



# Coxe-Hayden House + Studio

BLOCK ISLAND DESIGN RETREAT 2020



# About

SECTION

Writing + Research: kHyal, fiZz Agency

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House Beautiful; Venturi, Scott Brown & Associates; Block Island Times / Coxe Family

Karl Heine and kHyal joined forces in 2007 in business and life. They are design educators and practitioners, artists, entrepreneurs, makers, authors and speakers. Karl is the founder of creativeplacement® talent agency and DesignerJournals, kHyal is the founder of fiZz Agency and MegaGlam®. Together they founded PUSH workshops and PUSH Design Camp, which first took place on Block Island in 2011. Their most recent endeavor “REJECT Found + Made” supports sustainable design and the circular economy. They produce content as SECTION magazine.

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# Unraveling the History

It was easy to piece together the home and studio basics since there are many links about the architectural design awards it received in the early eighties when it was built. Strangely, the acclaim of the design wasn't mentioned in the rental description. Articles about the original owner, Weld Coxe, helped fill in other details. He was beloved and respected by many and led an active life in business and service. It took some sleuthing to put together the most fascinating parts of the Coxe family tree and his ancestors' accomplishments. In the end, we realized the house couldn't be more perfect for us to spend the week in. Even more so if you account for the fact that the architect of the Coxe-Hayden House and Studio, was known for having coined the maxim "Less is a bore," in contrast to Mies van der Rohe's well-known pronouncement "Less is *more*" — since Karl and I are far from minimalists.





## AN OLD TRADITION REBORN

Rising nobly from the landscape, these new shingled structures bear the classic earmarks of weathered wooden houses that have dotted the New England seacoast for centuries ▶

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# Design Rigor

The Coxe-Hayden House and Studio were born from the vision of Weld Coxe — a vacation home in partnership with his second wife, Mary Hayden. Designed by the well-known architect Robert Venturi in 1981, it has won top awards for architecture, including the National Honor Award, AIA, 1983; “Record Houses,” Award for Excellence in Planning and Design, Architectural Record, 1982.



The separate guesthouse (with bedrooms above a garage/workshop) gave the architects an opportunity to "play" more games with scale because the smaller house makes the main house seem larger than it really is (*above*). "The two of them look like kids holding hands," says Mr. Schwartz. The space between them—sheltered from the island winds—gives a pleasant feeling of enclosure, in contrast to the open deck (*below*).



Magnificent water views expand the spaces in this pair of shingled cottages. Sophisticated window design is the prime distinction between these new houses and older ones along the shore.

The design of this pair of tiny shingled houses, ably executed by Robert Venturi and project architect Frederic Schwartz, grew out of the client's vision of the project. He wrote 11 pages of carefully organized notes about the hopes and desires, both general and specific, he had for the structures. Although he never specified how he wanted them to look, he knew precisely how he wanted them to work. Far from cramping the style of the architects, his vision helped them immensely. "This has been one of our favorite jobs in terms of working with clients,"

says Mr. Schwartz. "With some we have to pull everything out of them."

The client's specific requests included a separate guesthouse, one open living room/dining room/kitchen, a secluded writing room and numerous views. Mr. Schwartz explains how these vistas change as you go from first floor to third. "The view from the living-dining room is almost as expansive as that from the front deck. The fanlight in the master bedroom focuses on the saltwater pond, and the window in the study frames the light house on the bay beyond the pond."

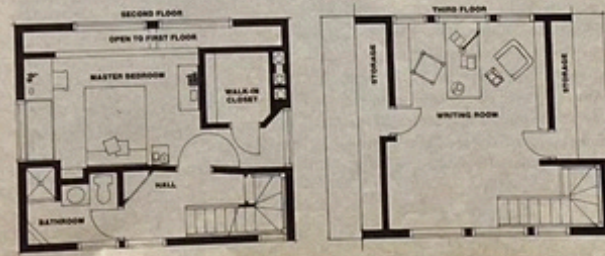
Editor SUSAN GRANT LEWIS



FOR MORE DETAILS, SEE PRODUCT INFORMATION



In the owner's private writing room (*above*), on the third floor of the main house, windows tucked up under the eaves (a typical Venturi detail) look across the pond to the bay. On the first floor of the plan (*below*) the dotted line near the window wall shows the edge of the master bedroom above. A large walk-in closet on the second floor eliminates the clutter of many chests and cupboards in the small bedroom.





# Working Backwards

In 2011, Weld Coxe passed away from Parkinson's Disease in Pennsylvania at the age of eighty-one. Sadly, his wife, Mary Chapman Hayden died of cancer in 1993. According to Rhode Island tax records, the house was put in a trust in 2004, and at some point, his family members began to offer it occasionally to vacationers to “help maintain and rehabilitate” it. You find this out once you've arrived through a note tucked inside a plastic sleeve tacked to a wall in the kitchen.







There is no mention of the Coxe or Hayden names on the welcome instructions, only the architect and the honors. Still, the Coxe-Hayden House and Studio design awards are hung in the bedroom hallway, and Coxe's other awards for things like sailboat races are etched in glasses and pitchers in the dining room cupboard and on objects near his work area.







# Architectural Artifacts

Upon further exploration after our arrival, and finding Weld Coxe's books and other ephemera lining the shelves of what we now know was his 3rd-floor writing studio — (where I sit and type this, in Weld's chair, at Weld's desk, looking out at Sachem Pond, and beyond it to the North Lighthouse and the sea) — it is clear that most of what remains inside, the furnishings, art, and personal belongings were here when the house was occupied by its original owners. The photos in the 1983 issue of *House Beautiful* that I found the torn-off cover of on one shelf, and the rest of on another, show the house as it was then, as do other architecture books. I spent hours pouring over the books, the heartfelt notes from friends and family, the interesting works Weld left behind like the presentation titled “Omni-Life Housing, A Concept” featuring a feasibility study with elaborate plans, drawings, and photographs for economy-minded communities and a new concept for affordable mortgages, dated 1976.







Among the publications was a self-published chapbook called “POEMS” by Coxe’s first wife, Georgia Mattison Coxe, published in 1996. Its water-stained personal inscription, “for Weld, from Georgia,” barely readable. A further search revealed just one other published work by Georgia from 2010, *Tales From My Roads*, which is still available for purchase via Amazon.







# Passion + Purpose

As it turns out, Weld Coxe was in our business, albeit in a different vertical, and wrote groundbreaking marketing books, the first of their kind in architecture and engineering. Though Coxe was credited at innovating an industry, like us, he carved his own path. As noted in the 2011 article by Edward Keegan in *The Journal of the Institute of American Architects*, “He attended Harvard College but was asked to leave after two years because he neglected his studies to write for Harvard’s newspaper, *The Crimson*. Coxe’s first jobs were as a reporter for *The Berkshire Eagle*, *The Arizona Republic*, and *The Providence Journal*. When professional ethics rules were changed by the American Institute of Architects in the early 1960s to allow marketing, Coxe saw an opportunity to meld his journalistic skills with his interest in design. He wrote the first draft of his book *Marketing Architectural and Engineering Services* in 1967 and began consulting for firms as he solicited comments while polishing the text. The book was eventually published in 1971.”









It is clear that Weld Coxe was a positive force in this world, someone who accomplished big things to help others in a quiet and gentle way. While researching the house, I discovered he was on many boards, including the Sophia G. Coxe Charitable Trust and the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Both had connections to his ancestral family.







# A Family of Note

According to the Sophia Coxe Memorial Foundation and Education website, “Sophia spent her lifetime lightening the misery and drudgery of mining families of the Coxe Collieries. She gave ninety percent of her income to charitable works, living on the remaining ten percent.”

From there, I discovered that Sophia G. Coxe was the wife of Eckley B. Coxe, and eventually found a reference to Weld as his great-great-nephew.











According to Wikipedia, “Eckley Brinton Coxe was an American mining engineer, coal baron, state senator and philanthropist from Pennsylvania. He was a co-founder of the Coxe Brothers and Company coal mining operation which became the largest individual producer of anthracite coal in the United States at the time.

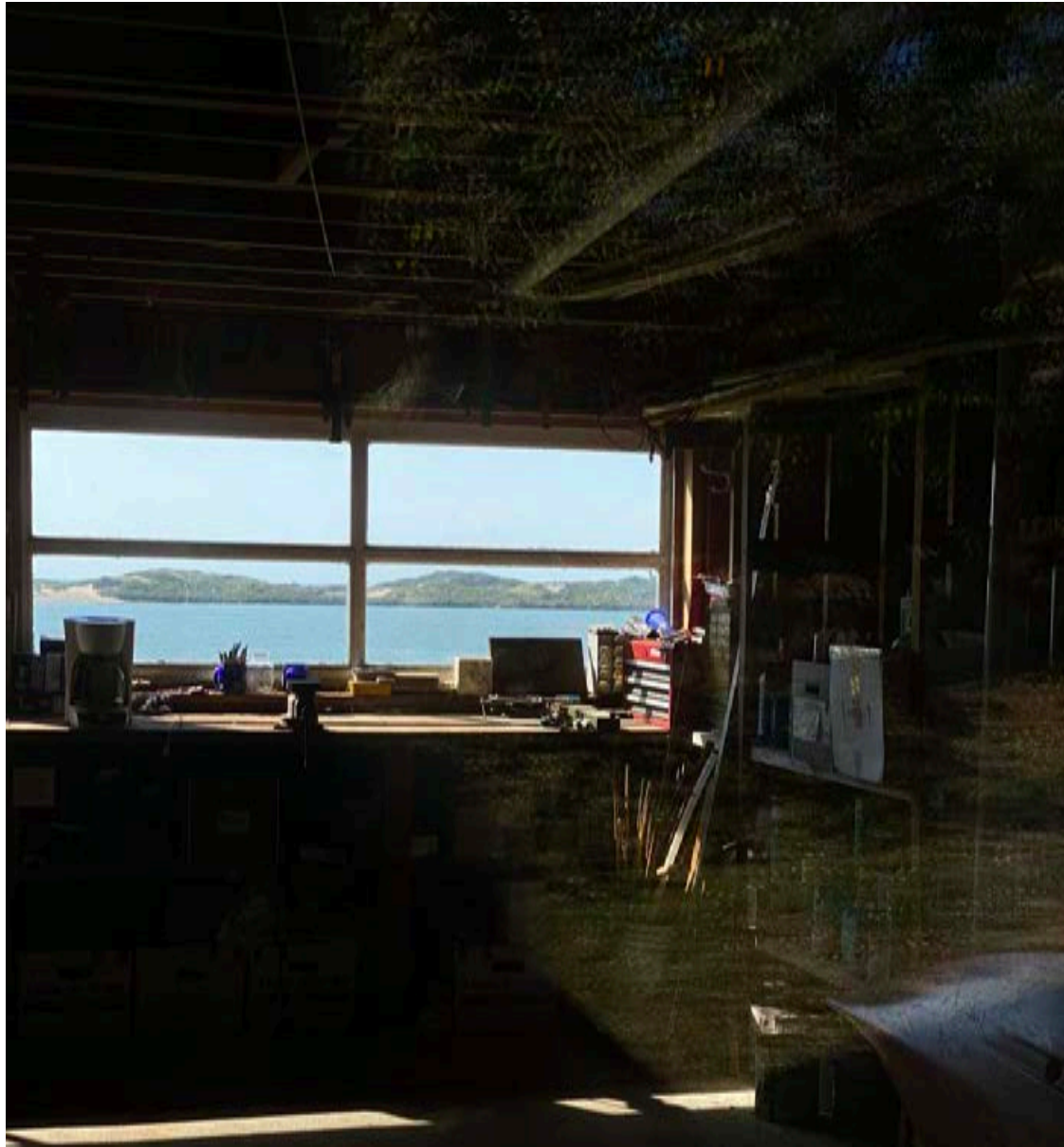
He was instrumental in the formation of Lehigh University as a mining school in 1865 and founded the Institute of Miners and Mechanics in 1879. He served as president of the American Institute of Mining Engineers from 1878 to 1880 and of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers from 1893 to 1894.

He served as a Democratic member of the Pennsylvania State Senate for the 21st district from 1881 to 1884.”







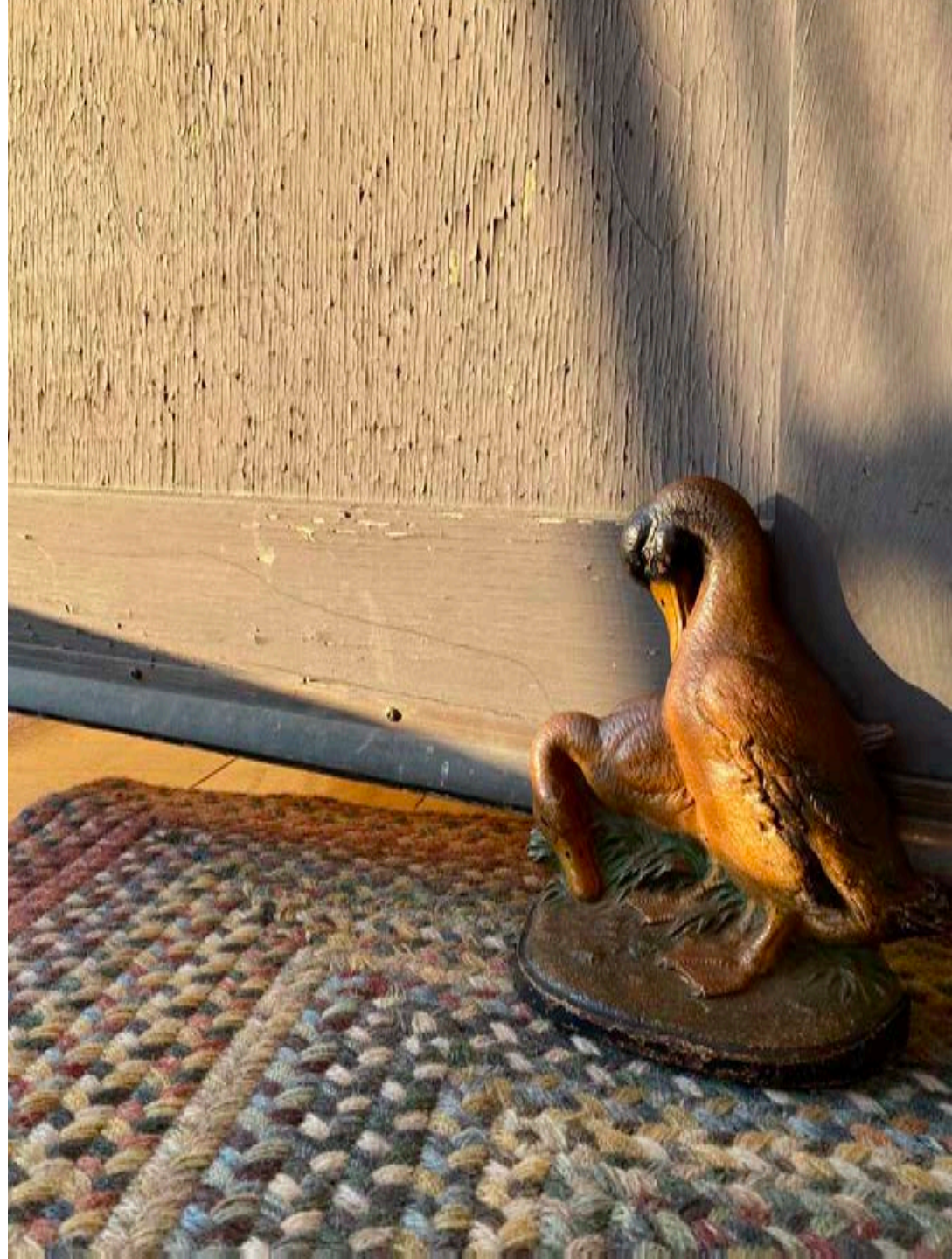








For people like us, who seek out unique places to be inspired and workshop new ideas together, this was the ultimate getaway place. It was synchronicity at its finest since we hadn't known the details until after we signed the rental agreement, and then each day a little more, as the house and its history unfolded itself to us during our stay.







If you are curious to know more, some tributes to the life and work of Weld Coxe, and other information about the Coxe-Hayden house, studio and families can found at the following links:

[Weld Coxe dies at 81](#)

The Block Island Times, March 28, 2011

Edward Keegan, [Weld Coxe, Hon. AIA, Dies at 81](#)

The Journal of The American Institute Of Architects, March 18, 2011

[Weld Coxe, Founder Memoriam, The Coxe Group](#)

Marjanne Pearson, [Weld Coxe, hon. AIA — Professional Services Visionary and Thought Leader](#)

Talent Star, March 20, 2011

Paul Goldberger, [Design; Architecture That is Bred to the Sea](#)

New York Times, August 22, 1982

[The Sophia Coxe Foundation](#)

[Lehigh University, Sophia G. and Eckley B. Coxe](#)

The Historical Society of Pennsylvania, [Coxe Family Papers](#)

[Weld Coxe Alumni and Supporter, MMI Prep](#)





# Contact

[kHyal@SECTIONmagazine.com](mailto:kHyal@SECTIONmagazine.com)