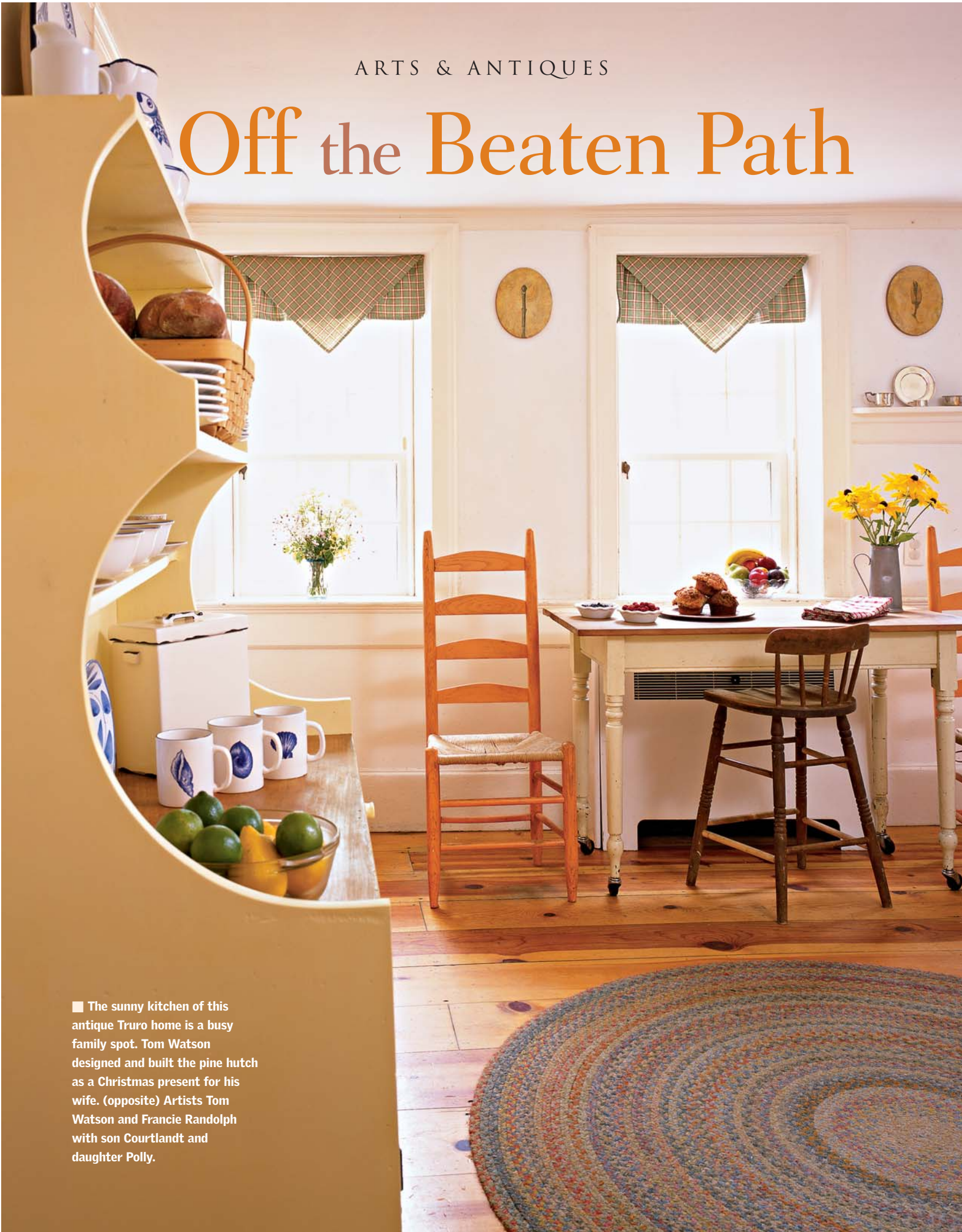


ARTS & ANTIQUES

# Off the Beaten Path



■ The sunny kitchen of this antique Truro home is a busy family spot. Tom Watson designed and built the pine hutch as a Christmas present for his wife. (opposite) Artists Tom Watson and Francie Randolph with son Courtlandt and daughter Polly.

In a historic and remote Truro home, two artists find inspiration in nature.

Truro oil painter Tom Watson is busy at work. But at this moment, his canvas is an enamel stewpot on the stove in his kitchen, and instead of wielding a paint brush, he's got a wooden spoon in hand, frying bacon that he smoked himself for oyster chowder.

"Can you run down to the garden and grab a leek?" he asks his wife, mixed media artist Francie Randolph, who is showing a guest around their 18th-century traditional Cape Cod home. She is proudly pointing out one of her husband's paintings that hangs over the hearth, while stopping to scoop up their youngest child, three-year-old Courtlandt, to smother him with kisses.



BY DONNA SCAGLIONE  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY TOM SOBOLIK



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## ARTS & ANTIQUES

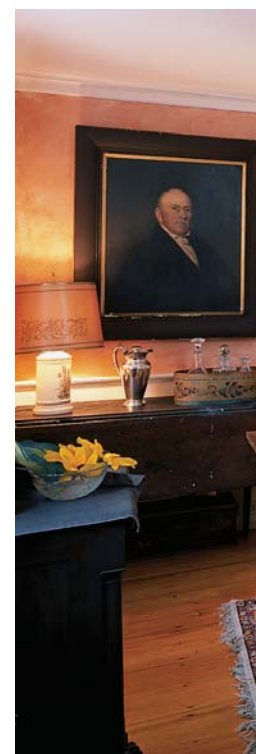
# Off the Beaten Path

But before she can go to the garden for the leek, a neighbor arrives to pick up Courtlandt for babysitting, and the conversation turns to a discussion of who last had the locking clip to the baby seat and where it might be found (no one seems to know), which stuffed animals Courtlandt wants to take with him (the mouse), whether he should wear his clamming boots in the day's rainy weather (yes), and where the bag of instant oatmeal that he likes to carry around went (in his father's pocket). For a moment, the leek is forgotten, until Watson slips on his storm jacket to head out into the wind and rain down to the garden, where two sturdy leeks stand among yellowing remnants of the fall harvest.

What is a typical day like in this household of two prolific artists and two small children?

"Chaos," Watson replies quickly, a hint of a smile on his lips.

Call it chaos, yes—but creative, verdant



■ The dining room is framed with portraits of Francie Randolph's ancestors.

chaos. On three rolling acres of land a short walk from Pamet Harbor and the Castle Hill Center for the Arts, Watson and Randolph have carved out a life that feeds their art, their family, and their souls. Behind the house stands a two-story, timber-frame barn-studio, where Watson paints oil seascapes and landscapes upstairs. Downstairs, Randolph creates images using photography and digital processes. There's also a smokehouse—Watson is a bacon fiend and a friend recently gave them half a pig—as well as a chicken coop, sheep's pen, wood shop, and a rustic guesthouse lighted by kerosene. The house was built sometime between the late 1700s and early 1800s, though the couple is unsure of the exact year—a fire at the Barnstable County Courthouse in 1827 destroyed the original Registry of Deeds, including the Depot Road home's papers.

The couple's back-to-the-land existence is



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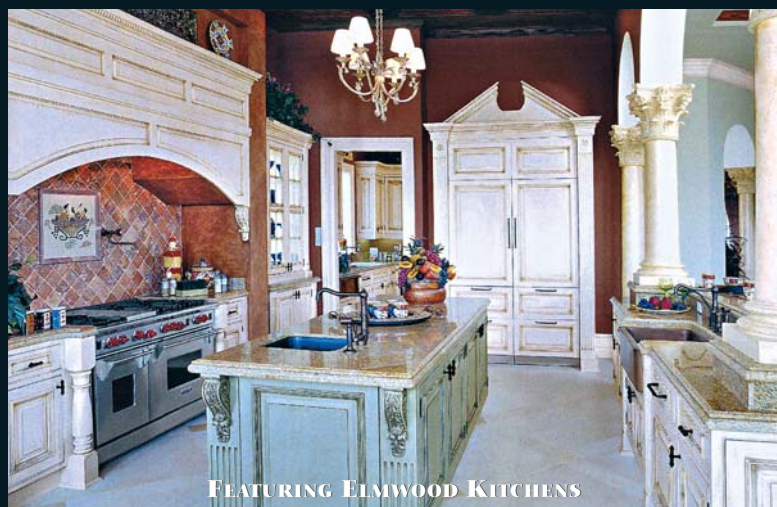


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## ARTS & ANTIQUES Off the Beaten Path



nothing new. Both grew up with parents who fostered love and respect for the land and a belief in its utility. Watson says his parents were “homesteaders” who moved to southern Vermont in the '40s. (They divorced when Watson was eight.) Randolph's father, a nine-to-fiver in Boston during the week, raised chickens and tended lobster pots on the weekends in Manchester, Massachusetts, where she grew up. Her father even taught her how to slaughter chickens.

But the artists have not always lived such a bucolic life. Both attended college in the city: Watson at the Rhode Island School of Design in Providence and Randolph at Harvard in Cambridge as an undergraduate and graduate student in the Visual and Environmental Studies Depart-



■ Watson built the chestnut bed and walnut trunk. The bed was a gift to wife and artist Randolph for their first Christmas together.

ment, where she later taught for seven years.

Still, life near the sea always seemed to beckon the pair. Since the age of eight, Watson lived part of the year in Truro, where his mother owned a home, while Randolph spent a lot of time in Chilmark on Martha's Vineyard.

"This is as close to Chilmark as you can get while being on the mainland," says Randolph. Both towns are laid-back farming communities where you can walk around barefoot, drive a pick-up truck, and do a lot of fishing, she says.

The natural environment looms largely in

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Photo by Andrew deLory

ARTS & ANTIQUES

**Off the  
Beaten Path**

the life the couple has chosen.

"The thing that keeps us from going anywhere else is the sense of outside," Watson says. "With the narrowness of the land here, you can either hear the ocean or hear the bay, and you can smell both."

That sense of the outside is reflected in their work. These days, Watson—who also illustrated *Tommy's Mommy's Fish*, a children's book originally written by his mother, Nancy Dingman Watson—is most captivated by the sea. His recent work features a theme inspired by Melville—white whale in blue water, whale boats, and sperm whale versus whale boat. After a busy summer last year that included their annual August studio exhibit at their Depot Road home, Watson spent the early part of fall meandering in his skiff on the bay, gazing at cloud formations, blue water, and big sky—inspiration for the dramatic seascapes of this past summer's exhibit.

"Right now, that's my favorite thing to paint," he says. "That's what really stimulates me the most—water and sky, that sense of space."

■ **Husband and wife artists Tom Watson and Francie Randolph use the timber-frame barn by their home as art studios.**





Meanwhile, Randolph's work often depicts growth in nature, with lotus petals, moss, seed pods, and the pregnant human body as subjects. She manipulates photos by flipping them, or scanning them at a high resolution. Then she layers the prints with glazes, paints, and shellacs.

"I'm just kind of manipulating the natural structure and seeing what I can make," she says.

Her recent inspiration is fertility and motherhood. *Body Matrix* depicts a large photo of her body swollen and curvy while pregnant with daughter Polly, from a series of self-portraits she took at various stages of her pregnancies. The installation measures 18 x 2 feet and is broken up into nine pieces. Now, for a possible book project, she is photographing pregnant women as they ripen closer to giving birth.

"Because of my interest in the patterns of life, the patterns of nature, I love to plant seeds, plant plants," she relates. "I'm really interested in the structure of growth."

In many ways, each artist's work is quite different from the other's. His is traditional,

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## ARTS & ANTIQUES

# Off the Beaten Path

Cloud Over the Bay by Thomas A.D. Watson



brush to canvas, while hers incorporates technology. Despite the differences—or perhaps, because of them—they freely ask each other for advice and criticism.

“We’re both comfortable enough in our work that we can say, ‘This draws my eye, or this doesn’t look quite done,’” she says.

Their home, which they bought in 1998, is another work in progress. Watson, who made many pieces of their furniture, including their walnut bed and pine sea chest, is building a mahogany porch and recently completed a shingling project. The couple also plans to restore a central part of the traditional Cape Cod house plan—the “keeping room,” a rectangular room extending across the back of the house, which commonly served as living area, kitchen, and workshop. In a previous renovation, before Randolph and Watson owned the home, part of the keeping room was walled off behind closets and kitchen cabinets. They plan to remove the walls



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to expose the fireplace and beehive oven. They will also add an ell off the northeast side of the house for a new kitchen with an 1800s design. The kitchen will feature modern appliances except for an old wood-burning Glenwood stove, which is now being restored in Vermont.

All of this work, of course, will be done amidst raising two young children, creating their art, planning their next big exhibits, running the studio—and finishing up the oyster chowder.

“It’s just a juggling act,” Watson says, reflecting on the couple’s life.

“But it all works,” Randolph adds. “It’s a lot of fun being around the kids, and it’s a lot of fun doing what we do.”

**FOR MORE INFORMATION,  
SEE MARKETPLACE ON PAGE 120.**

*Donna Scaglione is a freelance writer who lives in Hatchville.*

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