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SEA VIEW

Another coastal property, yet a different challenge and approach; **Philippa Gort-Barten** reports on how interior designer John Willey worked his magic in the cottage of a Nantucket beach house

John Willey formed his own company, Willey Design, a year and a half ago, following ten years working in the interiors industry. One of his projects under the auspices of this new incarnation was for some clients he'd worked with previously on their move from New York to London. When business called them back to the US just a year later, they had to quickly find somewhere to house their new belongings. Their solution was enviable; they bought a beach house in Nantucket, an island south of Cape Cod, Massachusetts.

By this stage, Willey had built up a good relationship with the clients, and they trusted his brave polychromatic inclination. When he was given the chance to decorate the

guest cottage attached to their new beach house, he was thrilled. He also admits to being 'phenomenally' pleased with the result.

The clients were, for him, a gift. They had a clear vision and just one major design specification: they own some work by American painter Philip Taaffe, and requested that, when stepping into the cottage, they would feel as though they were walking straight into their painting. Taaffe's work is vivid and multi-layered. Clearly Willey's love of colour was echoed in his clients' taste too.

Around the time that John Willey started out on his own, he was contacted by New York based rug company Vanderhurd Studio, with whom he'd worked before, to see if he would like to continue the relationship. This was perfect for Willey; he was excited to work with them again, yet, more importantly, the continuity of this particular collaboration was crucial for him. To Willey, a rug is the pivotal part of a room's design. He starts with it, working mainly with bespoke pieces to obtain the perfect fit, and from there builds the room from the bottom up. It is both catalyst and focal point; everything in the room feeds into it, creating a fabulous harmony. Not so the situation where a room is completed and a rug hastily found to match. It was Vanderhurd who provided the majority of the rugs for the Nantucket cottage, and the co-existence is perfect. They work absolutely in keeping with his ethos.

At present, Willey bases his interiors largely around contemporary rugs – partly because of deference to the more 'way-out' when it comes to palette, and partly because he likes the rugs to fit just so. He has previously worked as an architect and views a rug as part of the physical structure of the room. An exact fit is essential and he doesn't feel he can necessarily obtain that from antique items. However, for the living room of the cottage, he broke with tradition and bought a 20th century piece – an Indian *dhurrie* from New York based rug company Warp & Weft. It worked wonderfully.

Maybe this will mean that future design projects will see Willey starting to mix bespoke and contemporary rugs with more antique pieces. With his love of colour and his fearlessness when it comes to the combining of hues, anything seems possible. He is certainly open-minded on the subject. Watch this space.

www.willeydesign.com



All photos: David Jacquot



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1 Living room with Indian *dhurrie* from Warp & Weft. All rooms designed by John Willey
2 Bedroom with a bespoke rug from Vanderhurdt Studio
3 Bedroom with a bespoke rug from Vanderhurdt Studio