



Photos by Jan Simmons

Martha's Vineyard is 25 miles long and 9 miles wide, with lighthouses, like this one at Gay Head Cliffs, punctuating the island's tips.

The Pearl of New England

Rubbing shoulders with the not-famous siblings of Martha's Vineyard's famous people

By **Wolf Schneider**
For The New Mexican

We're munching on hummus and crackers, sitting on the deck of photographer Peter Simon's French country cottage deep in the Chilmark woods of Martha's Vineyard. I've traveled to this island 7 miles off the coast of Cape Cod, Mass., with my high-school friend Jan. Peter — who used to shoot for *Rolling Stone* and is Carly Simon's brother as well as the son of Simon & Schuster founder Richard Simon — has invited us to visit with him, his wife, Ronni, and record producer Fred Mollin.

We're talking about how fabulous Carly looks on the cover

of her new album, as shot by Lynn Goldsmith — slinky and suggestive in black and hardly like 62. And about how engrossing Sheila Weller's rock-music triple biography *Girls Like Us* is. On the table is Sunday's *New York Times Book Review* with a rave recap of Peter's photojournalist book: *Reggae Scrapbook*. "It's a red-letter day!" he beams, handing it over. I understand, working in publishing as I do.

There aren't that many places where kindred-spirited folks can so easily come together, much less in such a pastoral setting. Which is partly why so many Martha's Vineyard visitors become Martha's Vineyard residents.

"I moved here full time in 1987," says Peter. "The best thing is the sense of tranquility and community — it's a nurtur-



Curious lambs venture close to visitors at the Allen Farm, where they roam free on the farm's spacious grounds.

ing, secure place where you feel like you belong, and people really know each other. You feel like you're in this together because you're here surrounded by water. It's insulated, but in a good sense. And there's the beauty and the beaches. And the laid-back lifestyle."

The way Peter sees it, he came here after establishing himself in New York City. "I'm a laid-back, post-hippie survivor," he says. "I'm also not that aggressive in terms of pushing myself up to the top of the rung. I felt like I had to make my mark as a bigger fish in a small town." I nod, thinking, "Sort of why I left Los Angeles."

A friendly, Puckish fellow who's barefoot in khaki shorts and a button-down shirt today, Peter confides, "People come to me here. I've made my mark. I have to advertise and schmooze at cocktail parties, but people know my work, and I'm like a brand here. I have the longevity. I don't like to be known as Carly's brother, but it does play into it."

He reflects, "I come from a pretty intense family. There were a lot of expectations."

Just as Santa Fe, where I live, is an arts enclave in a remote and remarkably gorgeous natural setting, so is Martha's Vineyard. Consider: Santa Fe had Georgia O'Keeffe; the Vineyard had Thomas Hart Benton. Santa Fe has 250-plus art galleries; the Vineyard has 50-plus galleries on a mere 25-mile-long island. It's one of the last literary bastions, with writers David McCullough, Larry David, Tony Horwitz, Richard North Patterson, Cynthia Riggs and Geraldine Brooks.

The Island's First Couple (long divorced, but still homeowners) remains Carly Simon and James Taylor (who's also lived in Tesuque) with their extended clans. Summer residents include Meg Ryan, Mike Nichols, Diane Sawyer, Keri Russell, Ted Danson, Amy Brenneman and Bill Murray.

When I flew east to the Vineyard in early June, I knew I'd find beaches, yachts, ferries, fishermen, lobsters,

sheep farms and educated New Englanders. What I didn't expect was that Martha's Vineyard would be Santa Fe's East Coast doppelgänger: a distant arts colony.

Notes jeweler Ronni Simon: "I've rarely met an Island person who doesn't do something creative. If you meet a carpenter here, he's also a musician."

Martha's Vineyard proves as uniquely gorgeous and dependent on tourism as Santa Fe. Its sunsets are sherbet orange and raspberry just like Santa Fe's, and the Vineyard is selling the experience of its lifestyle in unspoiled nature, too, as its summer population swells from 15,000 to 120,000.

Which is where Niall Reid, who used to be general manager of Santa Fe's Inn of the Five Graces, figures in. Niall left Santa Fe this past January to take over the Vineyard's Inn at Blueberry Hill for its new owners, Everlands, a conservation-oriented global destination chain. "The same type of person is attracted to Santa Fe and Martha's Vineyard," declares Niall, 37.

"The best thing Martha's Vineyard has to offer is the nature and the beauty and how unspoiled it is," he says.

"Another similarity is zoning — in Santa Fe it's adobe. Here it's all shingled. Big business isn't invited; it's discouraged. No high-rises. Environmental zoning is huge here, even more than in Santa Fe."

Niall allows that Santa Fe has the better visual art ("Santa Fe would kick most places," he believes), whereas the Vineyard boasts more wildlife and superior restaurants. "It's more organic, it's local, and the fish was caught that day." The Vineyard has more celebrities, but "it's the same laissez faire attitude as Santa Fe. It's a celebrity cool community," he says.

As far as contrasts, "we get more of a traditional WASPy crowd here, more conservative. Even though Santa Fe gets Texans, they're not as conservative as New Englanders," he comments.

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Westerners will probably always be more maverick than Easterners, I think, which prompts Niall to tease, “New England tends to be, ‘My grandfather hasn’t done it; I won’t. They burned a witch here two centuries ago; it’s still a bad place. There was a witch!’ ”

A dense New England population assures a strong regional tourism base for Niall, who assesses: “The main reason why people come here is the beaches. And it’s safe. It’s got like the highest police per capita in the Western world. It’s a really rich area. It’s rustic New England, very individualistic.”

If you crave a wooded setting with fields of iris and luxury lodging, the Inn at Blueberry Hill is the place to stay. It’s in countrified Chilmark, the most beautiful town on the Island. Spread out over 56 acres of woodlands, the inn consists of 25 rooms in gray, sea-stained Cape Cod shingled cottages.

Inside, the minimalist farmhouse design is Martha Stewart-goes-New England-barn: two-story-high vaulted ceilings adorned with fans and skylights. King-sized beds with pristine-white down duvets, six pillows on each. Hand-painted wood side tables. Wicker chairs. Blond wood floors, gleaming clean. Newly painted white or pale pink walls. There’s a subtle nautical theme, with the occasional fish print. Sliding glass doors and big windows open onto thriving lilacs, cherry trees, dogwoods, elms, beeches and wild grapevines refreshed by misty mornings.

At night, moonlight streams in the skylights, casting geometric blocks of light onto my vaulted ceiling; in the morning, I wake with anticipation — to borrow a word from Carly — to gaze into the radiant woods where chickadees beep and whippoorwills cry.

The highlights of our four days occur mostly driving around Up Island in Chilmark and West Tisbury where we sight rabbits, raccoons, skunks, deer and wild turkeys among the farmlands, and coax baby lambs to come closer at Allen Farm.

We inhale the salty sea air at Menemsha Harbor where *Jaws* was filmed, and Menemsha Fish Market owner Stanley Larsen — a sometimes painter — works from 8 a.m. until dark, grilling seafood chimichangas and researching watershed conservation.

Best of all are the conversations we fall into with locals — like about how rock musician Danny Kortchmar left Chilmark for Connecticut and how the hedge-farm trustafarians’ brightly lit McMansions are scaring the fish away.

When we venture Down Island, where white clapboard Greek-revival colonial houses dominate bustling Edgartown, Mark Jenkins of Sotheby’s International Realty, informs us: “Chilmark and Edgartown are the most expensive towns. I’m just about to list a decrepit tear-down in Chilmark for \$1.7 million. Well, let’s say it’s a much-loved summer camp which has seen better days.”

Back Up Island, our most sociable night is at Hugh Taylor’s Outermost



Menemsha Harbor, where working fishermen dock and set out their lobster cages, is where *Jaws* was filmed.

If you go

Getting there

To get to Martha’s Vineyard, fly to Providence, R.I., or Boston. Drive to the ferry in Woods Hole, Mass.

Stay

Inn at Blueberry Hill, Chilmark. Chic, upscale rooms, most with private decks, pine floors, whitewash walls and Frette linens. Stonewalls crisscross the inn’s woodlands brimming with wild blueberries. Probably the island’s most secluded resort. \$245 to \$480, nightly. www.blueberryinn.com, 508-645-3322.

Where to eat

◆ Catch at the Terrace, Edgartown. Dine on French-inspired regional seafood by candlelight in formal elegance amid Old Masters-style paintings. An excellent asparagus soup with morel mushrooms; braised cod with Wellfleet littleneck clams, baby romaine and applewood bacon; and strawberry parfait

with rhubarb. \$78 prix fixe, 508-627-4751. Wine available.

◆ The Beach Plum, Menemsha. Serving American cuisine, with fresh lobsters (\$45) and exotic salad greens (\$12) from North Tabor Farm. Larry David is a regular; 508-645-9454. BYOB.

◆ Outermost Inn, Aquinnah. Spectacular views. Have the seared sea scallops with fava beans and mustard seeds; island greens with fiddlehead ferns; roasted barramundi fish with parsnips and king trumpet mushrooms; and strawberry shortcake. \$75 prix fixe, 508-645-3511. Web site does not specify whether alcohol is available.

◆ Menemsha Fish Market, Menemsha. Seafood chimichangas (\$12.95) and lobsters for take-out and shipping, www.menemshafishmarket.com.

To learn more: *On the Vineyard III* for the scoop on Island life, with 230 original photos by Peter Simon and 39 articles by notable writers, \$49.95. www.petersimon.com.

Inn (yes, his brother is James Taylor). “When the horizon is a long way away, it’s kind of a relief,” Hugh — a philosophical version of his brother in khakis and Crocs — muses as the sun sets on the Vineyard Sound.

“Artists have always liked it here,” he continues, and then he nails the appeal: “For painters and writers, this is an easy place to spend time with nature and still be close to urban thought.”

The Vineyard isn’t perfect. Nor’easters can knock out the power for days, the average Chilmark house starts at \$3 million, it takes \$165 and a month-ahead reservation to ferry our car onto the island, and many towns are “dry,” without even wine.

But as our ferry swooshes away, I look back at the pristine Island already yearning to return. Maybe I could work at a local paper some summer. I chuckle

thinking about what fisherman-caretaker Hollis Smith — who used to be Billy Joel’s stage manager — told us, when we chatted him up at the Outermost Inn: “New England doesn’t suck. We have to put up with the rest of the world!”

I totally get it. *Santa Fe-based Wolf Schneider has been editor in chief of the Santa Fean, editor of Living West and consulting editor at Southwest Art.*