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William A. Sterling

Eastern Point Retreat House

Even before you arrive at the Eastern Point Retreat House, there is a sense of procession as you drive there in your car. You drive past Gloucester harbor with its fishing boats and repair yards, past the Rocky Neck artist colony, then past a small neighborhood beach at the gated entrance to Eastern Point perched on the ocean bay, then along the edge of a fresh water pond that is always mirror flat and on a sunny day reflects a bright blue sky across its face.

As you turn off the approach road onto the retreat property you wind through a dense thicket of trees that open onto a panoramic view of the old stone mansion complimented by the new residential wing in stone that is carefully finished to match the variety of colors of the mansion stone. The designers added brick coursing on the upper story to match the roof color of the old red slate tiles.



The new residential wing evokes an iconic image of a style that reaches far back before Gothic style to the early Christian basilicas like Hagia Sophia of Istanbul with bands of stone alternating with brick red bands of

spanner courses that stabilize the wall. In fact, cladding the top floor in brick

happens to match the finishes of Loyola Castle in Spain, the family home of the Jesuit founder St. Ignatius of Loyola. A projecting mass of delicately clad rooms



Andy Caulfield

hang cantilevered off the front wall of the massive stone building in a textured pattern of pale weathered gray cedar.

The strongest symbolic image to greet you is straight ahead as you drive in, a 15 foot high solid cedar cross mounted to the face of the stone façade. To the side of the cross is the main entrance that is flanked by a pair of mission style bells, recalling the traditional call to prayer in religious communities like the matins and angelus of earlier days.



Jane Messinger

From this arrival point there is only a hint of the ocean beyond. An astute observer senses the lack of any trees behind the house and can find a view through the glass walled dining hall to the flash of sparkling blue off the water.

The building exterior imagery evokes an instinctive spiritual response. Upon entering the main entrance you are faced with a full wall of stained glass sculpture by David Wilson. On second look, you can decipher an abstract form of a cross in dazzling clear and crystalline prismatic reflections with touches of forest green and garnet red tones. It is a modern interpretation of the Gothic principles of helping us see God's presence on earth through geometry and light.

Another touch of stained glass artistry is on the first and second floor connector hallways to the mansion from the new residential wing. This walkway overlooks a courtyard below, opening to a broad lawn and a fantastic panorama of the ocean and rocky coast featuring Brace's Rock, a mammoth monolith just off the shore. The stained glass transforms that view into a pixelated array of sky blue, sea foam green and meadow grass green through the veil of the cut facets of

glass pieces. Through this picture window, the morning sun transforms the hallway into shimmering patterns of color and light on the floor and walls.

The first connecting room past the glittering stained glass hallway is an original sun porch from the 1921 Gatsby Era mansion. Two pairs of original french doors were salvaged and re-glazed with mirror glass to cover the fact that the wall behind them had to become a 2 hour fire rated separation from the new wing.



Jane Messinger

Early Christian services forbidden by the Roman Empire were celebrated secretly in the homes of the faithful. Today “pop-up” venues of worship are trending again, not unlike the early Christian model. Eastern Point follows that model of transforming a private residence into a place of religious teaching, reflection and meditation. It has an informal atmosphere of a vacation getaway at a stunning location. In that way it becomes a destination

for retreat from the stresses and distractions of our mundane daily life into a place of highly charged physical and spiritual energy. Father James Martin, S.J., editor at large at America Magazine, has declared it to be “the best retreat house in the world.”

William A. Sterling, AIA