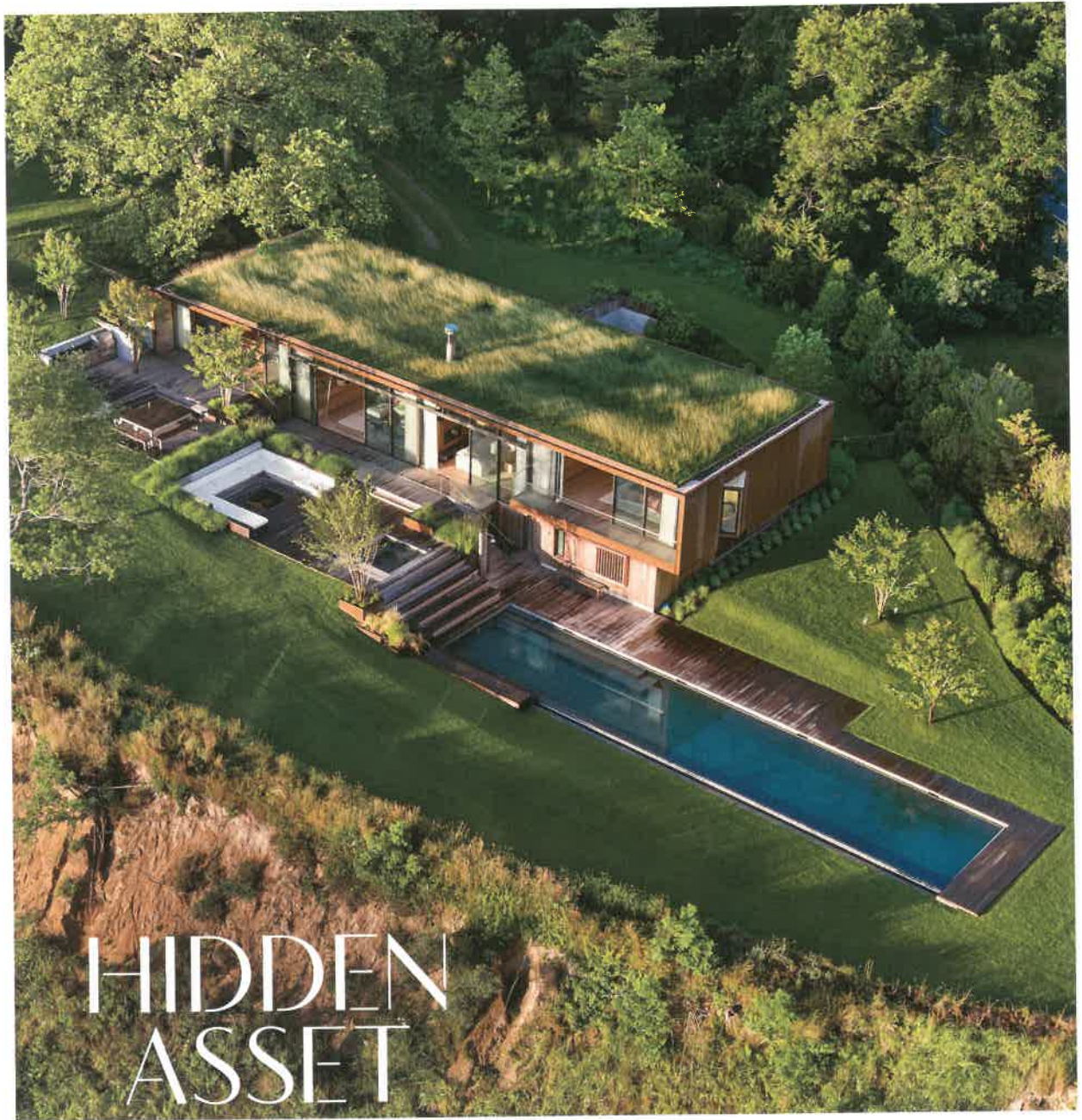


CENTURION

M A G A Z I N E

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HIDDEN ASSET

On a low-key stretch of the Long Island coast, two beauty entrepreneurs have built a hideaway so discreet you hardly know it's there.

By Rima Suqi

When viewed from the waters of the Peconic Bay, Bertrand and Mathilde Thomas's Long Island home practically disappears into the landscape. The low-slung matchbox-like structure with a glass facade and green roof is a far cry from many shorefront houses in the Hamptons that scream to be noticed—either for size or design or, often, both. And this was done deliberately. “I wanted it to be a stealth house,” says Mathilde, who, with her

Above: The green roof insulates Bertrand and Mathilde Thomas's home from the summer sun.

husband and their three children, moved to New York City from Paris seven years ago. After meeting in college, the couple founded Caudalie, the natural French skincare brand, in 1995. Four years later they opened the first Vithérapie spa on the grounds of Château Smith Haut Lafitte, Mathilde's family's vineyard in Bordeaux.

In New York they settled comfortably into Manhattan's Upper East Side, but they knew they'd need a place to escape to on weekends. They chose Hampton Bays, a small but picturesque hamlet a 90-minute drive from the city that's often referred to as the "un-Hamptons," as it's less crowded and more understated than, say, East Hampton. Attitude and accessibility aside, Hampton Bays also offered something else. "We are big windsurfers. I looked on the map to see where we could windsurf. This is how I found the Great Peconic Bay," says Mathilde, who is also the author of a best-selling 2015 book, *The French Beauty Solution*.

Before deciding to buy, the family rented houses in the area for several years. Over three years they looked at more than a hundred properties. In the end they bought the place they were renting at the time—a somewhat nondescript 1940s Cape-style home. Extensive renovations were re-

quired, and they went through many sets of plans before ultimately opting to tear it down and build a home from the ground up. It wasn't an easy decision. "When you're French and you have lived in old homes that have a history, you don't tear down. It's not European," Mathilde insists.

"The placement of the original house was really bad," says Caleb Mulvena, principal and cofounder of Mapos, the New York architecture firm the Thomases tapped to design and build the 4,000-square-foot home that would take its place. "It was situated right at the prow of the hill and was kind of ostentatious. It put the importance of the house over the importance of the site. We wanted to take the house away and pay homage to the land."

About half of the five acres are wooded, and two consist of a big meadow sloping to the edge of a 60-foot bluff leading down to a private beach. "It was absolutely beautiful, with direct views of Robins Island," Mulvena says, recalling his first visit. After walking the property with the couple, a clear vision emerged. "We wanted the house to be low to the ground," Mulvena says. "I wanted to push it as far down the slope as possible so that when you're on the land, you almost don't see the house until you are in front of it." Mulvena

A custom Cor-Ten steel fireplace divides the family area from the living room. The floor lamp is from Foscarini.



The front of the home, above, is protected by cedar storm shutters. In the dining area, below, a brass Lindsey Adelman chandelier hangs above a custom sycamore table. The dining chairs are from Design Within Reach.



The master bedroom features a pop-out window, *bottom*, that overlooks the lap pool and Peconic Bay. The rug is from ABC Carpet & Home.



designed a structure that, from the front, looks completely level. But from the bay side, both the interior rooms and exterior spaces step down with the landscape. The highest point is an outdoor grilling area, which corresponds with the dining room and kitchen; the next level down is a sun-deck leading into the indoor living area; and a few steps down from that is a 75-foot lap pool that's on the same level as the downstairs bedrooms.

The process took roughly a year, the design-and-build version of a miracle. Perhaps that's because Mulvena, who also handled the interiors for the home, had history with the Thomases. His firm had designed Caudalie's New York City office, a lofty, industrial, light-filled space with

"WHEN YOU'RE ON THE LAND, YOU ALMOST DON'T SEE THE HOUSE UNTIL YOU ARE IN FRONT OF IT," SAYS ARCHITECT CALEB MULVENA.



ceramic floors and a neutral palette that makes generous use of white oak, blackened steel, and pine wine crates imported from France. There's little color, except in plants, terrariums, and the Eames molded-fiberglass chairs that act as desk and conference room seating.

Using natural materials, both in their office and their home, was a directive from the couple. Caudalie favors eco-friendly products and ingredients so much that Mathilde coined the term *cosm'ethics* to describe their business philosophy. The front of the home is clad in cedar, the back is a glass wall that overlooks the bay, and the rest is wrapped in Cor-Ten steel. By design, the cedar will turn silver, the steel will oxidize into a shade of orange, and the plants that surround the home, along with the green roof, will eventually make it look like it grew out of the landscape. There are obviously a lot of variables with this type of aging that a typical client might not be comfortable with. But the Thomases, Mulvena maintains, "are not always looking for perfection. They are looking for authenticity."

A must-have for the couple was space for their book collection, which numbers in the hundreds.

ACCESS

For design inquiries, contact Mapos at 212-529-5005; studiomapos.com. For information about Caudalie and its *Vinothérapie* spas, visit us.caudalie.com.

"We decided to make it the centerpiece of the house and organized the house around this massive library," Mulvena says. Rather than create a special room for the books, he designed a 50-foot-long unit with three shelves, each with integrated lighting. It runs the length of the dining and living areas, creating a wall of sorts that hides the staircase used to access the home's lower level. Another necessity was wine storage, which is integrated seamlessly into the dining room wall. It was a last-minute decision—surprising, given Mathilde's parents' winery.

In 2015, just a month after the house was finished, the Thomases relocated to Hong Kong to expand their business in Asia. (They plan to move back to Paris in 2018.) Yet they return to the house for six weeks every summer, when the kids go to surf camp and friends from all over the world visit to hike the nearby preserves, go out on the family's boat, or zip-line on the property. Bertrand swims every morning, and the family grills on the deck every night, dining while overlooking the bay. "The home is our escape. It's where we relax and unwind," Mathilde says. "It's our little slice of paradise." ♦

Mulvena used native plant species around the house to blend in with the landscape over time.

