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Hamptons Homes Blur the Line Between Inside and Out



The awning of a pool house in Southampton, N.Y., frames the view of a gunite pool with an infinity edge, spa and sun shelves. John Kean built the house on spec for the ultimate in indoor-outdoor living. Daniel Gonzalez for The New York Times

By Marcelle Sussman Fischler

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Twenty-foot-wide glass walls retract electronically at the tap of a cellphone app at the over-the-top \$39.5 million furnished mansion John Kean built last year on four acres in Southampton. They disappear into wall pockets, blurring the distinction between indoors and out.

The living room, with its full bar, dovetails with an outdoor covered terrace lengthy enough for a banquet table for 75 guests.

“You come to the Hamptons to be outside,” Mr. Kean said, describing an indoor yet outdoor alfresco fund-raising soirée he held last summer at the 15,500-square-foot, 10-bedroom, 12-full- and three-half-bath manse that he built on spec.

Another tap and a mesh screen came down, enclosing the terrace and turning the geothermally cooled house into a giant screened-in porch. The screens “keep the air-conditioning in,” he said, and the pesky bugs out.

Increasingly, architects, builders, interior designers, landscape architects and homeowners in the Hamptons are bringing the indoors out, turning terraces, backyards and roof decks into a series of stylish outdoor rooms.



The home of Philip Judson and James Maloney in Northwest Woods opens onto a deck and a gunite pool with a sun shelf and more. Daniel Gonzalez for The New York Times

Mr. Kean's property is at the high end of the Hamptons housing market, where the average sale price is \$1.72 million, but the melding of inside and out is a trend that can be seen even in more modest homes.

"In the Hamptons, the outdoors is more important than the indoors," said Gary DePersia, an associate broker with the Corcoran Group, who has the listing. "Houses are being designed to accentuate that," including at least two that he has represented that have underground grottoes offering aquarium-like views into outdoor swimming pools, he said.

For Hamptonites from the city, "it is such a rare thing to have outdoor space," said Christine Gachot, an owner of Gachot Studios, an interior design firm based in Manhattan. "When you have it, you try to celebrate it as much as possible. We try to design pockets of outdoor living like exterior rooms," putting kitchens, fireplaces, pool areas and bars outside, "very much like you are designing the interior of the home." Depending on how far clients are willing to go, "it is like having a whole extra house."

At a contemporary \$50 million seven-bedroom home built four years ago in Sagaponack, glass walls on both sides of the house slide open to an infinity edge pool, a private beach and the ocean to the east, a pond on the west. "You are almost in a big loggia," said Susan Breitenbach, an associate broker with the Corcoran Group, who has the listing.

"The integrated interior-exterior is very important," Ms. Breitenbach said. When the owners, who live in Manhattan, come to the Hamptons, "they want their outdoor space. They want their loggias, their terraces, their barbecue, their roof deck, their fireplace, their two outdoor showers in the master bedroom and outdoor Jacuzzis, one in the pool, another on the roof. "



Daniel Gonzalez for The New York Times

Peggy Fruin, an interior designer and co-owner of Hampton Design in Bridgehampton, said that she starts by dressing the patio “as if it’s just another room with sofas, chairs, short tables for drinks, dining tables and chairs — all the amenities for entertaining family and friends.”

Technology has helped make outdoor decorating easier, she said, with Sunbrella and other “no muss, no wet” fabrics to use on outdoor sectionals, pillows and other furnishings.

Quincy Hammond, a Manhattan-based landscape architect who frequently designs Hamptons gardens, said that in the past decade, the choices for aluminum, wicker, resin and teak outdoor furniture and fabric options have become “almost as impressive as what they have for the inside.”

Things like fire pits, gas fireplaces, pool houses for entertaining, outdoor televisions, and “great sun coverage from all the new umbrellas on the market” are also ramping up the outdoor’s cachet, Ms. Fruin said. While outdoor showers are not new, for one Amagansett client Ms. Fruin designed an outdoor bathtub off her bedroom that “she could enjoy day or night,” with an enclosed tiled wall with candles on shelves, a lush garden and a slatted pergola above.

Trying to duplicate the indoor experience outside, in the last four years, Bill D'Agata, a Quogue-based pool and landscape designer, built pavilions in six East End backyards, with prices ranging from \$600,000 to \$1 million each.



An oceanfront property in Sagaponack mixes interior and exterior elements to celebrate the best of both worlds. Michael Moran/OTTO

“All the amenities that exist inside the main house are now found outside the main house,” he said, including apps that can remotely set the spa to 98 degrees, and turn on the lights or outdoor speakers, while the homeowner is still on the drive east.

Mr. D’Agata changed the way that Glenn and Rachelle McGrath use their wooded 2.14-acre Southampton property, by doubling the amount of level land on the property, adding a saltwater pool and building a 30-by-35-foot pavilion.

“We entertain a lot,” said Mr. McGrath, an insurance executive. “Even in summer months, people would migrate to our kitchen, inside.”

The pavilion, which has living and dining spaces, a full kitchen and pantry, a bathroom, an outdoor shower, a floor-to-ceiling fireplace and a speaker system, now draws the visitors outside instead.



A backyard pavilion next to a pool in the woods of Southampton has a chef’s kitchen with black granite countertops, a pantry, dining and living areas, a fireplace, a television, Western red cedar cladding, bluestone floors and a basement to hide the pool equipment. Daniel Gonzalez for The New York Times

Swimming pools are the quintessential outdoor playrooms. But in the Hamptons and other luxury destinations, chaise longues are no longer confined to the deck.

Greg Darvin, the owner of Pristine Pools in East Hampton, took a cue from resort pools that his clients have enjoyed in the Caribbean or Indonesia. Many of the 25 to 30 in-ground saltwater gunite pools he builds a year have “sun shelves” in shallow water for chaise longues and shade umbrellas, making it easy to dip your feet in the water without getting out of your chair.

“It is very inviting,” Mr. Darvin said, “a fun place to sit with the kids, or Mom and Dad can have a drink or read.” The 12-foot-wide shelves are also a place for toddlers to splash and play without the need for a separate kiddie pool. Other pools have sloped “beach” entrances.

Three years ago, Mr. Darvin built a heated pool with a sun shelf, a spa and room for laps for Dr. Sheryl Leventhal and Peter Schwartz, both 57, at the five-bedroom Wainscott house they bought a year earlier for \$1.7 million. Their old pool was smaller, faced the other way, and was more steps down from the house.

Mr. Darvin “lifted the backyard by six or eight inches and turned the pool longways,” Dr. Leventhal said. Including a new outdoor barbecue, landscaping, walkways and deer fencing, the project cost about \$400,000. “We were really happy with it,” she said. “The whole feel of the house changed because you could see the pool from the house,” which has double-height windows with transoms across the back.



Daniel Gonzalez for The New York Times

The sun shelf, which holds four chaise longues, became a social space. “I had 14 people staying with me for three days, and everyone was on the sun shelf,” Dr. Leventhal said. “You are in the water but out of the water and everybody can be together.” Guests also use the hot tub inside the pool, chaise longues in a shadier area behind the pool, and a sectional on a deck one step above the pool level. Two love seats around a fire pit provide another gathering spot.

Dr. Leventhal said the reason to go to the Hamptons is to have friends and family over and “get out of our house in Suffern. It is dark and depressing.” The couple feel better in the Hamptons “because of the light.”

James Maloney and Philip Judson entertain every other weekend in the oasislike backyard of their three-bedroom, three-bath home on half an acre in Northwest Woods, part of East Hampton. “When people come here, they are awe-struck. It looks like a resort pool,” said Mr. Judson, an agent at Halstead.

Flames shoot out of a channel-style fire feature in the Corinthian blue-gray granite stone wall that wraps around the back of the pool with two waterfalls, part of a redo by Mr. Darvin four years ago.

The pool has a sun shelf with chaise longues, marine-grade stainless-steel tables and shade umbrellas. Below the shelf is a narrower seating ledge for sipping cocktails.

An outdoor living room with a sofa, two armchairs, a coffee table and two ottomans is on the limestone patio. A dining table is on the deck and a second, private deck sits off the master bedroom. Music is piped outside.

Sliding glass doors and a sunroom on the back of the house adds to the feeling that “when you are inside the house, you are really outside,” Mr. Judson said. “You can see into the entire front yard and backyard when you are in the house.”

Ms. Hammond, the landscape architect, said the indoor-outdoor trend came from California, and was driven by “people wanting more space to expand their entertaining.”

“We want a reason to be outside other than the sake of just being outside and gardening,” Ms. Hammond said. She uses hedges “to create the boundaries of an outdoor room” and provide enclosures, with trees for shade and “an overhead sense of protection.”

A curved bench under a colonnade in one Southampton flower garden she designed becomes a “separate garden room, like a library in the house, a place you go to do something different,” Ms. Hammond said. Vegetable gardens in raised beds, which her clients clamor for, are “like a pantry,” providing food for outdoor kitchens and outdoor dining.

For those with a vista, roof decks are in vogue. Mr. Kean installed a putting green and Adirondack chairs on his mansion’s roof. “Once you are up here, you want to have a cocktail,” he said.

At Ms. Breitenbach’s Sagaponack listing, the roof deck has a Jacuzzi, a kitchen and a fireplace. And in East Hampton, Peter Wilson, a retired corporate lawyer, and Scott Sanders, an interior designer, erected a giant lifeguard chair on the roof of their \$16.9 million, 3.2-acre estate to see the ocean.

In the spring of 2016, Pamela Glazer, a Southampton-based architect, cut out half of a tall attic to create a roof deck as part of the \$525,000 renovation of two 1960s prefab homes cobbled together in Hither Hills. She used board and batten on an exterior wall to create a cozy backdrop for a sectional sofa, and a bungalow-style railing so the owners would have a place to enjoy cocktails while gazing over their neighbor's houses at the Atlantic.

Ms. Gachot, who furnished a roof deck on a \$13 million home in Sagaponack, said there was “definitely a request to create as many terraces as possible. It is just an extension of the interior of the house.”

Or as Ms. Glazer put it: In the Hamptons, “too much is not enough.”