



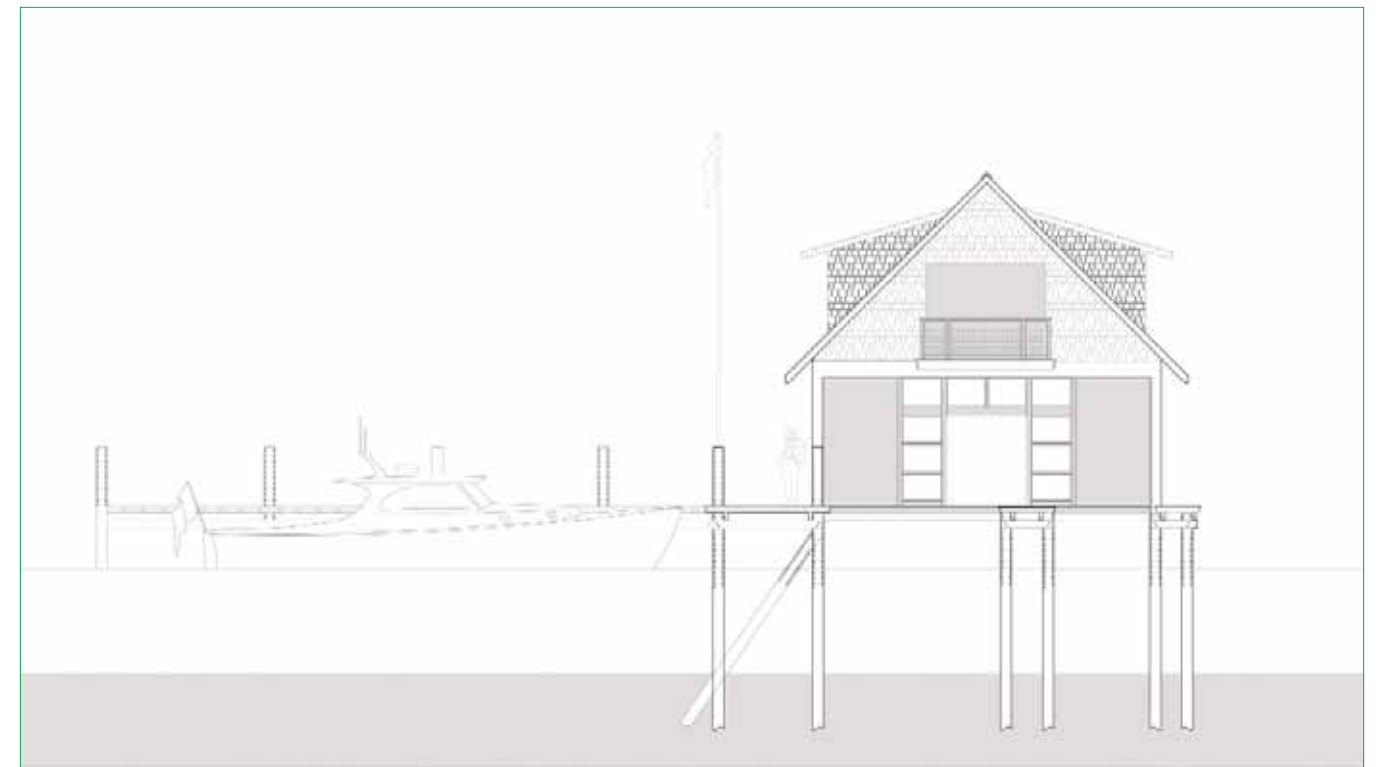
Boat Barn

A state-of-the-art shelter for watercraft is steeped in classic Eastern Shore style

By Linda Hales



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The Chesapeake Bay is nurturing territory for boaters, and where there's a boat, there should be a boathouse. But concern for the health of the waterway has turned these charming, functional shelters into another endangered species.

Washington, DC, architect Merle Thorpe, who recently completed a new boathouse on the site of a vintage 1920s wreck, figures only a few dozen remain on the bay. The Critical Area Act of 1984 bars new construction at water's edge and rules are so strict that had his client's aged boathouse not survived Hurricane Isabel, Thorpe's replacement might never have won approval.

But with luck and diligent pursuit of history, clients Robert and Charlotte Kettler traded a dark pigeon roost on rotted pilings for a welcoming, super-strong structure that is a model of its genre. With white-washed shingles and red barn doors, it's as quaint as any vernacu-

lar building on the Eastern Shore. The simple box and peaked roofline cut a classic profile in keeping with the Kettlers' property at Cedar Point Farm, an Easton, Maryland, plantation dating from 1659. But this is definitely not your great-grandfather's boathouse.

The cheery box is white-washed inside and out. Barn doors on the end wall slide back to expose the central opening. Two more sets of barn doors, one on each side wall, open the interior to breezes and a view of an undeveloped cove. Though size and height were predetermined by the extant structure, codes are stricter than those in place when the boathouse went up, so duplication was never an option. And there's barely a resemblance between the original and its replacement. "If you looked from the sky it would be exactly the same thing," Thorpe says. "But everything about it is new."

The owner, a serious sailor who owns the 154-foot luxury yacht *Ohana* for Mediterranean cruises,

Amid the waving grasses of the Chesapeake Bay, Washington architect Merle Thorpe created a new model for the boathouse (previous spread). Barn doors (opposite) slide back to open the enclosure to daylight. Extra-sturdy pilings (above) brace the structure from below.

keeps a 27-foot MasterCraft powerboat on the Eastern Shore for water-skiing. Robert Kettler asked Thorpe to design the boathouse to accommodate the 37-foot Hinckley Picnic Boat he plans to acquire next. "I've done boating my whole life," says Kettler, a Washington-area real estate developer, who has raced sailboats professionally.

Along with custom slips, Kettler wanted easier access, a finished staircase and a screened loft. Guests arriving by boat today also appreciate electrical connections, phone service and access to cable or satellite television. So Thorpe innovated.

A formal staircase now leads to a finished second level that pigeons may envy but cannot enter. Oversize

Architecture: Merle Thorpe, Merle Thorpe Architects, Washington, DC

Size and height of the boathouse (pictured here) were predetermined by the original structure. But innovations abound inside. For strength, the structure was built around four steel frames. The storage loft (opposite, inset) was screened for comfort and enhanced by operable windows in the dormers. By floating the loft floor over the slips, the architect created light shafts at the corners (opposite). An avid sailor, Kettler uses his 27-foot MasterCraft powerboat for water skiing.



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operable windows in the dormers flood the space with daylight, turning a storage area into a gathering space. End walls of this loft are screened and an overhead fan gives the space the lazy ambience of a sleeping porch. There's also a balcony overlooking the cove, reached by an interior bridge from the loft, which floats over the boat slips.

"It's a great place to go and sit and relax," says Robert Kettler. "It's got a beautiful view, to the west and east,

and it catches a lot of breeze." The boathouse is also supremely functional, with lifts and space for the Kettler family water craft, including jet skis, kayaks and other gear. By stopping the loft floor short of the corners, Thorpe created light wells that shower the slips with daylight.

From a distance, red shutters protecting the dormer windows give the boathouse the air of a simple farm cottage. But when the barn doors open, the structure is more pavilion

than enclosure. Robert Kettler calls the design "a gigantic iron cage on reinforced pilings."

That's because, with advice from longtime engineering consultant Edgar Seaquist of Annapolis, Thorpe designed the boathouse around four steel frames to withstand 140 mph winds. Thorpe also had some of the extra-sturdy pilings, which measure 12 inches across, installed at an incline to brace the structure from below. "These sorts of structures are

like putting up sails," Thorpe says. "To put that much investment in a building, you want your investment to be secure."

Thorpe has worked on sensitive renovations on the Chesapeake Bay for years, so he was accustomed to the rigors of seeking approvals—from the county, state and Corps of Engineers. He also researched the structure through vintage aerial photos at the local historical society. The Kettlers were able to build

a new 48-foot-long pier perpendicular to the boathouse.

As for those barn doors, they were a natural. Thorpe, who has designed big boathouses for several college and private school crews, says the shells are nothing more than "building a barn on the water." ☸



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