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RESIDENCE

[ISLAND DREAM]

FROM NEW YORK CITY TO PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

JAMES MULLINGER MEETS
KYLE TIMOTHY BLOOD



The foyer of a New York City penthouse designed by Kyle Timothy Blood
Photograph: Anastassios Mentis

Born in Maine, Kyle Timothy Blood studied at Dartmouth College and in Paris before embarking on a publishing and marketing career in New York City at *Forbes*, *Martha Stewart Living* and *Country Living*. After studying at the New York School of Interior Design, he launched his boutique interior-design firm, Kyle Timothy Home, in 2004 and soon was working on projects in New York City, Westchester County (NY), the Hamptons (NY), Connecticut, Cape Cod (MA) and the Great Lakes region. In 2018, Kyle and his husband moved from Ontario to Prince Edward Island to continue their careers at a different pace. As he tells [EDIT]'s James Mullinger, "I recall the first Island event we attended. We had only met one person in the room, but several people apparently already knew who we were: 'Oh, so you're the interior designer from New York City who bought the so-and-so's house.' I quickly learned how quickly word spreads on this island."

[EDIT]: How did you end up in PEI all the way from New York City?

KYLE: I've come full circle, I guess. I grew up near Penobscot Bay in Maine. After university, I landed in New York City for 25 years. Then I ended up marrying a Canadian who was living in Muskoka, Ontario. When we were dating, we agreed that, "if things worked out," we would find a new location for our new life together. Things did work out, and we travelled, visiting each other's favourite places, including PEI, where he had been coming for years. I only had two requirements: a vista (I had been staring at brick walls for 25 years from my Manhattan apartments) and enough space so that we could let the dogs out the door without worrying about passing cars. At one point, I asked my partner, "How will we know?" He said, "It will feel like home."

[EDIT]: Tell me about the first time you visited the Island.

KYLE: We visited the Island for the first time together in October 2015. On a drive to the Inn at Bay Fortune we passed a small, picturesque Island house, set on a little hill overlooking a river. It happened to have a 'For Sale' sign on it. To make a very long story short, it seemed too good to be true, and it was. But that little house captured our imagination of owning a seasonal home here on the Island, and we made seven more trips to the Island in search of a property.

[EDIT]: How did you find your home?

KYLE: The house found us — twice. In March 2016, we walked through a "farm cottage" designed by William Critchlow Harris. A gentleman farmer and his wife had commissioned the property, and they moved in on their wedding night in 1894 and raised five children there. For the last 25 years it had been used as a summer house by one of their granddaughters. At the first viewing, I couldn't see

anything but fussy furniture and layers upon layers of lace. I took a quick tour and said, "Nope, it's just not us."

Over the next six months we looked at all kinds of properties in all states of repair, from Montague to Malpeque. In October 2016, we returned to the Island to see a house that our realtor had promised to be "the one." It wasn't. As we were leaving the Island, I said, "Let's swing by that house we saw in March; maybe it's still for sale." So we did. On the second, unscheduled visit, the house seemed to tick off all the boxes: it was structurally intact, architecturally significant, set far from the road, and it had the most captivating vista. As I was backing out of the driveway and we were excitedly asking one another, "Is this it?" I misjudged the curve and slope of the lane, and the rental car ended up precariously perched on the lawn. We waited for CAA for over an hour, enough time for the house to work its magic on us.

A few months later, we were back inside for the final walk-through. I pulled down the gauzy layers covering the windows, whisked away all the dust covers, and was able to see rooms filled with light — and vistas! To my amazement, this Victorian house proved surprisingly modern in its spatial flow and the proportion of the rooms.

In June 2017, we spent the first month in our new summer house. During that time, as we discovered more and more fascinating things about the Island and met more and more interesting people, my partner would interject into conversations, "Well, when we live here full-time..." "Wait a minute," I'd say. I wasn't on board with a full-time move to this island. A month here and there, sure. But how would we, midstream in our careers, find work here? And how would I transition my professional skill set from the island of Manhattan to this island? However, it was not long after our return to Ontario that we realized that our summer house was indeed our home. So we set things in motion to make PEI our full-time residence.

[EDIT]: That's a big change in islands, Manhattan to PEI. How did it feel?

KYLE: I had realized during our travels that I am very much an East Coast person: The sun should rise over the ocean and set over the land, unless you're "up west" (on the west coast of Prince Edward Island), of course. You should be able to sense a briny smell when nearing the shoreline, and towns and villages aren't old unless they were founded well before the 20th century. For someone who had learned to drive on the back roads of Maine, I felt at home driving here: I knew I couldn't get lost and, as my grandfather would say, "You'll always end up somewhere." Since I had heard many stories of my father growing up on a dairy farm, I found comfort in seeing three working farms from our living-room window. As neighbour after neighbour drove down



The colour palette of both cool and warm neutrals in a Cape Cod living room was inspired by the ocean-blue travertine that surrounds the fireplace

the driveway (and backed out without needing CAA) to introduce themselves and offer homemade baked goods, jams, jellies, and pickles, I recalled childhood summers when I helped my own grandparents put up preserves and such. Having seen how hard my parents and grandparents worked, and having worked myself since age 14, I also understood the work ethic here. PEI was starting to feel like home.

[EDIT]: When did you know you wanted to be an interior designer?

KYLE: When I was in seventh grade, my parents redecorated the house (with my oversight, of course), and I created a comprehensive materials board and presented it to anyone who would listen. I should have known then that design was to be in my future, but coming from a long line of Mainers, I was far more pragmatic in my career choice: I planned to become a lawyer. I never did go to law school, and it took a few career changes to finally get into design.

[EDIT]: When did you move to New York City?

KYLE: I arrived in New York City with everything I owned in a backpack at age 22 from a post-graduate



Kyle Timothy Blood and his partner, Dean Perry, purchased Hazeldean in 2017 (designed by architect William Critchlow Harris in the 1890s), Springfield, PE



A pair of Rose Tarlow "Paddington" sofas in pale-blue linen flank a limed-brick fireplace in this cozy Hamptons living room

year in Paris. I was en route to Maine for a family visit before returning to Paris, where I wholeheartedly planned to spend the rest of my life. While in New York I heard about a job at *Forbes* magazine. I applied and surprisingly was hired as a fact-checker for the editor-in-chief, Malcolm Forbes Jr. It was 1991, and New York was a vastly different city from the one I left in 2016. In the early nineties, New York was one great adventure: new restaurants were popping up all the time; museums were featuring blockbuster shows; theatre and dance were abundant. Bars and clubs always provided a lure — Madonna or Grace Jones might show up at any time. The supermodels had just become “super,” and celebrities, always donning baseball hats, strolled the avenues. I once had a great conversation with Julianne Moore about faucets in a plumbing showroom.

Five years later, I left *Forbes* and ended up at a temp agency. Before I finished the typing test, the manager asked if I could work that day. “Martha Stewart needs someone,” he said. “Sure, you mean the magazine,” I replied. “No, I mean Martha...”

So I hustled the 25 blocks down Fifth Avenue and was swiftly led through security into Martha’s office suite. Martha would be back later that afternoon, I was told. She called a number of times, and I provided various phone numbers and other contact information from a very well-designed, well-labelled, laminated contact sheet. When she finally walked through

her private door directly opposite my desk, she quipped, “Well, it’s good to see what you look like.” I replied, “You too! Now what do we have to do today?” I guess that was the right answer because at the end of the day she told me to show up the next morning. And I did. And for the next six weeks I continued to temp in different departments at the magazine, always being recalled to Martha’s office when summoned.

I ended up being the 101st full-time employee at *Martha Stewart Living*. The late nineties were an unprecedented time in publishing, product development and branding. I had five roles in my five years there: copy-editing the magazine, editing the recipes, managing the book department, managing the packaging of Kmart/Zellers products, and managing the product development of a line of home furnishings. Those experiences were a fabulous combination of finishing school, business school and design school.

[EDIT]: What happened next?

KYLE: Despite the fascinating jobs I had at Martha, I always wanted to be on the creative side of the organization, not the editorial/managerial side, so I took night classes at the New York School of Interior Design. When I left Martha in 2004, I joined a small Upper East Side design firm. A year later, I had the proverbial big break — designing the interior of a 4,500-square-foot

new build in the Hamptons. For the initial meeting with the clients, I put my very limited portfolio in a backpack and hopped on a bike. I wasn't exactly presenting the image of a well-established designer at the time. As I pedalled up to the house, the young family of five were just coming back from the beach. We were all a bit taken aback at the informality of this meeting, and we all quickly agreed, "Well, I guess what you see is what you get." There was no pretense involved. And so we embarked upon a design journey together. They gave me one design directive: "Kyle, this needs to be a happy house."

[EDIT]: When did you start designing in Manhattan?

KYLE: By 2006, enough prospective clients had seen my work in summer residences in the Hamptons to offer me projects for year-round residences, whether in New York City or in the towns north of the city. For the next five years, I worked non-stop on a wide range of projects, from New York to Cape Cod to the Great Lakes.

The minute I had enough savings, I bought a studio apartment in Chelsea. When the apartment was done, I realized I was operating within a giant hamster wheel: I had to work more and more to earn more and more simply to exist in Manhattan. And the city had changed. Every square block was being gentrified; the grit had disappeared and luxury condos were replacing bodegas and parking garages. Traffic was always at a standstill and horns sounded incessantly. By Thursday of each week I found myself needing to get out of the city. New York had become a necessary evil for my professional existence, and I started to want out.

Then the dream project landed: a \$25 million, 5,000-square-foot penthouse with three terraces. Every furnishing and fitting had to be bespoke. A breakfast table was in fact a sculpture, one of eight in the world; a Nepalese hand-woven carpet was based on a global award-winning design, recoloured to my palette; a curvilinear sofa was designed so that Central Park was visible from every seat. Large-scale items (like a 14-foot-long dining table) were not out of the realm of possibility, as a crane could hoist them up twelve floors. (Who knew you could block off Madison Avenue on a Saturday morning? You just had to write a cheque.) The china, the flatware, the glassware, the linens — every item in that apartment fit within the overall design scheme. I was thoroughly enjoying the design challenges, but then one day my heart just sank. Yes, this was a five-bedroom penthouse, but each was just another bedroom. The kitchen overlooked Central Park, but it was just another kitchen. The living room was large enough for both a

home theatre and a billiards table, but it was just another living room. The clients had only bought it as a pied-à-terre. Was there any way this was ever going to be a happy house? Where was I to go from here? Work for a billionaire rather than for a millionaire?

I knew one thing: if I had any innate talent at all, it was listening to clients and figuring out how to facilitate their vision, not mine, for their homes and then leading them on an organic design journey that would leave them with a space to make their own happy house. That process, which I enjoyed so much, was not limited to New York, I realized. It was time to get out. I guess that was the "aha" moment that, in retrospect, prepared me for life here on PEI.


[EDIT]: So what does an interior designer actually do?

KYLE: I think the American Society of Interior Designers description sums it up best: "Interior designers are creative and technical problem solvers who work with their clients to develop design solutions that are safe, functional and attractive. Combining aesthetic vision with practical skills and knowledge, interior designers impact the human experience and transform lives."

[EDIT]: How has your business developed during your time in the Maritimes?

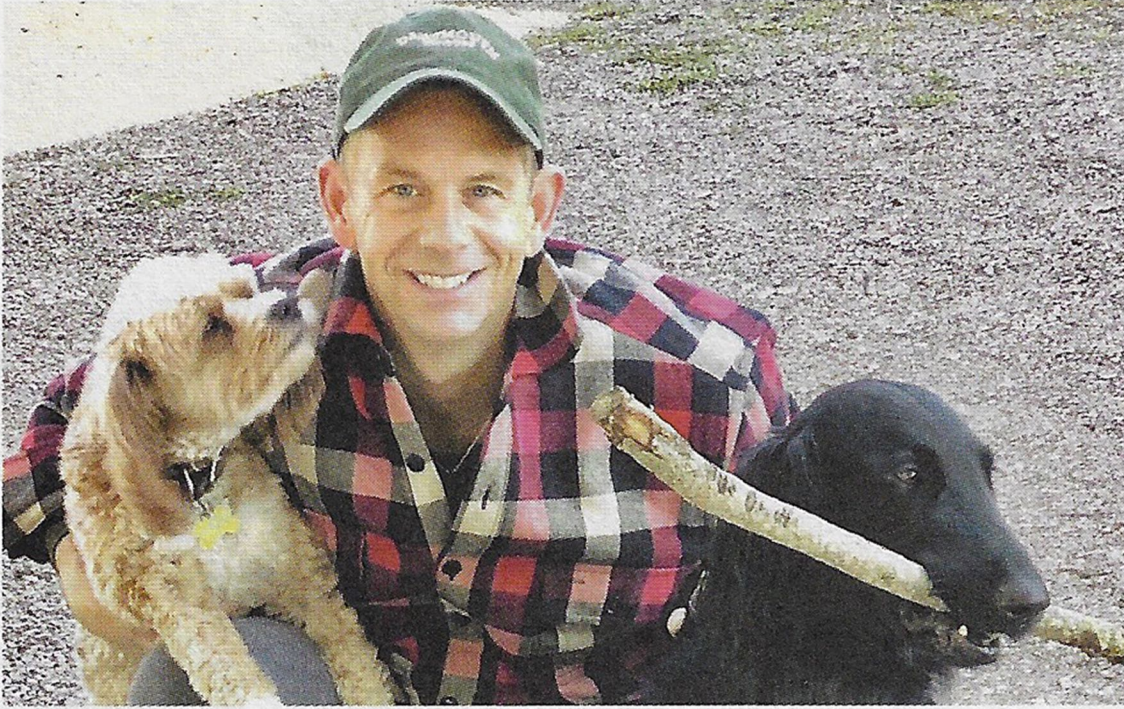
KYLE: In my short time here, both Islanders and people "from away" have retained my services for extensive renovations of multi-unit, historic properties, complete renovations of single-family houses, an expanded kitchen here, and a refreshed living room there. And then there are the ever-challenging colour consultations on an island with the most beguiling quality of light. Having cultivated productive relationships with vendors in Moncton and Halifax, I plan to work in all the Maritime provinces.

[EDIT]: Is designing a space any different here than it is in New York City?

KYLE: Not really. As I see it, design remains the same for any space, whether the budget is \$1,000 or \$1,000,000. Good design produces functional and flexible spaces that accommodate every person, pet, object and activity in a home. A successful design scheme relies on a balance of proportion and scale as well as a harmony of pattern, texture and colour. Good design and decoration stand the test of time. You have to treat the elements of the construction, design and decoration process as pieces of a large jigsaw puzzle and make sure they all fit together as a beautiful whole. Most important, I believe that people are people, and most of us really do want to live in a happy house. 

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KYLE TIMOTHY BLOOD

Born in Skowhegan, Maine, Kyle Timothy Blood graduated cum laude from Dartmouth College in French and art history. After a year in Paris under the Fulbright Teaching Assistantship program, he started his professional career in New York working in various editorial capacities at *Forbes*, *Martha Stewart Living* and *Country Living* magazines. Having studied at New York School of Interior Design, he founded his own interior-design-and-decorating firm, Kyle Timothy Home, in 2004. Based in Manhattan until 2016, Kyle completed numerous projects in New York City, Westchester County, NY, The Hamptons, NY, Connecticut, Cape Cod, and the Great Lakes Region. His work has been published in *Hamptons Cottages & Gardens*, *House Beautiful*, *Boston Home*, *Cape Cod Magazine*, *East Coast Home + Design* and *New York Social Diary*. In 2018 Kyle and his partner moved to Prince Edward Island, where he continues to work as an interior designer. He is an allied member of the American Society of Interior Designers and an associate member of Interior Designers of Canada.