

## **BOOK REVIEW: Design Interventions - Authenticity vs. Nostalgia**

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by James Croak

“It features three laundry rooms!” the broker gushed. I was wandering through one of the massive Shingle Style houses that have appeared in the Hamptons recently like ticks in June. Three laundry rooms? Why? “Because it has nine bedrooms!” she beamed.

My first thought was that I would have at least 12 places to look for my socks. My second thought was we have a word for such structures; they are called “hotels,” and if you wish to live in a “hotel,” rent a floor in the Waldorf Astoria. Why migrate to the country and then bulldoze a hectare of woodland in order to stare at an acre of drywall?

In his new book, *Design in the Hamptons*, author Anthony Iannacci describes 19 designers who are performing a “successful intervention” to block the commercially generated architectural nostalgia suddenly rampant on the East End.

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“Design in the Hamptons” book cover. Courtesy of The Monacelli Press.

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His is a large book both in scope and ambition, a survey of contemporary design in New York’s special incubator, the collection of villages and towns at the East End of Long Island colloquially known as the Hamptons. It is where the established New York designers try out edge ideas in a casual atmosphere.

To understand this unusual book, first it’s important to introduce Iannacci himself. His parents owned a house in Southampton and he spent some of his childhood on the East End. He studied art and architecture at Cooper Union and then made an art world name for himself writing pieces from Milan for the theory-laden publications Artforum and Artscribe, and the somewhat lighter Vogue Italia. He also curated edge-thinking sculpture and painting shows such as “Niente di Nuovo” (a show that included this author) and “Toolbox,” both in Italy.

Given Iannacci’s academic and critical background, one should not expect a puff piece on Hamptons architecture and design. Indeed, quite the opposite as, similar to many long term residents, Iannacci is not fond of the direction that housing and land use on the East End have been going. He adopts the idea of “authenticity” from continental philosophy to counter the

aforementioned nostalgia.

The existentialists were fond of the word authenticity and used it to mean being true to one's eccentric self, eschewing trends and conformity. And such is the amazing design theme throughout this book: there isn't one. Each structure is filled with a motley collection of objets d'art and utilitarian objects from far flung styles and worlds complete unto themselves. When these are improbably juxtaposed, the result is as individual as, well, individuals.

Designer Joe Naham worked with architect Steve Chrostowski on one such "intervention," which involved lowering the living room ceiling in a newly constructed developer's house. When they started, the ceiling height was more on a scale of the aviary at Doué-la-Fontaine than the proclaimed Hamptons historic style. Triage for the nouveaux riche.

There are no fillers in this book; each of the 19 designers or design teams did a superb job and is showcased by an individual house with an installation by each. They are: Jonathan Adler and Simon Doonan, John Barman, Christoff:Finio, Joe D'Urso, Tom Flynn, Fox Nahem, Philip Galanes and Michael Haverland, David Gresham and Benjamin Pardo, S. Russell Groves, Thad Hayes, James Huniford, Tony Ingrao and Randy Kemper, Todd Merrill, Stuart Parr, Roman and Williams, Suzanne Shaker, Robert Stilin, James Topping, and Yabu Pushelberg.

For those with a Colonial house, the Russell Groves installation of muted tones and proper moldings is the touchstone of these early English and Dutch homes on the Atlantic seaboard—a peaceful and refined elegance, understated and sustaining. A developed style for a welcoming nest that has lasted or reappeared many times over the centuries.

On the far opposite of the colonial house style is the less-is-more modernism that appeared on the East End during the 1960s as upscale New York families built a second home on the seashore. One popular architect was Charles Gwathmey, who designed a home in Amagansett for his parents in 1966.

By the 1990s these modernist homes had fallen out of favor as personal taste returned the 1880-1900 Shingle Style—what Iannacci calls nostalgia—and an odd thing happened. Owners began molesting clean-form houses with decorative baseboards and trim, intolerably stuck on buildings where it simply didn't belong. Peanut butter on a steak. Tassels on a Ferrari.

Todd Merrill restored the 9,000-square-foot Gwathmey house mostly by removing what didn't belong, namely attempts to "update" the house in the 1980s with interior décor. The result is a pleasing time capsule of the developed forms and simple functionality that dates back to the German Bauhaus. The white on white in white provides the kind of brilliant light and shadows that perform a daily dance across the simple surfaces of the empty-is-full aesthetic of this major architectural lodestone.

In between the style bookends of Shingle Style and Modernism readers will find interior installations of every architectural style in evidence in the Hamptons, making the book an encyclopedic study of posh East End homes. This kind of study, of course, comes with plenty of ideas to pinch for the less well-heeled needing to perform an intervention or two in their own homes.

The production values are high, with consistently good photography, making this a beautiful coffee-table book as well as a design student's reference guide. Well-written, thoroughly researched, an engaging and involving layout, and beautifully printed.

Another home run for Anthony Iannacci.

**BASIC INFO:** *Design in the Hamptons* by Anthony Iannacci, The Monacelli Press, 2014, 320 pages, 250 color illustrations, \$75. [www.monacellipress.com](http://www.monacellipress.com). [www.facebook.com/anthony.iannacci](https://www.facebook.com/anthony.iannacci).

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