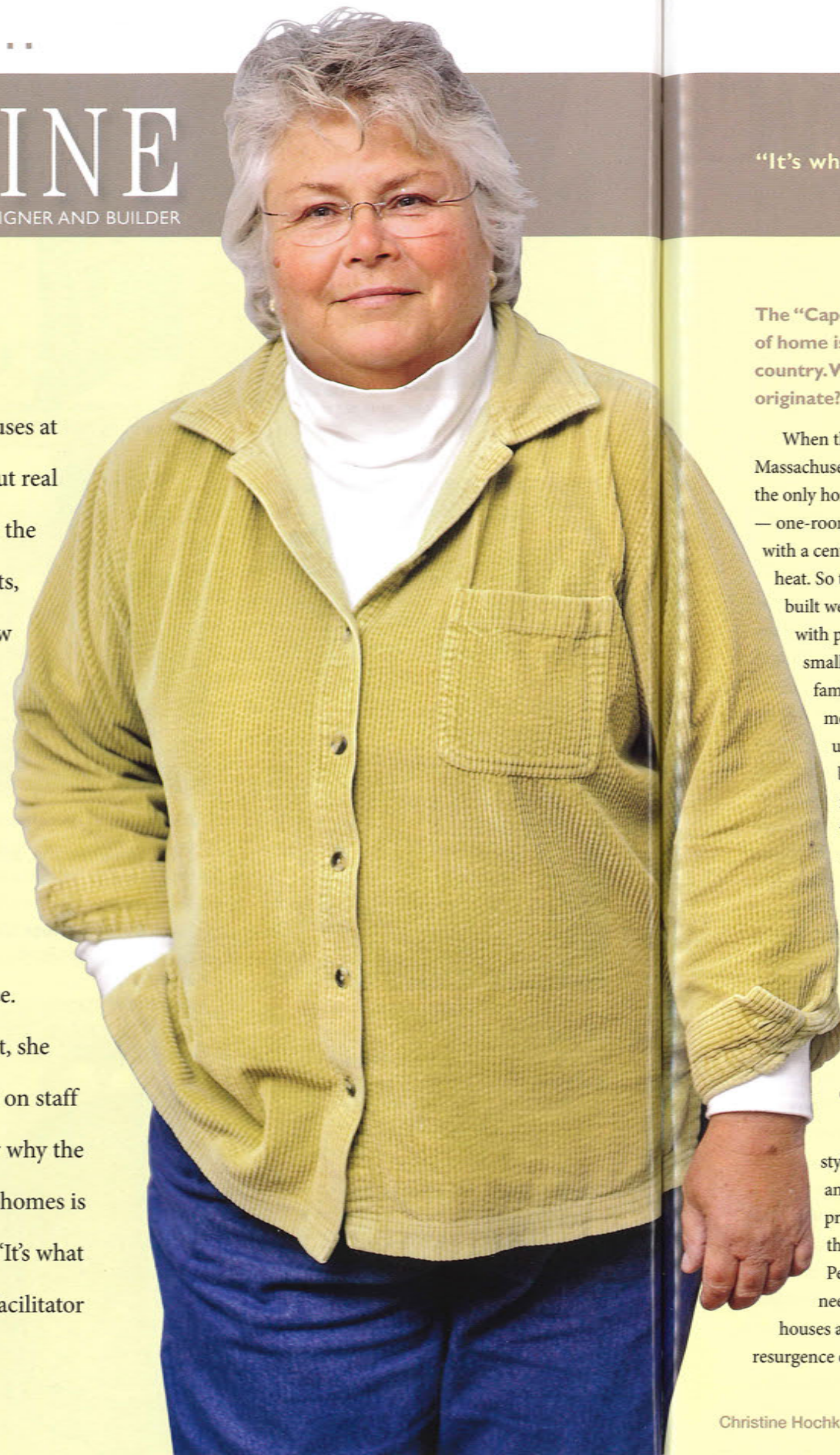


DEB PAINE

HOME DESIGNER AND BUILDER

By Roe Osborn

Deborah Paine began drawing houses at age 4. And not just stick figures, but real homes — some even on piers over the water. From those earliest moments, Deb (as she likes to be called) knew what she wanted to do in life: design and build homes. After living on both coasts and stints in both the creative and corporate worlds, Deb moved to Cape Cod in 1989. She has been designing and building homes here ever since. Although not a registered architect, she has a full-time registered architect on staff at her firm in Truro. “I don’t know why the process of designing and building homes is so easy for me, but it is,” she says. “It’s what I’m supposed to be doing. I am a facilitator of dreams.”



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The “Cape” or “Cape Cod” style of home is widespread in this country. Where did the design originate?

When the first colonists came to Massachusetts, they brought with them the only home design that they knew — one-room, steep-roofed little houses with a center chimney to provide easy heat. So the first homes that they built were renditions of that design with post-and-beam frames — small and practical. As their families grew and they needed more room, they added on, usually as a shed roof off the back of the house, creating the “saltbox” look. As the homes expanded and evolved, they kept the simple lines and wonderful symmetry that the Cape style is known for.

How did the Cape style find its way into home design of the 20th and 21st centuries?

In the 1800s other home styles such as Greek Revival and Italianate became predominant. Then came the Depression in the 1920s. People once again had the need for small, inexpensive houses and the Cape style had a resurgence of sorts. After World War

II the demand for housing increased enormously, and with the Modernist movement, home design went in a whole different direction. But out here, the Cape is the style that we’re all used to.

What are most of your clients looking for when they come to your office?

Most people want some variation of a Cape style house. They want their homes to fit in because they love the architecture of Cape Cod. But they also want what I call retro-mod — they want everything on the outside to look traditional but everything inside to be as technologically up to date and as green as they can afford.

Does your firm do more remodeling or new construction?

Our firm does mostly remodeling, with a variety of projects from kitchens to additions as well as upgrading existing homes. Whole house remodeling is really our mainstay — stripping a home back to its shell and rebuilding it to modern standards. But we also love to design and build new homes — about 23 over the years.

How often do you tear down a house and build a new one, and what criteria do you use for when that should happen?

We rarely resort to tearing down an existing home. We always look at a number of factors. First, is the home

located in an historic district? Then, what is the intent of the client? Do they just hate their existing home and love the lot, or perhaps they want a completely new building? Do they want to build a bigger home on the lot? In my experience, teardowns are driven first by the lot and location, and by the house itself after that. When we tear a house down, it is because that house is beyond repair.

You mentioned historic districts, how do historic district commissions affect home design?

I live in Provincetown, and it’s still a beautiful town because a group of volunteers have taken the time and emotional expense to put together guidelines that help keep it in scale and in the vernacular of a historic seaport. I always try to keep the dialogue open because it’s important that we collaborate. It’s a give and take process, and I know it’s for the best. This town is a historic snippet of America — iconically so — and it needs to be preserved. Most historic commissions carry the cellular memory of their area. There is always someone who remembers the specific history and details of a particular place.

So what is your own home like?

I actually live in a home that sits on a pier over the water, and I love every minute of it. High tide comes right up under my bed and it’s a lot of fun. ♦

Christine Hochkeppel/Cape Cod Media Group