

Speak Softly

In a wild meadow by the sea, Julianne Moore and Bart Freundlich's Montauk house uses just a few materials to say many things.

By Nick Haramis

Photographs by Stefan Ruiz



ON A BALMY afternoon this past July, Julianne Moore wanders barefoot through the open field next to her home in Montauk, N.Y., a once-quiet fishing town at the eastern end of Long Island. Butterflies and other pollinators flutter above the tall grass, and the bumblebees from her apiary hover among stalks of chamomile and milkweed. Her dog, Hope, pants contentedly in the heat. And yet the actress looks distressed. For weeks, she's been anticipating the arrival of the Queen Anne's lace, whose long, thin stems and delicate white flowers had last summer transformed the meadow into what Moore, 62, describes as a "fairyland." It's still early in the season, but her optimism has been challenged. "Yeah, maybe it'll come," she says, smiling to mask her doubt. "It's a little fickle."

If Moore seems unusually patient for a movie star, it's because she and her husband, the filmmaker Bart

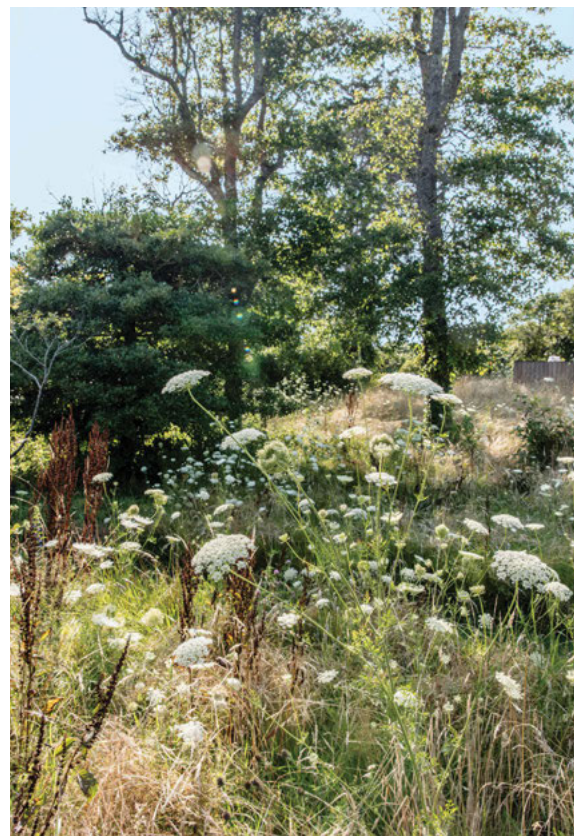
Freundlich, have had practice. About 10 years ago, the couple's friend [Tomas Maier](#), Bottega Veneta's creative director at the time, told them about a 10-acre property for sale several miles from their modest cottage on Fort Pond. Moore had dreamed of building a home in the modernist style of [Andrew Geller](#) or [Norman Jaffe](#), both known for their residential projects in the Hamptons, but Freundlich became "obsessed," Moore says, "with this lovely, very traditional house from the 1990s." Although she was charmed by its proximity to a rocky purple-sand beach, the property, which came with a circular driveway, felt a little fussy. "There were transoms everywhere," recalls the Manhattan-based architectural designer Oliver Freundlich, Moore's brother-in-law and frequent collaborator. "And *beadboard*," adds Moore, landing on the word as if it were the spooky part of a campfire story.



Julianne Moore and Bart Freundlich's house in Montauk, N.Y., overlooks a meadow of wildflowers that Moore created with help from Tom Volk of Summerhill Landscapes, and a modernist pool with a pair of structures by the architectural designer Oliver Freundlich.

In the fall of 2019, after years of false starts — the original owners kept removing the listing — the pair finally bought the house and started making it their own. That part required patience, too; when the pandemic brought the renovation, and Hollywood, to a halt in 2020, Moore and Freundlich moved temporarily from New York City into their 1,100-square-foot cabin on Fort Pond, which they hadn't yet sold, with their daughter, Liv, then a high school senior. (Their son, Caleb, a musician and composer, decided to stay in North Carolina to complete his final year of college.)

Now that she was living out east full time, the decorating choices Moore had made in the city about the new house suddenly felt like mistakes; although she admires the marbled interiors of the French architect [Joseph Dirand](#), slabs of Calacatta Paonazzo make more sense in Manhattan than Montauk. "I wanted everything you see on the interior of the house to be reflected on the outside," she says. Moore kept the two-story, 4,000-square-foot structure intact, but eventually replaced the facade's light gray shingles with red cedar, stripped the interiors bare and implemented what Oliver calls "the three-material rule": clay-finished walls, white oak floors and Belgian bluestone (mostly in the kitchen and bathrooms). "I'm really consistent," says Moore. "I cannot bear a variety of material, and I don't like a lot of colors." Oliver, who has now overseen six projects for Moore, grins. "It's the greatest challenge to edit something to one's personal perception of perfection," he says, especially because they weren't starting from scratch.



Moore replaced the formerly manicured lawn with a field of Queen Anne's lace and native wild grasses.

MOORE, WHO DISAPPEARS into characters as complicated as they are diverse, seems like her most authentic self when talking about design. She inherited her passion for objects from her mother, Anne Love Smith, a Scottish psychologist and social worker who sewed her own slip covers and regularly took Moore and her two younger siblings on historic house tours as children. “I don’t think I really saw it growing up, how much my mother cared about what was beautiful,” says Moore. “She was always telling me where to look.” As Moore’s knowledge about furniture and interiors has become more refined — owing in part to her friendships with architects and designers such as [Massimiliano Locatelli](#), [Daniel Romualdez](#) and [Vincent Van Duysen](#) — so, too, has her taste. And yet she’s careful not to intellectualize her aesthetic. “Talking about something while you’re doing it stops it cold,” she says. “Why do you have to tell us what it’s about? Why can’t it just be a thing?”

Upon entering the home’s double-height foyer, one immediately notices the view of the ocean through the dining room. Moore has eliminated most clutter, choosing instead to let the coastal light cast shadows on “big shapes,” as she puts it. “This was the largest Noguchi I could find,” she says, pointing toward the ceiling at an oblong paper lamp by the Japanese American designer [Isamu Noguchi](#). A bronze ring by the American sculptor Alma Allen is displayed on the floor across from a woven bench by the midcentury French architect Charlotte Perriand. Beyond a set of sliding pocket doors — which stay open except when they want to create a cozy environment for family meals — a smaller Noguchi lantern hangs above an imposing circular elm dinner table by the French furniture designer Pierre Chapo and one of Moore’s two metallic cabinets by the Belgian Modernist Willy Van Der Meeren (she keeps the other one in her office upstairs). A 2014 painting by the German artist Friedrich Kunath depicts a woodland scene at dusk. The title of the piece, “We Better Stop Pretending,” appears across the canvas in capital letters. “But I’m an actor,” says Moore. “That’s all I do.”



At the end of a walking path, a stone bench by the artist Robert Gurr.



In Moore’s office, a Pierre Jeanneret desk and chair, an Alvar Aalto stool and a Willy Van Der Meeren cabinet. The photograph above the fireplace is by Ori Gersht.



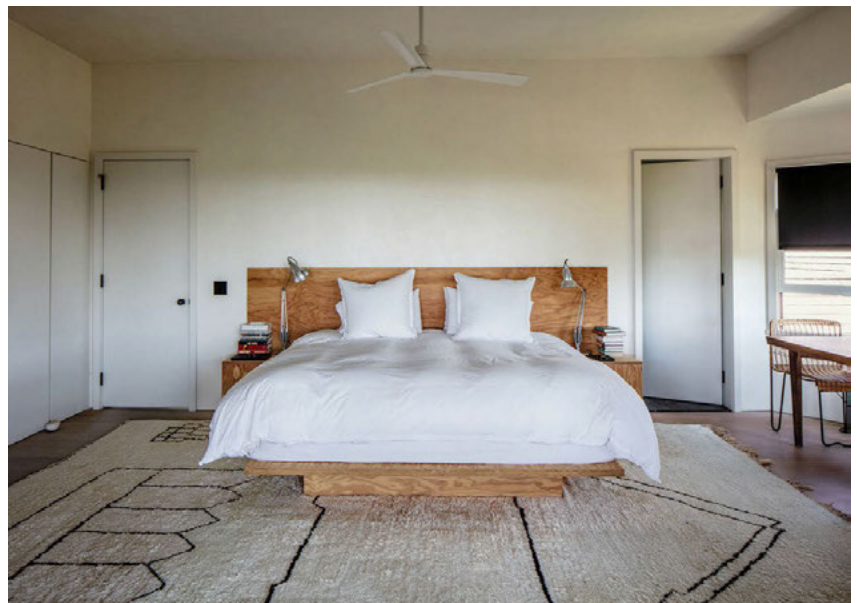
In the dining room, an Isamu Noguchi lamp hangs over a Pierre Chapo table and chairs from Morentz.

To the right of the dining room is the living room where she and her family watch movies or sports on a pair of puffy brown Le Bambole sofas by [Mario Bellini](#). Some objects of personal significance are scattered on and around snakeskin side tables by Karl Springer and a gypsum coffee table by Rogan Gregory: a bronze cassette tape by Nancy Pearce (a gift from Moore to Freundlich, who made mixtapes for her when they first started dating); a turtle shell from the owner of a sushi bar in Japan. The best actress Oscar she won in 2015 for playing a linguistics professor with Alzheimer's in "Still Alice" is hidden at the very back of a bookshelf between an Alexander Calder monograph and "The New American Cottage" (1999).

On the far side of the ground floor is the kitchen, which abuts a screened porch overlooking the swimming pool and the vegetable garden where Freundlich, who enjoys cooking, grows kale for their morning smoothies. Above the bluestone sink and counters are rows of clay bowls by the California-based artist Andrea Zittel and ceramic cups by the American sculptor JB Blunk. A separate set of stairs off an adjacent mudroom leads to Caleb's bedroom, where the house's first patriarch used to make fishing lures and where Freundlich now writes his screenplays. When Moore walks in on him, Freundlich throws his hands in the air. "I was *just* about to solve the issue I've been working on for years," he says with mock exasperation. Moore rolls her eyes and laughs.



In the foyer, a Noguchi lamp, a bronze ring by Alma Allen on an alabaster pedestal and a Charlotte Perriand bench from 1950 Gallery.



In the primary bedroom, a plywood bed produced by Mark Wilson Studio in East Hampton, inspired by the work of Donald Judd.



On the covered porch, a pendant from Tiina the Store over a table and benches also by Wilson.



A view of the house from a path leading to the apiary.

THE MOST PEACEFUL room in the house isn't really a room at all. At the top of the central staircase, flanked by the primary bedroom and two others, Liv's and a guest bedroom, sits Moore's office, a sort of in-between space with the water on one side and the forest on the other. Atop her teak desk by the Swiss architect Pierre Jeanneret are scripts: one for a film that shut down nine days early due to the Writers Guild of America strike (a couple of months later, when SAG-AFTRA joined the labor dispute, Moore picketed in solidarity); another for "Case 63," a fictional podcast that follows the therapy sessions of an alleged time traveler.

When it's nice out, Moore takes Hope down to the water. Sometimes she uses the walk to memorize her lines, playing back the dialogue she's recorded into her phone. But most of the time, she takes advantage of the silence. It's been 18 years since she and Freundlich started renting in Montauk; now that her children are grown, Moore has found new ways to enjoy her home at the end of the world. Well, mostly. "My mother used to tell me, 'You're never finished with a house,'" she says. "It's like an organism that keeps going."

The sun beats down as Moore makes her way back, past her newly refurbished pool area — a pair of modernist structures with teak Skagerak lounge chairs and an outdoor shower — and the rugged field where rosebushes and fluffy wisteria once bloomed. She stops to inspect something. "Huh," she says, holding out her hand. In her palm is a burst of intricate flowers that look a lot like lace.