



# SHORELINE BEAT FOR BUSY NEWSMAKERS

60 MINUTES EXECUTIVE PRODUCER  
DON HEWITT AND MARILYN BERGER  
ON LONG ISLAND

Architecture by Jaquelin T. Robertson, FAIA  
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From the sunroom upstairs, the view is among the best on Long Island's East End. The marsh grass begins at the edge of the lawn, then there's a bay, a stripe of beach and the Atlantic. Overlooking this sea of tranquillity, with just a sprinkling of houses to remind them they're not the first settlers here, Don Hewitt and Marilyn Berger couldn't be faulted for spending their weekends in a kind of sweet stupor, savoring what they've achieved and tending to their memories.

But as the creator and executive producer of *60 Minutes* sits by the fire with his wife, he couldn't care less about past glories or even the considerable plea-

tures of his country house—he's too angry about what television has become.

"Broadcast journalism is practically dead," he pronounces. "If Murrow, Seavareid and Cronkite were available tomorrow, the networks wouldn't know what to do with them." It's not, he emphasizes, that television has considered its lack of talent and cut back on news—because this programming is both popular and relatively inexpensive to produce, the networks have glutted prime time with knockoffs of his show.

Don Hewitt does not regard these shows, or almost anything on network television, very kindly. In his view, the audience is getting older and smarter—

On the site of their weekend house on Long Island's East End, *60 Minutes* executive producer Don Hewitt and his wife, journalist Marilyn Berger, asked architect Jaquelin T. Robertson to design a traditional cottage for summer and winter use. ABOVE: The front façade.

"The challenge was creating a little house with scale on a tightly constrained strip of land," says Robertson (opposite, center, with the couple). "I feel like this is my hometown," says Hewitt, who recently celebrated *60 Minutes*' 30th anniversary on television.



The house is set on a docklike platform at the edge of a bay. "My goal was to break down the exterior mass of the cottage into a series of individual pieces that, compressed together, could hold their own against the expanse of water," the architect explains.

but network TV increasingly caters to young audiences with dumbed-down shows. The result? Declining quality, shrinking viewership. "At *60 Minutes* we get a twenty-five share, and we're among the most popular shows," he snaps. "I once did a show called *Who's Who*. It got a twenty-five share—and went off the air."

What makes Hewitt's blast more chilling is that this is not the carping of a pioneer who has, in his dotage, been shunted aside. He produced the first network newscast. He directed the first

televised presidential debate, between Richard Nixon and John Kennedy. And then, in 1968, he launched *60 Minutes*, which has won sixty-three Emmys, has consistently dominated the ratings and is, he says, "one of the biggest moneymakers in the history of television." So although Hewitt is seventy-five, he's still the ultimate survivor, and the ultimate insider. Small wonder that on the program's thirtieth anniversary CBS has asked him to create a second hour of *60 Minutes* each week. (Hewitt's response: "Over our dead bodies.")



ABOVE: Robertson raised the living room ceiling to conform to the new roofline, adding height and scale to the space. The screen is Japanese. "Mark Hampton, who acted as a consultant on the interiors, suggested the white-on-white tones for the rooms," says Berger.

Marilyn Berger, his wife of nearly two decades, is equally accomplished—and opinionated. After a stint at the United Nations, she became a diplomatic correspondent, covering the Vietnamese peace talks in Paris for *Newsday*. She then covered the State Department for *The Washington Post*. She now writes elegant and exhaustively researched profiles of the world's most influential people for *The New York Times*. The subjects never see these profiles, however—they are used as obituaries. "Some people are unnerved and refuse me," she

says. "But then I tell them that I seem to confer long life: George Abbott reached one hundred and seven, Irving Berlin one hundred and one, George Delacorte ninety-seven. Only Pamela Harriman and Isaiah Berlin went quickly."

Hewitt and Berger are blunt, decisive people, impatient with cant—seemingly unlikely candidates for designation as "dream clients" by their architect and designer, Jaquelin T. Robertson, whose firm has so many large projects that he accepts only three residences a year. And yet he was happy to take on this house



TOP: Simple details in the dining room reinforce the house's farmhouse feel. The porcelain is Meissen. Cushion fabric from Clarence House. ABOVE: Robertson designed the sunroom windows for unobstructed views. Ralph Lauren rattan furniture; Sanderson leaf print.

with Michael McCrum, who served as supervising architect. A good part of his enthusiasm was inspired by Hewitt and Berger's eagerness to learn as much about architecture and design as they know about television and journalism. In the late 1970s the couple bought a condominium in Southampton that Berger describes as their "first upstairs-and-downstairs res-

idence." Long Island proved addictive; in the early 1980s Hewitt got the urge to look at houses. "If we look, we'll find one," Berger warned. Undaunted, Hewitt and a real estate agent dragged her into the spring rain. And, overlooking a bay, they found what Hewitt calls "the worst-looking house on the best piece of land I'd ever seen." The heavens cleared, and they spotted a

family of swans paddling into the sunset. "The agent then took the swans to the next house," Berger comments acidly. But it was too late—the couple were about to become homeowners. Hewitt didn't exaggerate about the house. It was sort of modern but so casually designed that a screen porch was accessible only through a window. They remodeled. They remodeled again. And

then they asked Jaque Robertson, who had done their apartment near Central Park, to create, in Berger's words, "a house worthy of the land." When he saw the house, Robertson found his second motivator. "I'd always wanted to build something that looked as if it had been added on to the house fifty years after it was built," he says. *continued on page 162*

"The secret of *60 Minutes* is four words that every kid knows: 'Tell me a story,'" says Hewitt. ABOVE: "We put the master bedroom in a separate wing to give Marilyn and Don their own panoramic but protected world," says Robertson. Ralph Lauren drapery fabric.

Behind the house is what Robertson calls the "wood pool piazza." The variety of roof shapes—hip, Dutch gambrel and octagonal—represent architectural styles prevalent in traditional buildings in the area. "It's a tiny domestic village by the water's edge," he says.

