

# Pooled Wonder



**Willowbend.** The name brings to mind images of pristine Cape Cod estates surrounding a championship golf course with water views. Swaths of manicured gardens edge the entrance to this Mashpee community, where multi-million-dollar homes offer easy seaside living with all the amenities provided, including an elegant country club with tennis courts, a huge pool, and award-winning dining.

For years, Bob and Syrul Lurie of Brookline, Massachusetts, spent long summer months on a sprawling Cotuit estate not far from Willowbend, an expansive 10-acre property with private tennis courts, a pool, several outbuildings and gorgeous grounds. Their two children and four grandchildren would frequently come to visit and the Luries treasured those long summer days.

Yet after seven years in Cotuit, the Luries began to wish for a simpler life, with less to care for; an easier, less complicated existence with a house that would allow life to ebb and flow with their family's summer visits, yet require far less upkeep. Now in their mid-70s, the Luries wanted a house with one-level living, but also needed separate second-floor spaces where their family and guests could relax without disturbing the first floor's peaceful haven.

It was a vision for a more minimalist existence—except for Bob Lurie's one large wish. A dedicated swimmer who swims at least a mile every day, Lurie wanted an enormous 72-foot pool with an infinity edge.

A visionary architect, a resourceful builder, and clients committed to quality turn a challenging site into a spectacular seaside haven.

"Everywhere you go in the house, there are these lovely private areas and yet the house's different living spaces are so well integrated."  
~ Doreve Nicholaeff, architect. Nicholaeff Architecture & Design

by susan dewey | photos by eric roth



The Luries turned to an architect they have known for nearly 20 years—and who has designed three other homes for the couple—Osterville’s nationally regarded Doreve Nicholaeff. Nicholaeff designed an elegant home and a condominium in Brookline for the Luries as well as the house in Cotuit.

“For the Cotuit house, we interviewed three architects, two of whom were well-known architects,” says Bob Lurie. “Doreve was just starting out, she had never designed and built a whole house. We knew that house needed an innovative design—it was really a big project.”

Lurie says that he asked all three architects to create a model of their design. “I told the architects that I would pay them for the design, but because of the size of the project, we really wanted to see a model,” says Lurie. “The truth is that Doreve’s design won hands down—there just was no comparison in terms of her creativity. The other two architects just were not even close. She is a very talented lady.”

“I understood what the Luries were looking for with this Willowbend project,” says Nicholaeff, who notes that the Cotuit house she designed for the Luries also had a lap pool. “The difference between that project and this one was that the first house and pool were on a large piece of property,” says Nicholaeff, noting that the Willowbend site on Shoestring Bay is just one acre, with neighboring houses close by on two sides.

“The lot falls dramatically off towards Shoestring Bay,” says Nicholaeff. “There were lots of trees along the water edge which the Luries wanted to keep for privacy reasons, yet they also wanted glimpses of the water from the house and pool courtyard.” The proximity of the house to the water and the existing vegetation also meant there were very sensitive conservation issues.

Nicholaeff says that through her long, successful partnership with the Luries, she has come to value the couples’ sensitivity to both environmental issues and community-wide concerns. “It is interesting how the Luries have always had modern taste, yet they wanted this house to fit into the neighborhood,” says Nicholaeff, explaining that the houses surrounding the site are classic “Cape Cod houses.”



On either side of the streamlined kitchen are sophisticated, yet comfortable dining areas to accommodate visiting family members and friends.

Eventually, Nicholaeff came up with an innovative, yet necessarily complicated design, featuring a long narrow house curved around the pool. “It was challenging trying to fit everything onto the site, to really get everything to fit because the house needed to be quite spacious,” says Nicholaeff, who has a Masters in Architecture from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. “It was like putting a giant puzzle together. Even though the house had to be narrow because of the restrictions of the lot, it really feels large all the way through because there is an open, flowing floor plan.”

Aware of the Lurie’s desire for a sophisticated, minimalist interior allowing for relaxed seaside living, Nicholaeff’s design allowed for large windows custom-designed by Little Harbor in Maine, which give expansive views of the pool and the bay beyond. “The main living space of the house faces south, so the house is always full of light,” says Nicholaeff. “The house is all about bringing nature in,” she continues, noting that as soon as you walk through the front door, the stunning Tahoe Blue Pebble-Tec finish pool seems to “be all around you.”

Ralph Cataldo, President of East Falmouth’s Cataldo Custom Builders, contractors for the entire Lurie project, including the house, the lap pool, and a 5,200-foot dock built out into Shoestring Bay, says that the pool had to be built first on the site. “The first challenge we faced was the great difference in the grade of the lot from the street,” says Cataldo, who says he has enjoyed working with Doreve Nicholaeff as a team on three of the Luries’ residential projects. “It was a tough lot that

Custom-designed floor to ceiling windows framed in mahogany bring nature in to every room of the house.



dropped almost 20 feet to the back of the pool in about a 120-foot span,” says Cataldo. “You wouldn’t believe the amount of concrete that was needed to achieve the construction of the pool and the retaining walls.”

Cataldo agrees with Nicholaeff that the size and shape of the lot combined with the challenges of tucking a 72-foot infinity-edge pool and a curved 6,000 square foot house onto the site, required a great deal of team-work between the clients, the architect, and the builder. “The best thing is that the Luries had a commitment to quality from day one,” says Cataldo. “They understand the value of unique architectural design.”

Bob Lurie says that working with Ralph Cataldo—who continues to provide comprehensive maintenance services to the Luries for the Willowbend residence—was a completely beneficial experience. “Ralph just builds a wonderful house,” says Lurie. “He just puts his heart and soul into every project and pays personal attention to all the details. He is involved at every level and doesn’t delegate the details needed to complete a complicated construction project like this.”

Nicholaeff says that she has been to several get-togethers at the house since its completion several years ago and that she is always gratified that the house may be 26 feet at its widest point, yet can accommodate everyone in comfortable relaxed spaces. At the heart of the house is an elegant, streamlined kitchen, which opens out to dining and living areas on both sides. Custom-designed, light oak cabinets and a sand-colored granite island add to the light and airy feel of the home’s interior.

Throughout the house, gleaming white oak floors are framed perfectly by walls and simple, sophisticated furnishings in a fresh natural palette, pale ecru, sunny yellow, cool blue, warm brown. Floor to ceiling windows, framed in solid mahogany bathe the entire interior with light and at night, allow the pool’s shimmering light into the house.





Lurie says that Nicholaeff and Cataldo both rose to the considerable challenges of the Willowbend project. “I was pretty skeptical of the curved design at first,” says Lurie. “But the truth is we have just found it a joy living here. We can sit in a chair and look out over the infinity pool and the view just merges into Shoestring Bay. The house and the pool designs are just works of art.” Lurie also speaks highly of the project’s talented landscape architect, Kimberly Mercurio of Woods Hole and of the landscaping contractors, BJs’ Landscaping of Mashpee.

The Luries enjoy the ultimate in privacy in an expansive master suite at one of the end of the house, which affords panoramic views of Shoestring Bay from a private deck. Bob Lurie, former CEO of the Susan Bristol Company, has a handsome, two-story octagonal office lined with custom cabinetry, close by.

A distinctive, custom-designed staircase at the center of the home’s street side, connects all three levels of the house from the basement up to the second floor, rising to a custom sky-roof window. Light from the second floor streams into the entire space, including two separate family areas encompassing parents’ bedrooms, bunk rooms for the grandchildren, and private play and sitting areas.

“It is kid-heaven there,” says Nicholaeff. “Everywhere you go in the house, there are these lovely private areas and yet the house’s different living spaces are so well integrated. It is just a happy house.”

*For information on Nicholaeff Architecture & Design, call (508) 420 5298 or visit [www.nicholaeff.com](http://www.nicholaeff.com). To contact Cataldo Custom Builders Inc., call (508) 548-1133, or go to [www.cataldobuilders.com](http://www.cataldobuilders.com).*

**Susan Dewey is the editor of Cape Cod Home.**



“The truth is we have just found it a joy living here,” says Bob Lurie, opposite, shown with his wife, Syrul.