

# A long journey out of the past

A historic home that began life humbly in the Berkshires is now going for \$12.5m on Martha's Vineyard

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**W**EST TISBURY - WHEN Benjamin Clark, an antique house restorer, wanted a historic home to place on land he owned on Martha's Vineyard, he found it in the Berkshires.

For nearly 200 years, The Morgan Hall Homestead, a stately Federal that bears the name of a carpenter who became known for his grand hallways, had overlooked 140 acres of fields in the small Berkshire town of Worthington.

But in 1987, the 1795 homestead was disassembled and floated on a fishing boat to the shores of Martha's Vineyard to be reassembled on Clark's land, the final leg of its journey from rags to riches.

Today, the house, which had sat abandoned and consumed by thickets in a homespun hamlet, stands in one of the hottest real estate markets in the nation, with an asking price of \$12.5 million. Elaine Miller, the listing realtor with Sandpiper Realty in nearby Edgartown, said the one noticeable difference is that the house was turned sideways when it was reconstructed on its new site.

Included are 50 acres of land, a second 1741 house that has also been restored, and two large ponds. There is also a heated reflective pool and spa, a modern amenity added by its current owners, Beverly and George Szakacs, a businessman from New Jersey.

Grant Knapp, a retired paper mill worker who grew up in the eight-room farmhouse, was surprised to learn the "whopping" price. Knapp, who still lives near his stepfather's old farm in Worthington, sold the property in 1986 to a surgeon from South Hadley, who donated the farmland the house sat on to the Audubon Society.

After its move, the Morgan Hall house and all of its 3,400 square feet of living space was set on a new foundation and completely refurbished to its original state by Clark, the antique restorer.

It is an elegant four-square home with typical wide-board floors, detailed millwork, and high ceilings of a Federal. There are French doors everywhere, a maze of hallways, and an upstairs master suite wonderfully contorted by a giant wedge-shaped wall that houses a brick-lined fireplace.

Szakacs, who owns Global Wire & Cable Co., an international manufacturer of insulated cable and



GLOBE PHOTOS / STEPHEN ROSE

For nearly 200 years, The Morgan Hall Homestead (above) had overlooked 140 acres of fields in the small Berkshire town of Worthington. In 1987, it was moved to Martha's Vineyard. Left: The dining room.



some ocean cliffs of Gay Head and the more popular tourist areas of Vineyard Haven and Oak Bluffs. The nearest beach is about 15 minutes away.

Ironically, the Morgan Hall Homestead found its way to one of the oldest farms on the island. The Luce Athearn House, the other house on the property, bears the name of two of the island's earliest settlers.

Today, Nancy Luce is one of the most celebrated names on the island. Her books of poetry, such as "Consider Poor I," are local bestsellers, and the beach bearing her name in Chilmark is considered one of the most exclusive

beaches on the island.

Luce also farmed the land at West Tisbury, according to Candice Hogan, executive director of the Dukes County Historical Society.

The taxes on the Morgan Hall Homestead property, which is assessed at \$3.6 million, are \$24,000, considered on the high end for Martha's Vineyard but not unusual.

"Real estate agents are saying put your wish price on the property," says Hogan, "and it sells." The stretches of meadow the Morgan Hall Homestead and Luce Athearn House sit on are preapproved for a 10-lot subdivision.

wire for the telecommunications industry, and his wife, Beverly, purchased the property for \$780,000 10 years ago as a peaceful retreat.

But the pressure of business in the rapidly expanding e-commerce industry has taken its toll. Szakacs also wanted to spend more time with his wife.

"With her here [Martha's Vineyard] I feel like we're living separate lives," he said, "and I don't want to be separated."

West Tisbury, home to the only vineyard on the island, is nearly as rural as Worthington. It sits in the belly of Martha's Vineyard, between the awe-