

# THE EAST HAMPTON STAR

SHINES FOR ALL

## An Intact Half House Celebrates the Past

*There was no one room, though, where the whole family could fit*

By Catherine Tandy | September 15, 2011 - 1:46pm

Having survived a move from one place to another, a history of scandal and rumor, and seizure by the federal government, the Stafford Hedges house in East Hampton has remained intact for more than 230 years.

William Ronan, who was chairman of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority and a close friend of Gov. Nelson Rockefeller, moved the house from its original site on Pantigo Road (where a branch of the Hildreth department store is now) to Cross Highway, tucked between Middle and Hither Lanes, in 1954.



The facade and original rooms of the 233-year-old Stafford Hedges house remain intact although it has been expanded at back. At right, a small sun room was added by previous owners.

*Durell Godfrey*

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The story goes that during the journey, heavy rain bogged the process down. Although the house got where it was going without damage, it had become so sheathed in mud that local wags dubbed it “Ronan’s Folly” or “Folly Hall.” Later, regardless of whether or not it was true, the talk was that Governor Rockefeller visited the house for trysts.

Alex McNaughton, who bought the house in 1979, sold it six years later to a young man named David Bloom, who before long was renowned for an impressively lucrative stock Ponzi scheme involving millions of dollars from investors including the Rockefeller family, the Sultan of Brunei, and Bill Cosby. He was allowed to settle the charges against him by turning over his assets, which included real estate and paintings worth \$8 million.

Brooke Kroeger and Alex Goren bought the house in 1988. The couple, self-described transplants, had come to the South Fork for the first time the previous year, renting a house in Bridgehampton for a month. They fell in love with the area, and, at the end of the summer, proceeded to buy land on Bridgehampton’s Ocean Road.

“It was basically a potato field,” Ms. Kroeger said. “But suddenly we realized we were too old to wait for trees. It was either spindly new trees or spending a fortune on landscaping. So we sold it. Almost immediately. We started looking again with our children . . . and we were just enchanted by this tiny little house.”

“Hippopotamus Camp,” as the family calls it, was, and still is, an 18th-century half house, designed with two first-floor windows and a door to one side of the facade. It has been said that half houses look as if they are waiting for another half to be built, which was usually the case. The door would then be in the center with two windows on either side of it, and the look would be Georgian.

“But truthfully, it was already too small for us,” Ms. Kroeger said. “We contacted [the East Hampton contractor] Ben Krupinski about expanding it, but he said we should wait and live in it for a while and then give him a call. We lived in it for 18 years.”

The Hedges house has six bedrooms and five baths spread over three floors totaling 2,700 square

feet.

“It wasn’t that attractive a property,” Ms. Kroeger said. “It certainly wasn’t for people looking for something commodious and comfortable. But the house was in perfect shape. We basically did nothing, just painted. We thought we were incredibly brave not to have air conditioning.”

Today, the Hedges house celebrates the past and the masterful craftsmanship of an earlier time. The plaster walls and the configuration of the rooms are intact. The first floor has original 30-foot-long exposed beams which run from the front parlor all the way through the dining room. Echoing the beams are the original wide-planked pine floors. They have a subtle orange glow, the result, perhaps, of having been walked on for so many years.

The walls and ceilings are bright white. The furnishings are, for the most part, antiques the couple gathered over the years, including diminutive Victorian chairs and a loveseat. Armchairs are covered in cream and powder-blue.

“All our pieces are rather eclectic,” Ms. Kroeger said. “It’s really just about what we like.”

An upstairs bathroom is done in sea-green tile, befitting a house near the sea. A hollow table filled with beach glass decorates a small sitting room. The shards are blue, green, or white, with a few reds, which are the most coveted. The family adds to the collection every year.

With three children, their spouses, and seven grandchildren who would “stop in” and stay for a few weeks, Ms. Kroeger and Mr. Goren eventually decided they had to have more space.

“The whole point of the house was for the family to gather, but there wasn’t one room where we could all fit,” Ms. Kroeger said with a laugh. “The biggest room was 15 by 15.”

The couple worked with the East Hampton architect Douglas Moyer and Mr. Krupinski for a year before starting to build. They masterminded an expansion that triples the square footage of the original house and added a separate garage. Ms. Kroeger said the family and the architect took pains to make sure the expansion, though modern, would complement the historical aesthetic of the old house. Cedar shingles were used on the exterior and windows have 12-over-12 panes.

The expansion, which has a fully furnished basement, is at the rear of the house. Its large family room, behind the old house’s dining room, overlooks the pool. It has leather couches and enormous curtainless windows.

“I love paring down and editing out,” Ms. Kroeger said. “I don’t like a lot of stuff. And I don’t like the odor and dust that comes with curtains. They really collect moisture in beachy places.”

The family room leads to a gleaming new kitchen with an outdoor dining area where mechanized glass walls can be raised or lowered in keeping with the seasons. A louvered-glass breezeway, where Ms. Kroeger puts her lemon trees during the frigid and unforgiving months, connects to the two-story garage, where she has a studio. A master bedroom has its own porch and outdoor fireplace.

The family were more than delighted that the work, begun just after Labor Day in 2006, was completed in 10 months, in time for the summer. They moved in before it was quite finished, knowing they now had room to gather and sprawl.

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#### ***About the Author***

***Catherine Tandy***