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HOMES

Knoll CEO Andrew Cogan's Shelter Island Beach House

Architect Michael Haverland conjures a light-filled waterside compound for Knoll CEO Andrew Cogan and his family

By Jean Nathan

Photography by Roger Davies

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Andrew Cogan got his first look at how houses are built at around age ten, when his family made expeditions to East Hampton, New York, to follow the construction of their modernist retreat. Conceived by the legendary architect Charles Gwathmey, it set a high bar for the young Cogan's design standards. He loved that house—all the more so after he discovered an unintended benefit of its interior ramps: They were perfect for roller-skating.

Cogan's passion for design only deepened, and today he is the CEO of Knoll, the storied modern-furnishings company. As his wife, Lori Finkel, puts it, "Andrew's whole life is about design." Cogan started at Knoll in his 20s—when his father, investor Marshall Cogan, helmed the firm—and rose to the chief executive spot about a decade ago. He is the driving force behind efforts to diversify and expand the business, which this year is marking its 75th anniversary and will open its first-ever retail store, in New York City, as well as a new online shop.

It's no surprise that Cogan and Finkel, a former investment banker who now chairs the board of the Worldwide Orphans Foundation, have lived in some distinguished residences in Manhattan and the Hamptons. But the couple had never commissioned a new house—until the right property and design team aligned.

Several years ago the pair, having tired of the traffic and crowds around their Hamptons getaway, set their sights on Shelter Island, which sits in the bay between Long Island's two forks. "It's only a short ferry ride away, but you go through customs psychologically," Cogan says. After renting there for three summers, they bought a cottage perched atop one of the island's highest points, a waterfront bluff with stunning views out to the North Fork and the Connecticut shoreline beyond. They had decided to keep the house as it was, despite its awkward layout and rather small size for their clan (they have a daughter, Aliyah, adopted from Ethiopia, and two sons, Jed and Caleb). One day, however, when the family dog fortuitously wandered next door, Finkel learned from their neighbor that she was thinking of selling her place. In early 2010, they reached an agreement to buy it.

With nearly four full acres, Finkel and Cogan enlisted friends interior designer Philip Galanes and architect Michael Haverland, a couple who are occasional collaborators, to help unify and transform the property. Galanes—also an entertainment lawyer, a novelist, and the Social Q's columnist for *The New York Times*—had previously worked with Cogan and Finkel on their Manhattan townhouse. Haverland's impressive roster of clients from the fashion, art, and design worlds includes Calvin Klein, Robert Marc, and David Salle.

As the foursome discussed how to proceed, they all felt, Finkel recalls, that "light and sky and water" were the primary considerations. Another concern, Haverland says, was to come up with a design that would be respectful to the landscape and the low-key aspect of the island. Their solution was to demolish the neighboring house and add onto their cottage. The existing dwelling would be reconfigured to incorporate a large dining room, a kitchen, bedrooms for the children, and a guest suite, while a new, dramatic steel-and-glass extension would contain a living room, the master suite, a play area, and two more guest rooms.

To break down the residence's scale (the expanded house would total 6,000 square feet in all) as well as for visual interest, Haverland designed the addition not as one big mass but rather as two volumes: a north-facing living wing and a northwest-facing bedroom wing. The defining features of those two volumes—the peaked roofs and walls of mullioned glass—were conceived to echo and connect with the original cottage. And the plan allowed nearly all of the rooms to be oriented toward the water to better capture views and light.

Most arresting is the living room, where a 23-foot-high wall of glass "gives so much sky view that you feel elevated not only physically but also spiritually," Haverland says. "The space has a strong ecclesiastical quality, and the exposed steel columns and beams refer to Gothic structures." This is where the family and their frequent guests often congregate, treated to a never-ending show of boats plying the bay or evening lights twinkling across the shore. That is, when they're not outdoors, playing games on the lawn, splashing in the pool, or enjoying the stretch of beach that's accessed via a short walk down the hill.

When it came to furnishing the new interiors, Galanes says he "tried to ratchet up the warmth with color, texture, and softer, more organic shapes." He notes the curved Edward Wormley sofas and FilzFelt wool-felt rugs with hand-stitched details. (Cogan loved the rugs so much that Knoll bought the company last year.) For the "more rough-hewn cottage," he says, "it was all about cooling down the space, looking for materials that were a little harder, to avoid the homespun country-cabin look."

Among the pieces Galanes introduced are the living room's rare 1968 Eye cocktail table by the French artist-designer Nicola L., blue '50s Murano-glass lamps, and a '60s Franco Albini rattan ottoman. Throughout, vintage and new Knoll pieces are well represented—and sometimes boldly and unexpectedly upholstered, as in a yellow wool Saarinen Womb chair and a Mies van der Rohe Barcelona daybed in bubble-gum-pink leather with white piping. It's all tied together with distinctive items the couple brought to the mix—an inlaid bed they found on a family trip to India, for example—and large-scale contemporary artworks by Vik Muniz, Doug and Mike Starn, Esteban Vicente, and others.

For the most part, the nine-month project "went fast and flawlessly," says Finkel, praising Haverland's hands-on managerial style. Galanes, however, does concede one fraught moment when his lawyerly skills and Social Q's expertise came in handy. It had to do with the shimmering blue wallpaper on the foyer walls. He and Finkel loved it. Cogan hated it. "I had to find something that he wanted as badly as she wanted the wallpaper," Galanes says. The answer: a Piet Hein Eek scrap-wood table, now the dining room's focal point.

Ultimately, the entire house is a balancing act, marrying old and new—in the furnishings as well as in the architecture—and making a design statement that melds graciously with the magnificent natural setting. Says Cogan, "Michael gave us a house that, in the true modern tradition, you can literally look right through." Or, in the case of a new generation of Cogan children, Rollerblade right through.

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In the living room, 1950s swivel chairs by Edward Wormley for Dunbar are grouped with a cocktail table by Nicola L. and a '60s Franco Albini rattan ottoman. On the right, a Studio Tord Boontje light fixture for Artecnica is suspended above a Mies van der Rohe Barcelona daybed covered in an Edelman leather; in the background, Saarinen chairs surround a 1960 Richard Schultz table for Knoll. The walls are painted in Benjamin Moore's Simply White.

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Knoll CEO Andrew Cogan and his wife, Lori Finkel, commissioned architect Michael Haverland and decorator Philip Galanes to expand their house on New York's Shelter Island. Finkel and Cogan are seen here on the terrace with their children, (from left) Caleb, Jed, and Aliyah; the Sutherland teak furniture is topped with cushions of a Trina Turk pattern for Schumacher and a blue Sunbrella fabric.

3/12

A chimney breast of local river stone provides a rustic note in the dining room, where a 1930s Italian industrial light fixture from Obsolete hangs above a Piet Hein Eek table and Mies van der Rohe chairs by KnollStudio, the latter covered in an Edelman leather.

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The dining terrace's chairs, inspired by pieces by artist Donald Judd, are cushioned in a Sunbrella fabric, which is also used for the retractable awning; the sconces are by Urban Archaeology.

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In the master bedroom, which is lined with a Carolyn Ray wallpaper, the bed, blanket, and pillows were all acquired on a family trip to India; the ceiling fixture is by Patricia Urquiola and Eliana Gerotto for Foscarini, the Saarinen chair and ottoman are by KnollStudio, and the curtains are made of a KnollTextiles linen.

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A 19th-century cyanotype by Anna Atkins is displayed in the master bath, where sinks by Nottingham Brass for Signature Hardware are paired with Restoration Hardware medicine cabinets.

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The bath’s cast-iron tub has fittings by Sign of the Crab.

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A prototype of a Robert Venturi chair for Knoll enlivens a guest bath; the floor lamp is a midcentury Tommi Parzinger design, the Saarinen table is by KnollStudio, and the shower fittings are by Sign of the Crab.

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The mahogany pool deck features Bertoia side chairs and a Richard Schultz table, all by KnollStudio.

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The house as seen from its drive.

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A guest room is furnished with a ’50s Italian bed and a ’60s Scandinavian dresser from R. E. Steele Antiques.

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The property sits on one of Shelter Island’s highest points, offering generous views across the bay to the North Fork of Long Island and beyond.