

The New York Times



## The Straight Lines That Came Full Circle

In a land of flamboyance, Norman Jaffe's understated homes are taking off.

**TROPHIES** The modernist homes, designed by Norman Jaffe, insert, have come to be prized Hamptons real estate. Above, his Sam's Creek development in 1982.

By ALASTAIR GORDON

BRIDGEHAMPTON, N.Y.

**E**ARLY on the morning of Aug. 19, 1993, Norman Jaffe went for a swim off the ocean beach here. Jaffe, a 61-year-old architect, left his clothes in a neat little pile and ran into the surf, as he did almost every summer morning, but this time he never returned.

While Jaffe was presumed to have drowned, his body was never found, leading to speculation, never confirmed, about sharks, suicide and foul play. ("Famed Architect Vanishes" read a headline in *The New York Post*.) He was officially declared dead by the Suffolk County Medical Examiner a month later, when a pelvic bone washed ashore and forensic investigators identified it as his.

Jaffe had left as much of a mark on the East End of Long Island as any architect, with a portfolio of local work that included a golf club, a synagogue, the popular Laundry restaurant in East Hampton and more than 50 homes characterized by rustic stone and long sloping rooflines.

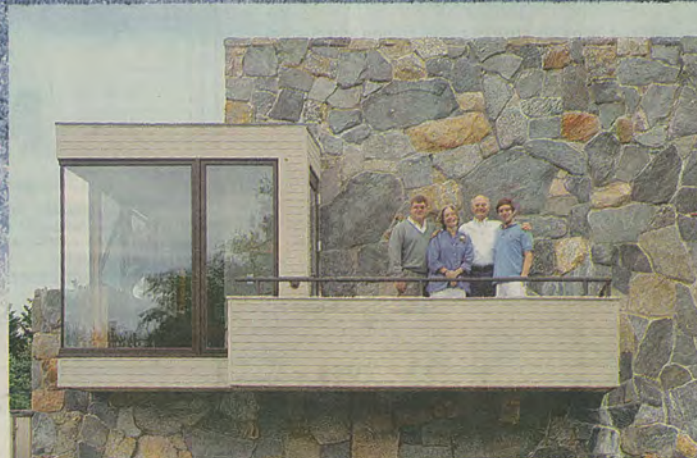
Today Jaffe's houses are beginning to acquire the cachet of modernist classics, and home buyers are increasingly seeking them out. "There's something special about the Jaffe houses," said Peter Turino, a broker with Brown Harris Stevens of the Hamptons, which has a Jaffe house in Southampton listed for \$16 million. "People love them."

Jaffe was the most prolific architect working here at a time when the Hamptons were becoming the Hamptons of today. Throughout the 1970's and 1980's, Jaffe's houses appeared in glossy magazines like *House & Garden* and *Architectural Digest*, and he had his share of high-profile clients, among them Alan Alda and Bjorn Borg.

Still, Jaffe was not always in sync with architectural fashion. For one thing, his work never quite conformed with the lighter-than-air geometries of better-known contemporaries like Charles Gwathmey and Richard Meier. With sunken living rooms, hefty beams and stone fireplaces, Jaffe's houses were closer in spirit to the rugged sensual-



Aaron Fedor and Scot Faubel



Above, Laurie Lambrecht for *The New York Times*; top, Paul Warchol



Laurie Lambrecht for *The New York Times*



Nikolas Koenig

**ADAPTATIONS** Alan Golub, above left, asked his daughter Tori Golub and James Merrell (in cardigan) to collaborate on a new wing, top left. Top right, Steven Harris (in white, with the Rappaport family) helped update a Jaffe house with a cedar-lined den, right, built in the Jaffe spirit.

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ity of Frank Lloyd Wright, and West Coast architects like Joseph Escherick, whose work at Sea Ranch on the northern California coast was an early influence.

A low point came last year when the wedge-shaped oceanfront house in Southampton that Jaffe designed in 1985 for Martin Raynes, a real-estate developer, and his wife, Patricia, was demolished by a new owner with hardly a peep from the local press. "It seemed obscene to tear down such a beautiful and monumental piece of architecture to make way for what?" said Sarah Jaffe Turnbull, Jaffe's widow.

To add insult to injury, parts of the house, including the terra cotta roof tiles and stone facing, were scavenged and auctioned off. "It felt like upscale looting," Mrs. Turnbull said. (The estate had already suffered its share of misfortune; in 1994, Vitas Gerulaitis, the tennis player, died from carbon monoxide poisoning while staying in the Raynes's guest cottage.)

Arthur G. Altschul Jr., an investor, bought a Jaffe house in East Hampton two years ago that was built in 1982 for Peter Cohen, then chief executive officer of Shearson/American Express, and has begun restoring it to its original condition, complete with copper-clad roofs and a sunken entry court with a waterfall cascading down a wall of boulders. "This kind of architecture was still out of fashion when I bought it," Mr. Altschul said. "It's like a John Lautner house come east."

Jaffe's greatest achievement, one that in

*Alastair Gordon is at work on a book about Norman Jaffe's architectural career, to be published next year by Monacelli Press.*

some ways surpassed Frank Lloyd Wright's Usonian vision of houses integrated with landscape, was at Sam's Creek in Bridgehampton, a grouping of six houses built by Jaffe between 1972 and 1982 on standard one-acre lots fanning off a cul-de-sac road. All six have been restored or remodeled in the past decade in a style that honors Jaffe's original intent. "People have a sense of pride about living in their Jaffe houses," said Judith Garson, who, with her husband, Steven N. Rappaport, bought a Sam's Creek house in 1996 and remodeled it with Steven Harris Architects.

Jaffe saw Sam's Creek as his chance to create an alternative to the kind of sprawl that had started to afflict the East End by the 1970's. The site, an unrelentingly flat former potato field, was undistinguished except for the spring-fed creek that flowed into Mecox Bay. Sam's Creek evolved gradually into a community, one lot at a time, with Jaffe working as architect, landscape designer and part-time developer. (He also became a resident.) He created a sequence of low horizontal forms that floated cloud-like across the landscape.

"It started off with the lines of the land," said Mark Matthews, a Southampton-based architect who worked for Jaffe in the 1970's. "Norman loved the horizontal landscape, and that established the forms of the houses at Sam's Creek."

Broadly cantilevered overhangs were used to protect houses from the heat of the summer sun, and the blocky geometry of each house was softened with berms of undulating earth planted with grass. "The feeling was so entirely different than suburbia," said Ellen Kreindler, who, along with her husband, Donald, bought a Sam's Creek house in 1979. "I loved the openness of the spaces and being able to see outside in every direction."



Paul Warchol

## An architect who left his mark, then vanished into the sea.

The most radical feature that Jaffe introduced at Sam's Creek, was a covenant that preserves a common green along the creek, a provision that runs counter to the instincts of most homeowners in the Hamptons, an area notorious for its nasty property disputes. "It's quite a challenge for people in 2004 to accept the shared green," Ms. Garson said. While the covenant has occasionally been a point of contention, most residents see it as a virtue.

What's more, the homeowners have generally managed to renovate without violating Jaffe's emphasis on flat roofs that hover discretely between sea and sky.

"We liked the house the way it was," Ms. Garson said. "We didn't want to change the

feeling." Inside the front door is a Zen-meets-James-Bond sunken garden that the Rappaports call "the pit." Bamboo and granite rocks are artfully positioned on a bed of smooth black stones and a staircase winds its way up to the master bedroom suite. "Some things screamed of the 1970's, but they were minor," Ms. Garson said. The renovation began with cosmetic changes, such as lightening the dark shade of the interior wood paneling, and removing a wall of mirrors.

"Our mission was to complement Jaffe's architecture," said Lucien Rees-Roberts, a partner in Steven Harris Architects, who designed an L-shaped sectional couch for the living room and helped Ms. Garson find furniture that was sympathetic to the design, including a midcentury tripod lamp, a Saarinen womb chair in orange mohair and a pea-green wool rug from France.

At the opposite end of Sam's Creek, the ground rises gradually in a green wave, undulating along one side of a 1,740-square-foot house bought in 1977 by Alan Golub, a former garment industry executive, as a weekend retreat in which to recover from a recent divorce. As his two daughters grew up and had children of their own, however, Mr. Golub found he needed more room for visitors.

Like the Rappaports, he was a longtime admirer of Jaffe's work and had discussed an expansion with the architect just before his death. He said he never considered tearing down the house. "That would have been a crime," Mr. Golub said.

Instead, he cultivated a close collaboration between his daughter Tori Golub, a Manhattan-based interior designer, and James Merrell, an architect based in Sag Harbor, to enlarge and refine what was there.

"My dad isn't really a hard-core minimal-

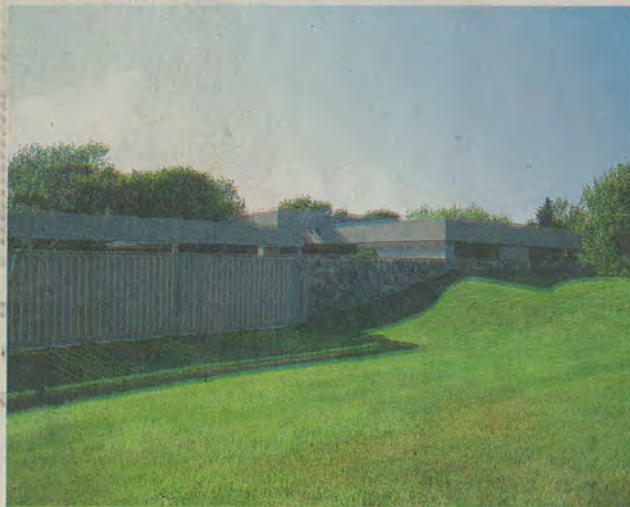
ist, and he wanted something more comfortable," Ms. Golub said. "We wanted it to feel like the same house, just a bit bigger and better." The dark wood walls of the original interior were painted white, and the old sliding glass doors were replaced with a four-panel glass door that opens onto the swimming pool terrace.

The kitchen was enlarged and refitted with stainless steel cabinets and counters made from artisan plaster sealed with epoxy. Simple modernist pieces — an ebony and steel side table by Pierre Chareau, a Jean-Michel Frank couch, a tubular chrome chair by Ken Weber — were chosen for the living room, which features a chunky stone fireplace, one of Jaffe's trademarks.

"You don't feel like you're in a typical one-acre subdivision because of the way Jaffe tailored the landscape with berms to create a sense of continuity," said Mr. Merrell, who designed a 1,723-square-foot wing on the northwest corner of the Golub house. "The challenge was to emphasize Jaffe's vocabulary but also introduce a spatial complexity that the original lacked."

The ceilings of the new wing are two feet higher than those in the rest of the house, but the front facade remains virtually the same as the original version. "People drive in and say, 'You didn't change a thing.' That pleases me very much," said Mr. Golub, who now lives in his house seven months of the year. "There's a peacefulness here that I've never experienced anywhere else."

That sentiment is shared by other the Sam's Creek residents, who continue to enjoy the sense of community and continuity that Jaffe managed to create with such relatively simple means. "It's a legacy that we're all trying to preserve," Mr. Rappaport said.



Photographs by Aaron Fedor and Scot Faubel

**BLENDED** The Golub house retains Norman Jaffe's bermed lawn, left, and skylight, center, though his trademark stone fireplace faces a new crowd of midcentury furnishings. A bedroom sits in a new glass wing.