



A sweet life indeed: view from the back of La Dolce Vita.

Living the sweet *Life*

A seaside Chatham home offers the luxuries of coastal living with unassuming charm

It's ironic that the title of Italian filmmaker Federico Fellini's 1960 classic is *La Dolce Vita*—that is “The Sweet Life.” Set in post-war Rome, the film follows seven days and nights in the life of an aimless gossip columnist, Marcello, played by Marcello Mastroianni. To outsiders, the protagonist's indulgent, Hollywood-esque lifestyle may seem quite sweet, but in reality, it is anything but.

Arguably, the film illustrates that a life of extravagance is ultimately an unfulfilling one. If “the sweet life” is found instead in the beauty and enjoyment of life's simpler pleasures, then the Chatham house aptly named *La Dolce Vita* is proof of that. Conveniently located just a jaunt away from the center of town and a beach overlooking Chatham Harbor, *La Dolce Vita* was designed and built by Polhemus Savery DaSilva Architects Builders (PSD) as a modest vacation home for a young family. Design Principal John DaSilva and his wife, Sharon, the firm's senior designer, were tasked with creating a casual and contemporary coastal abode that would function as a traditional family home but still feel like a compact cottage.

By Haley Cote • Photography by Brian Vanden Brink



A charming arched entry porch provides a peaceful retreat and an inviting welcome.



Doing so on a narrow, one third of an acre lot meant completely tearing down the outdated, “conventional” Cape house previously located on the property and giving La Dolce Vita a new and improved layout. That took some convincing on the client’s end. “They imagined replacing the Cape with a Cape,” DaSilva says. “With a conventional Cape, the eaves side—or the long side of the house—faces the street, but that design wouldn’t maximize the potential of this small site.” Instead, PSD designed the gable end of La Dolce Vita to face the street, which DaSilva says allows the house to have a compact footprint in a relatively simple form. And, he adds, this site orientation allows for optimal light exposure. “By designing the house this way,” he explains, “the open kitchen, living and dining room occupies the full back of the house, with windows on three sides—south, east and west—that provide all-day direct sun.”

“This is their getaway, their place to relax, and their place to have fun.”

From the street, the “balanced asymmetry,” as DaSilva puts it, of La Dolce Vita’s architecture is on full display. While the façade of the house is asymmetrical, with its beckoning arched entry porch and off-center, square first-floor window, DaSilva explains that balance is achieved through the defined rooflines. This play on symmetry, he notes, adds to the desired casual charm of the home and provides some unique character. “I like to think of it as the house sort of erupting from its simple footprint,” DaSilva says. “It’s basically just a rectangle, but it has a dynamic skyline. The geometry of the steep, slightly top-heavy roof and its large overhangs above the simple rectangular form gives the house a slightly storybook character.” To DaSilva, that “storybook character” is one seemingly born out of the imagination of a child. “A storybook house evokes a house that a



child might draw, where the domestic qualities are exaggerated,” he says. “The steep roof pitch, the large overhangs, the emphatic chimney, and the arch at the entry porch—these are all slight exaggerations of what you might consider to be conventional house designs. They’re not outrageous—they don’t make the house unusual, but they make it special and endearing.”

Entering through the front archway, one can imagine how easy it would be to find tranquility on the wraparound entry porch. With views of the well-manicured lawn, the cedar-paneled porch serves as a cozy retreat—and a “transitional zone.” “Porches are part exterior space and part interior space,” DaSilva explains, “so the natural wood is an exterior material, but its smooth texture is more similar to an interior wall than the shingles of an exterior wall.” He notes that an oval opening within the porch adds a whimsical touch. “It’s like a window without glass,” he says.





Left: The light-and-airy kitchen boasts a 14-foot-long island and opens into the living and dining room. Below: Kids will find a great escape on the second floor of the hillside garage: a playroom, accessible only by a set of French doors located off of the hill. Bottom: Complete with a deck, terrace and outdoor grill, the backyard provides an idyllic spot for summertime entertaining.



Once in the entry hall, one's eyes are drawn past the staircase and through to the backyard view beyond the living room. "We consider a view through the house to be very welcoming," DaSilva says. "It brings you forward and connects you from the entry to the living space." To the right of the staircase is a first-floor bedroom suite, and up the stairs on the second floor is the master bedroom suite. DaSilva adds that the right-hand corner of the master bedroom bay window offers the best view in the house, with sightlines of the outer beach, Chatham Harbor and the ocean beyond. A balcony off of the master bedroom, sited directly above the first-floor porch, also provides this distant water view.

Back downstairs, the linear kitchen, located in the center of the first floor, offers an ideal spot to both dine and

socialize. For Becky Brown, design manager of Classic Kitchens & Interiors, designing this kitchen proved to be challenging, as the kitchen was allotted a tight depth of just nine feet. Brown and her team chose to take advantage of what is a long and narrow space by installing a 14-foot-long island, featuring a light gray marble countertop that complements the kitchen's white cabinets and mother of pearl tile backsplash. "We didn't want to encroach on the living space any more than we needed to," Brown says of the island design, "and we wanted to allow for six stools for family and guests."

Another challenge for Brown and her team was incorporating all of the appliances the client wanted, including a full-length stainless steel refrigerator, two dishwashers, a wine cooler, a Wolf range and stovetop, and built-in Sub-



Zero ovens. To help make everything fit seamlessly in the space, they disguised the dishwashers and wine cooler—as well as two pantries, one which includes a set of refrigerator drawers, that occupy opposite ends of a window seat tucked into a corner of the kitchen—behind cabinetry matching that found throughout the kitchen.

Beyond the kitchen, two sets of French doors flanking the living room fireplace open out to the backyard—complete with a deck, terrace and outdoor grill. Curved lines and circular forms, like those of the arched entry porch, define this outdoor living space. The uphill site was ultimately an advantage for the landscape design team at Hawk Design Inc., as it allowed more



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opportunities to add visual interest, says company president David Hawk. “When you have topography,” Hawk says, “you can really do many more interesting things than you can when you have a flat site.”

Designing the outdoor grill space, located off of the wraparound porch, was one such opportunity to create visual interest. “We decided to conveniently place the grill on top of the stone retaining wall so that it flowed with this meandering seating wall that wraps around the terrace space off of the deck,” Hawk says. “Instead of making it a destination kitchen and setting the grill out by itself, why not make use of that retaining wall, which reinforces the circular forms of the backyard.” Using quintessential Cape Cod plantings like boxwood, hydrangeas, roses, rose of Sharon, and hibiscus, the team embellished the space, looking to create an “impact” landscape. Hawk explains, “As opposed to putting down small plants that would almost make the house look bigger, we brought in plants that are more mature and put the house in a more permanent setting right off the bat, instead of waiting years for them to grow and have the desired impact.”

Hawk Design also utilized a stone retaining wall to achieve level space with the sloped front yard. “This needed to be an informal wall that still had some finish to it so it would react nicely to the casual feel of the site and the undulating landscape,” Hawk says, noting that the use of irregular-shaped native stones helps achieve that. The wall borders the house’s side entry—which

faces the driveway and leads into a mudroom—and stops just short of the front entry. “We could’ve wrapped that retaining wall around to the street side,” Hawk says, “but we felt that would look too built-in. That’s why we went with the aged granite monolithic steps that meander up the slope to create a more traditional entry and a softer entry to the front door from the street.”

Since the land rises up at the back of the house, PSD chose to nestle the freestanding garage into the hill. Architecturally, DaSilva says the garage is “a miniature version of the house,” with its overhangs and steep roof. The second level of the garage provides the ultimate kids’ sanctuary in the form of a playroom. With no stairway inside the garage, the only way to get to that playroom is by going up behind the hill and entering through a set of French doors found right off of the grade.

To the client, DaSilva says “the sweet life” meant a life near both beach and town in Chatham, and La Dolce Vita was the realization of their dream to live in the quaint seaside town. “We try to create homes that people get emotionally attached to, that they long to return to,” DaSilva says. “This is their getaway, their place to relax, and their place to have fun. They’re entering a storybook world, in a way, when they come here. Their house can reflect that, and I hope this house does.”

Haley Cote is the assistant editor for Cape Cod Life Publications.



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