

Eric E. Dray, JD, MA
Eric Dray Consulting
71 Prentiss Street
Cambridge, MA 02140
508.566.3797 EricEDray@gmail.com

MEMORANDUM

TO: Martha's Vineyard Commission
FROM: Eric Dray, Preservation Consultant
DATE: October 4, 2022
RE: Architectural Peer Review - DRI #736, 43 Look Street, Vineyard Haven

As peer review for the above-captioned DRI, I have been asked to address the following three questions:

- 1. Identify those portions of the existing building that have architectural significance, including the dating of all portions where possible, and describe why each portion is significant.*
- 2. Assess the relationship of the existing building to its streetscape/neighborhood, including with respect to the age and style of other buildings in the area.*
- 3. Assess the relationship of the proposed building to its streetscape/neighborhood, including with respect to its architectural style and appearance, and the style of other buildings in the area.*

1. Identify those portions of the existing building that have architectural significance, including the dating of all portions where possible, and describe why each portion is significant.

According to the MV Staff Report dated 8.15.22, 43 Look Street is described as follows:

Design/Construction: The structure is modest in size and reminiscent of the Federal style. Distinguishing features include nearly symmetrical massing with hipped pyramid roof and mostly symmetrical fenestration on each side.

The house can more accurately be described as an example of an American Four Square house. "Four-Square" is alternately viewed as an architectural *style*, or a house *form* onto which ornamental features are sometimes added that represent a particular style (e.g. Craftsman, Colonial Revival). Four Square houses were popular from the ca. 1890s to 1930s.

43 Look Street has not been documented on a Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) Building or Area Form. There are a total of 1,796 Four Square houses documented on MHC Building and/or Area Forms throughout the state, but they are rare on Martha's Vineyard. There are no Four Square houses documented in Tisbury. There are three other Four Squares documented on the Vineyard: two in Edgartown, both contributing resources to the Edgartown Village National Register District and both located within the Edgartown Local Historic District; and one located in Oak Bluffs.

43 Look Street has all the hallmarks of a Four Square design: boxy shape, 2 ½-stories with hip roof, two-bays wide by two-bays deep, mostly symmetrical fenestration on each elevation, a front porch spanning the front elevation, and four rooms to a floor. The house does not have any architectural embellishments that connect it to a specific style.

The house rests on a concrete block foundation, including the front porch. The elevations have been clad in aluminum siding. The original siding may lie beneath. The wood trim of the projecting box roof cornice remains exposed. The house retains what may be original or early wood 2/2 double-hung sash. The open porch has been enclosed, but within the porch is a wood paneled door with large lite that may be an early or original front door.

According to Reveal Homes, and a review of Tisbury Property Card records, alterations include the following:

- Enclosure of front porch (date unknown).
- Addition of small rear porch (pre-1974).

Despite these alterations, the house retains its integrity as an example of an American Four Square house. The overall form, window openings, possibly the windows themselves, the front door, and some of the exposed wood trim all appear to be original. A review of floor plans and interior photographs included with the DRI application show that the floor plan is typical of Four Square houses - four rooms per floor - at it remains largely intact.



View of 43 Look Street, looking northeast.

2. Assess the relationship of the existing building to its streetscape/neighborhood, including with respect to the age and style of other buildings in the area.

I believe the relevant context for assessing relationships to neighboring properties consists of houses along Look Street between State Road and Spring Street (see Figure 1 below).

- Look Street rises up from State Road to the south, and drops back down to Spring Street to the north. This change in topography, and the fact that properties at the intersections with State Road and Spring Street are oriented to those other streets, creates a developmental and visual separation.
- Properties that extend down William Street to the east are of a different character and development period, and the change in topography and road direction creates a visual separation.
- There are some late-19th and early-20th century resources along West William Street, similar to those found along Look Street, but they are not visually connected to the Look Street corridor.



Figure 1. Diagram of Look Street corridor.

For purposes of comparative analysis, included below is a Look Street Corridor Database of those properties along the Look Street corridor (Figure 2). This database includes the following information:

- *Assessor Year*: While sometimes an approximation, best available year-built date.
- *Square Footage - Footprint*: This figure is based on First Floor and Porch(es) square footage on Tisbury Property Cards, but excludes open decks, canopies and pergolas.
- *Square Footage - Overall Volume*: This figure is based on Tisbury Property Card measurements, but excludes basements, open decks, canopies and pergolas. Comparison of building volumes above grade is a more accurate way to conduct a comparative analysis. Calculations that look at just “living area” do not accurately account for the above grade volume of the buildings.
- *Style/Form*: Style names are based on MHC terminology.

ADDRESS	Ass. Yr.	Sq. Ft. - Footprint	Sq. Ft. - Overall Vol.	Stories	STYLE/FORM
4 Look Street	1880	1,216	1,616	2	No Style, 2-story, gable-front form, open porch
16 Look Street	1900	560	996	1.75	No Style, 1 ½-story, gable-front form, open porch
19 Look Street	1970	768	1,536	1.75	Post-war Traditional, Cape, no front porch
22 Look Street	1880	1,370	1,826	1.75	No Style, 1 ½-story, gable-front form, open front porch
25 Look Street	1880	1,578	2,289	1.75	Victorian Eclectic, 2-story, cross-gable form, front ell, enclosed side porch
30 Look Street	1840	1,013	1,605	1.75	Greek Revival, 1 ½-story, gable-front form, no front porch
39 Look Street	1917	1,106	1,715	2	Colonial Revival, 2-story, gable-front form w/ gambrel roof, enclosed front porch
43 Look Street - Existing	1900	776	1,920	2	Four Square, 2 ½-story form w/ hip roof, enclosed front porch
43 Look Street - Proposed	2023	1,580* (est. based on plan, incl. porch)	3,479	32' 7 3/16" (likely 2.5 to 3 story)	Gable-front w/ turret, 2 1/2-story, open porch
96 West William Street	1980	892	1,784	1* Seems incorrect, 1.5	Postwar Traditional, 1 ½-story, gable-front, side ell (to Look Street), no front porch
47 Look Street	1920	672	1,222	2	No Style, gable-front form w/ ells, no front porch
48 Look Street	1982	1,142	2,312	2	Contemporary, 2-story, gable-front form, no front porch
54 Look Street	1994	673	1,294	3	Contemporary, 2 ½-story, variation on gable-front form, no front porch
55 Look Street	1948	976	1,776	1.25	No Style, 1-story cottage, integrated front porch
58 Look Street	1980	853	2,431	2.5	Contemporary, 2 ½-story, gable-front form, no front porch
64 Look Street	1900	848	1,352	1.25	Cape, w/ additions, enclosed front porch
65 Look Street	1892	853	1,692	2	Victorian Eclectic, 2 ½-story, gable-front form, no front porch
68 Look Street	1920	1,138	2,084	1.75	No Style, 2 ½-story, gable-front form, no front porch

Figure 2. Look Street Corridor Database.

Comparative Assessment

The existing house at 43 Look Street will be assessed against neighboring properties along the Look Street corridor in terms of Age, Siting, Scale, Design, and Materials.

Age

Almost 2/3 of the houses along the Look Street corridor were built ca. 1920 or earlier, all but one having been built between ca. 1880 and 1920. 43 Look Street, built ca. 1900 according to Assessor records, is part of that predominant age-group of houses.

- Pre-1880 1
- Ca. 1880-1920 10
- Mid-20th c. 1
- Late-20th c. 5

Siting

While not uniform in size and shape, the houses along Look Street all sit on parcels of a fairly similar size. Most houses are sited in a fairly similar fashion, set back slightly from the street, and the majority of the houses along the Look Street corridor face Look Street, including 43 Look Street.

Scale

As can be seen in the Look Street Corridor Database, both the building footprints and their overall gross area (square footage) were analyzed. It is important to note that the calculation for overall square footage is based on Gross Area on Tisbury Property Cards, but excludes basements, open decks, canopies and pergolas – building elements that do not impact the above grade volume.¹ The Property Cards also provide volume measurements for Living Area, but that is not an accurate calculation of a building's volume or scale.

MV DRI materials calculate the existing house at 43 Look Street at 2,726 square feet. However, this figure includes the basement and an open deck, neither of which add to the physical above-grade volume of the building. The actual visible volume of the house measures at 1,920 square feet. A comparative review of that scale against other houses along the Look Street corridor (see Database above) shows that 43 Look Street is one of the larger, but not the largest, house built during the ca. 1880-1920 time period. Two of the five late-20th century houses are larger but only by a relatively small percentage.

Building Footprint: The building footprints range from 560 sq. ft. to 1,578 sq. ft. The majority are around 1,000 sq. ft. ± 200 sq. ft. The house at 34 Look Street is on the smaller side (776 sq. ft.), with its simple rectangular footprint plus porch.

Building Overall Gross Area: The scale of houses along the Look Street corridor is fairly consistent. They all range in gross area from approximately 1,000 sq. ft. to 2,000 sq. ft. The house at 43 Look Street is on the higher end at 1,920 sq. ft. Despite its relatively small footprint, as noted above, its overall volume is on the higher side due to its full two-story height and attic space.

Height: The Property Cards include a calculation of stories. As noted on the Database, there is one 3-story house (54 Look Street) and one 2 ½-story house (58 Look Street). All others are two stories or less. The house at 43 Look Street, with its fairly low-slung hip roof, is calculated by the Assessor at 2 stories, so it fits well within the overall context of building heights.

¹ It is understood that some houses may have a partially exposed basement that can add gross area to a small degree, but it was not possible to accurately measure for purposes of this assessment.

Design

Style: As noted in the Look Street Corridor Database, the majority of houses along Look Street (10 out of 17), were built between ca. 1880 and 1920. Many would be classified as “No Style” by the Massachusetts Historical Commission, meaning they do not have sufficient ornamental details or forms to connect to an architectural style. From that period, the Four Square house at 43 Look Street is the only one to which a style can be attributed – but it is a style derived most notably from its form, not its ornamentation, of which there is none. The house at 43 Look Street is a modest house, on a street with other modest houses from that period.

There is one earlier house – the ca. 1840 Greek Revival-style house at 30 Look Street. This is the only house along this section of Look Street that employs ornamental details as well as form to express a particular style. There is one mid-20th century house and five built in the later-20th century. Of those, two are the largest two houses along Look Street, but only by a small degree. All utilize materials and forms that contextually blend into the streetscape.

Form: The majority of houses, including most of the contemporary houses, have a 1 ½ to 2 ½-story, gable-front form. The house at 43 Look Street is the only one whose main roof is hipped. Those that do not have a gable-front form have a side-gable form. In this respect, 43 Look Street is unique. The only other house with a variation on the roof shape is the gambrel-roofed house across the street at 39 Look Street.

Windows and Doors: All of the houses, including 43 Look Street, despite their varying scale and design, are similar in their traditional use of fenestration. Most visible elevations have a “solid-to-void” ratio of windows typical of New England residential design. The windows are generally of the same size and are arrayed, sometimes evenly, across most elevations. Two exceptions are across the street from 43 Look Street. 96 West William Street has a gable-roofed side ell that extends towards Look Street. That end gable is traditionally but minimally fenestrated with a single centered window. The other exception is the left (south) side elevation of 58 Look Street which appears to be fully fenestrated with fixed and operable windows.

All of the houses whose primary elevation fronts on Look Street have a single front door, and no other entrances on those primary elevations, including 43 Look Street.

Porches: Three of the houses along Look Street have open front porches – they are the cluster of modest gable-front houses at 4, 16 and 22 Look Street. Four other houses have enclosed front porches, most of which were likely open originally, including 43 Look Street. There is one instance of an enclosed side porch (25 Look Street). None of the porches include a second story porch or deck above the first story porch.

Materials

All of the houses are of wood frame construction. Almost all are clad in wood shingles with plain cornerboards. The house at 48 Look Street, built in 1982, has wood clapboard on the primary (south) elevation and wood shingles on the side elevation facing Look Street. Three houses, including 43 Look Street, are clad in synthetic clapboard siding. It is unknown what their original cladding was, but plain wood shingles are the dominant siding material on Look Street. All houses have asphalt shingle roofs, although some likely had wood shingle roofing originally.

There is no consistent window muntin pattern along Look Street. Many houses, like 43 Look Street, have original or early 6/6 or 2/2 double-hung windows; some houses have modern replacement windows that replicate an earlier muntin pattern; and some houses have replacement 1/1 double-hung sash. Some of the new houses have 1/1 windows. The common thread is that no houses have overly complicated or extensive window systems or muntin patterns (except as noted above for 58 Look Street).

3. Assess the relationship of the proposed building to its streetscape/neighborhood, including with respect to its architectural style and appearance, and the style of other buildings in the area.

Comparative Assessment

The proposed house at 43 Look Street will be assessed against neighboring properties along the Look Street corridor in terms of Siting, Scale, Design, and Materials. Calculations for the proposed house are included on the Look Street Corridor Database (Figure 2).

Siting

As shown on the attached plan provided by the applicant (Figure 3), the proposed house, while larger than the existing, is consistent with the existing house in terms of front and right (south) side yard setbacks.

Scale

Footprint: As shown on Figure 3, the footprint would be increased to the left (north) and to the rear (east). But as shown on the Database, the footprint for the existing house is one of the smaller footprints along Look Street, so the increased footprint from the new house still remains in keeping with the overall setting.

Overall Volume: Based on calculations provided by the applicant, the new house will be 3,479 sq. ft. This would make it the largest house along the Look Street corridor by a significant amount.

Height: The new house measures 32' 7 3/16" in height. Tisbury Property Cards do not include building heights, but this would likely make it one of the tallest houses along the Look Street corridor.

Design

Style and Form: The proposed house has a design that could be characterized as a modern interpretation of the Queen Anne style which was popular from ca. 1880-1910. The Queen Anne style employed different roof shapes, including corner turrets like that found here, to animate the building's form (see Figures 4 and 5). There is no precedent for this more elaborate Victorian-era house style and form on Look Street.

Windows and Doors: In comparison to other houses along Look Street, this house has far more fenestration on the front elevation. The front elevation is particularly problematic because it not only has extensive, large-scaled windows, but also has three other doors that are fully fenestrated - the second story has a multi-lite single door and multi-lite paired (French or sliding) doors (Figure 4). This is also the only house on Look Street with more than one door on the front elevation – in this case a total of four.

The fenestration pattern on the side elevations of the new house is minimal (Figures 6 and 7). There is no precedent along Look Street for both side elevations to be so minimally fenestrated with windows of varying sizes and irregular placement.

Porches: There is no precedent for double-height porch/decks along Look Street. A number of houses do have covered one-story front porches, but they all employ shed or hip roofs to cover those spaces. Those roofs have the effect of incorporating the porches into the main body of the house. With the flat roof required for a second story deck, this (metal?) structure would appear tacked onto the body of the house in a way not found along Look Street.

Materials

As noted in Question 2, wood shingles are the predominant siding material along Look Street. This was likely do in part, at least for the houses built from ca. 1880-1920, to the fact that wood shingles would have been cheaper to use for these modest houses than clapboard. If wood clapboard is found under the synthetic siding of 43 Look Street, perhaps an argument can be made that clapboard is appropriate in this instance.

CONCLUSION

The siting and footprint of the proposed new house at 43 Look Street are consistent with the overall setting along the Look Street corridor. However, the new house may be contextually inappropriate in terms of scale and design (including turret, windows, doors and second story deck). Clapboard siding may be appropriate if the original cladding for 43 Look Street was clapboard, otherwise wood shingles would be more appropriate contextually.

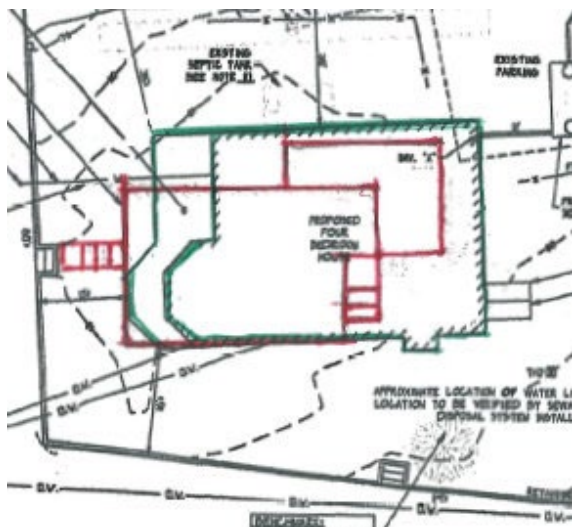


Figure 3. Detail of Site Plan provided by applicant, existing footprint in red (w/ deck), proposed footprint in green.



Figure 4. New house at 43 Look Street.



Figure 5. Late-19th c. Queen Anne-style house (Source: MacAlester, *Field Guide*).

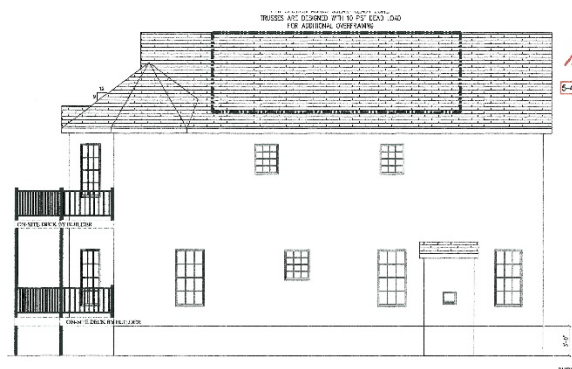


Figure 6. Right side elevation.

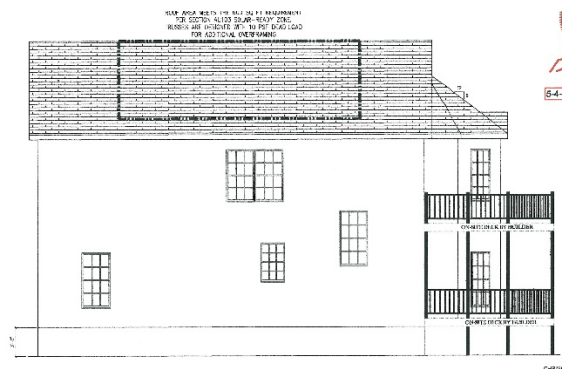


Figure 7. Left side elevation.