

# SARA JANE PORTER



A creative person's talents can find expression in many ways. For Sara Jane Porter, painter, sculptor, teacher, lecturer, and historic tour guide, her primary and chosen form of expression is architecture.

Sara grew up in Worcester, Massachusetts, the youngest of three children, and lived in the same house throughout her childhood. Although her father, who died when Sara was 15, encouraged her to be a secretary, he was inadvertently the one who planted her feet on the road to architecture when she was about 10 years old. It was at that time that her father hired an architect to design a new home for them. Sara was allowed to sit in on the meetings and although the project, a pie-shaped house with balconies,

By JOAN GRAHAM

never became a reality, Sara had found her future career. As a child, Sara says, "I would lay my crayons out to make a floor plan and then walk my dolls through it. The halls were always long and circuitous—no open floor plans—and there was always a swimming pool."

Good in math and science, Sara was encouraged to go to Carnegie Institute's summer program in Pittsburgh, PA, for high school students interested in architecture, an experience she recalls as difficult. She felt inadequate compared to the other students, a not-uncommon experience for those who have excelled in their home territory and then gone off to join others who have excelled, too.

Accepted into the Liberal Arts program at Syracuse University, Sara hoped to transfer into the architectural program, but was discouraged by some faculty members. "One dean said, when he saw the picture submitted with my application, that I was pretty and would have a busy social life and wouldn't have time for architecture school," Sara remembers. "I thought 'that's the place for me' and switched immediately into a Liberal Arts Home Economics program for interior design, where one of my projects was making a dress out of paper clips! One day, during a drawing class, the professor complimented me on the strength of my drawing. I left the class in tears, aware that my fears that I was not as good as other people prevented me from trying things because I was afraid I

school. I don't think I had the confidence or maturity to do it then. And in 1972, when I would have finished the six-year Master's program, I wouldn't have found a job. I'd almost like to go back and thank all those people for saying what they said!"

Sara and her husband, Jim McGuinness, had dated in high school but then lost touch. Sara says, "When we rediscovered each other, I came to the Cape to visit him on Christmas Eve and it was as if no time had passed."

Jim, who is the Language Arts and Title I Coordinator for Sandwich Public Schools, is a professional storyteller, and also teaches graduate level education courses for Lesley College. They live in a large, rambling Colonial home, parts of which date back to 1600, next to the Winslow



Crocker House on Route 6A in Yarmouthport. Both houses are owned by the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities (SPNEA). Sara and Jim have been the Resident Site Administrators since 1982 and conduct tours of the Winslow Crocker

House, the circa 1780 home of a wealthy 18th century trader. According to the Society's brochure, the house was moved in 1936 by Mary Thatcher, an antiques collector, who restored the house to display her collection.

One of only a handful of women architects on Cape Cod, Sara established her architectural business in 1986. Prior to that, she worked for five years as a designer and draftsman for Grattan Gill, a Sandwich architect she considers her mentor, who had studied with Frank Lloyd Wright. Sara has worked on more than 160 projects for owners, builders, and developers. Among her projects is ongoing work at the Chatham Bars Inn. She has completed millions of dollars worth of work in the three years she has worked with the Inn,

would fail. The next day, however, I transferred into the art program." Sara studied sculpture, loved it, earned a BFA, and went on to graduate school at UMass, Amherst, where she earned an MAT in Art Education in 1975.

After graduation, Sara taught art in three schools in White Plains, New York, working with a total of 700 children, K-4, and then taught art for four years in Englewood, New Jersey, teaching K-6.

Finally, at 30, with the support of family and friends who were starting new ventures of their own, Sara enrolled in an architecture program at City College in New York, where she earned a BS in Architecture in 1981. Sara says, "I'm not sorry that I was discouraged initially about architecture

including a spectacular new conference center. Christopher Diego, General Manager, said, in a written communication, "In addition to her architectural skill, Sara creates a pleasurable and fast design process resulting in visually attractive and functional structures . . . Whenever the demands of the construction process become stressful, one could always count on Sara's sense of humor and professional focus."

Sara also presents slide lectures on topics such as "Will the Real Cape Cod House Please Stand Up?," "Architecture on Cape Cod During the Victorian Era," and "Architecture in the Old King's Highway Historic District." She also offers a walking tour of Yarmouthport's architecture and history where she is an able guide to learning how to see the many clues our old buildings will show to those who know how to read them. Sara is also on the Board of Directors of the Yarmouth New Church Preservation Foundation which is restoring the steeple of the nearby historic church. Her work has been recognized through the 1997 Chatham American Home Week Award for Seaview

House (formerly the maids' dorm) given to the Chatham Bars Inn, and in 1998 for the Cape and Islands Board of Realtors American Home Week Award in recognition of Contributing to the Revitalizing of Community to owners of a residence in Brewster.

Sara says she "commutes down the stairs" to her office which faces the constant activity at the post office directly across Route 6A. She works every day and although she is a talented painter, she says, "I don't feel like painting any more. I am focused on work, not moved to do other things." About her career, Sara says, "I like it all—working with clients, the challenges, the process, the product. I enjoy the variety of projects, solving problems. I am doing exactly what I want to be doing." ▲

JOAN GRAHAM is the *Community Relations Manager at Barnes & Noble bookstore in Hyannis, a graduate student at Lesley College and a frequent contributor to CapeWomen magazine.*

BELOW: SUMMER HOME RENOVATION BY SARA JANE PORTER. ABOVE, BEFORE RENOVATION, AND BELOW, AFTER RENOVATION.

