in 1886 and is one of the oldest clubs in America.

As the day winds down and the sun sets over Shelter Island, the house feels almost like it is floating on the shimmering waters outside. The family gathers in the kitchen for dinner and the kids are already making plans for the next day’s adventures. There is a lot to do, as another summer of fun, family and friends begins. ♦

