



Renaissance Man

STEPHEN POGUE

Portraits in
Architecture and Art

Profile by Elissa Lash

STEVE POGUE LOOKS DUBIOUS when I suggest describing him as a “renaissance man” in his Vineyard Style profile. In a Vineyard Haven café, over cookies and iced tea, with his daughters quietly writing stories and drawing mermaids at the next table, he insists that he is a regular guy, just one with abundant hobbies.

“I’m sort of a science nerd. I love astronomy. Read a lot of philosophy, and history. I paint and sketch. I’m passionate about my work as an architect – but a renaissance man? I’m not sure... Honestly, it’s hard

to fit it all in, because I’m also a dad and that’s very important.” *continued on next spread*



An Edgartown South Water Street Residence facade study (drawing at upper left) typical of what Pogue's clients receive for visualizing their project.

The Pogue residence: the corner tower element (shown framed by an arbor at left) was conceived originally as a platform for a telescope, taking advantage of the spectacularly clear night skies on Martha's Vineyard. It's widows-walk treatment is in keeping with a common architectural element of Edgartown homes. With the tower theme, Pogue wanted to evoke a sense of a previously built historical structure that might have been added onto, such as a lighthouse or mill.



Detail shots (this page) of the Pogue residence...Steve states "a sense of our house having been around for generations was very important to our family both from the exterior to interior detailing."

The master bedroom (top & above) is treated differently than the other bedrooms with lower ceilings and grass cloth wall covering. The intent is to create a more intimate feel....the octagonal space inside the corner tower element forms an ideal seating area for reading and morning coffee. The ship ladder to an office and tower widows-walk can be seen to it's right.

“He’s a renaissance man with time constraints,” counters Kathy. This inspires a shared chuckle. They are a warm and down to earth couple, who clearly enjoy working as a team in all things, from parenting three children to professional matters. She is marketing director for his architecture business, which began in California, but as of 2002 became bi-coastal with projects on Martha’s Vineyard and the West Coast. On top of running a business and family, another ambitious shared venture for the Pogues, one where their sense of humor was a key ingredient, was the fairly recent fulltime relocation of the family and business to Martha’s Vineyard. Born from happy childhood summer vacations here and a long-term love affair with the Island, they decided to become year round residents several years ago. They started by moving the family to their Edgartown summerhouse. Thus began a process familiar to many wash-a-shore families – the discovery that a summer house can be less than ideal in the winter months, the search for a new home, the decision to build, buying a lot, planning, building, and finally completing, and moving into their new home, a 2400 square foot house in Edgartown, inspired by and with respect for the surrounding, pre-existing architecture of that town, old whaling captain’s houses and shingled cottages. All this while raising triplets, designing homes for others on both coasts,

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A Bay Area residence (above): outdoor living in Northern California is for the most part available all year long. Houses are designed to flow as easily as possible with what amounts to an outdoor living room complete with swimming pool, fireplace and wet bar/barbecue. "These types of spaces work well on Vineyard summer homes as well and add a nice focal point", Pogue says. A living room done in a craftsman look (right) from the same residence.



A custom kitchen (above) and greatroom (right) designed for a Craftsman style Silicon Valley residence. "I get a lot of requests for the craftsman look in my Northern California homes"...the Bay Area has a long history of Craftsman Style design with such notable architects as Bernard Maybeck centered there." says Pogue

and settling into the community.

"It has certainly made us more empathetic to what the process is like for clients," Kathy says with a grin. "We've been through it. It was a lot of work, but worth it. Sometimes it still feels like we're moving in, getting things settled." Currently they're on the other end of the Vineyard dance, the "summer shuffle," relocating their clan and renting out their new abode to summer visitors.

But the story and history of their move is not the story and history that Steve wants to talk about today. His whole face lights up at the chance to talk about architectural history, art history, American history and the stories contained within. "My architectural approach is based in the

romantic era, these notions of design from the turn of the century. The pre-modernist architecture that has character, detail, drama, derived from European design styles. It's all very evocative of emotions and stories and I'm drawn to that."

He lists cities and architecture that have drawn and influenced him, and in the same breath mentions Paris, where he lived and painted for a time, and Boston, where he went to school, San Francisco, where he lived for many years, and then Edgartown, where they've decided to settle for "the long haul."

"Nowhere is like Edgartown, as architecturally pure. All these late 17th century (through) 19th century whaling

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A circular staircase (opposite) with contemporary playful feel employing frequently used materials in Craftsman design. "I like the use of metal and exposed timber in my designs. They're durable and age well taking on a natural patina with time".

houses and late Federal style houses, not only are there – the official historical district – but people take pride in the history and self-regulate as they build or add on. And the setting of seashore and sailboats, the clapboard and shingles I find it so visually appealing." He pauses, seemingly lost in the image of his adopted hometown. "But all the Vineyard towns have a unique, appealing, and historically rich aesthetic – Oak Bluffs with its Victorian cottages transporting us back to the late 1800s, the up-Island rustic Capes and saltboxes, the stone walls, barns and rolling pastures. Much of the Vineyard architecture feels to me very honest and in harmony with nature."

Steve Pogue is drawn to and influenced by nature and the grandeur of the world outside the structures he designs in many ways. "Natural materials weather well. I've been very impressed with

the timber frame architecture that is prevalent up-Island. I like the use of natural timber. I design homes that work with and within the natural environment with good passive solar, employing overhangs to protect southern exposures, using technologies that reduce energy costs and time tested materials to reduce the impact on the environment. Architecture needs to work with the surrounding environment as well as the aesthetic and poetic desires of the client."

Plus as a self-described "science nerd" and amateur astronomer, he is delighted that the Vineyard setting and sky is paradise found for the indulging of these particular obsessions. "If you haven't seen the sky around here on a clear night, take the time to look up. An astronomy teacher of mine, John Dobson, was fond of saying 'there's an entire universe overhead ...

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Photo by Kathy Pogue

Architect
Stephen Pogue
In His Own Words

"Architecture is possibly the oldest of the arts. My attraction to it has to do with the aspect of time as it relates to culture. The time scale in which buildings exist can sometime span civilizations – and for that reason gives a gravity to the artistic endeavor. If one considers the structures arising out of Greco-Roman culture, they've transformed the way we see the built environment. The proportions, expression of load and support, cultural symbols, building technology, these are thousands of years old. And yet they're as familiar as any Federal style home you see in Edgartown. The art I create seeks to be personal and engaged in the culture I live, but on another level to be part of the continuum history represents. I guess the best word for this would be classic. I get kidded a lot for still using a T-square to do architectural drafting. Often my projects are executed in CAD, but for myself I find a T-square somehow satisfying given its connection to the architects of the past dating back to the Greeks. But people do look at you funny if you bring one onto a plane though, I have to say. "





Entrance foyer (top) of a Bay Area residence – “Sometimes quietly elegant detailing is called for. I always have the trim profiles custom milled to compliment the degree of ornament called for in a design,” says Pogue. A Silicon Valley residence (above), “Residential architecture is rewarding for an artist but also a challenge. Getting the design right functionally, getting it approved by the client, the city, and to code while still being able to pull off the design as a pleasing sculptural form requires skill and experience but in the end can be doubly artistically satisfying. It’s not like pulling out a canvas and box of paints, but the result needs to be equally creative.”

surely you’ve noticed.’ I’ve always been interested in the profound and mostly incomprehensible contradictions and symmetries of physics. Astronomy is the window anyone has into the macroscopic of these.” He describes the scale of the sky and the opportunity to freely witness that scale so clearly any night of the year as “mind blowing.”

“Almost everything we can see in the sky with the naked eye is within a tiny neighborhood to our planet ... the rest of creation is millions of light years away.” His tanned, boyish face breaks into a broad grin as he describes his father as a science buff as well. “He loved to elicit this same type of scale shock I just mentioned ... it would tickle him to do it to a dinner partner and see their reaction ... he was an intellectual provocateur and also a very talented portrait painter.”

Painting was the way his father earned a living, but it turns out Steve is an apple that didn’t fall far from the tree. At an early age, Steve was a chronic doodler and cartoonist. “Artistic ability actually got me in a lot of trouble and to some degree plagued my high school years before I had figured out how to channel

it.” He looks lovingly over at his daughters, still drawing away, and raises one eyebrow. “Of course as a very young child, I was fascinated with blocks. Building the tallest buildings and then smashing them down. What does that say about me as a future architect?” He laughs.

At Pitzer College, as a fine art major “with no direction,” a sculptor named Aldo Casanova suggested that he had the skill set to become an architect. Steve’s reaction?

“I flubbed it off. What does that have to do with anything? Then three years later at San Francisco Art Institute when I still hadn’t found any direction, I sent out a flurry of applications to architecture schools. I found out that the schools wanted me. This seemed to be a sign and made me think I should try this out.” He chose Harvard’s Graduate School of Design and flourished there.

Steve Pogue’s training in fine arts is obvious in his design sketches. Each drawing is complete and worthy of a deeper study, and seems several steps beyond the typical architectural rendering. He feels passionate about sketching as part of the process, and is saddened when architecture work is formulaic using a file folder of stock sketches to start the process. He works in full and often vivid color with each delicate detail in mind, and his sketches read as individual pieces of art chronicling potential homes, but client’s dreams, demeanor, and stories. “When it comes to design, anything with drama and character is right in my wheelhouse. Like the Compass Bookstore (in Anaheim, California). I created it as an amplified explorer’s club with a sense of whimsy and fun – Mayan heads, an eight-foot globe, Egyptian columns. Architecture, even residential, should have a sense of drama, of fun. I like to think of it as a stage set. Houses are basically stage sets in which you live the story of your life out.”

When not channeling his artistic talents and creative juices into architectural design, Steve still paints, primarily in oils. “Always oil on canvas. I like its connection to the history of painting. I like playing with color and surface texture and working in a larger format ... working with different palettes, horizon, and lighting.” He also paints what he calls “hyper realistic over scaled still lifes,” where he takes a photo of a subject and magnifies it in the painting. He believes that a realistic painting has to work on many levels, but the image is evocative “suggesting history, culture, or



mood ... the big word for this is iconography ... an artifact on the wall with an inherent object character.” One of his favorite muses for still life subjects is the “interplay of light through transparent objects and the prism effect that occurs.” He gestures toward the amber liquid in a glass of iced-tea, with a few shrinking ice cubes suspended within. “I did a series called “Sun-tea” where the image was a pitcher of tea and ice in the sun, splashing light onto a tablecloth. I like these pictures to suggest the way a child might see them.”

We’ve finished our tea and cookies, and the afternoon is getting cooler. Steve turns to his daughters, still quietly

coloring, and surveys their work with a careful eye. He and Kathy gather up the sheaves of mermaids – glorious flowing, colorful, fishy and feminine illustrations and the girls leap around their smiling father, chattering away, as they describe their creations. They are drenched in a halo of late afternoon sun, creating a warm and intimate spotlight on the family. In this moment the description of “renaissance man” doesn’t seem so far-fetched at all. **vs**

For more information contact Stephen Pogue at 415-441-2237, or log on to www.poguearchitect.com