

THE VIBRANT LANDSCAPES OF

# Eric Holch

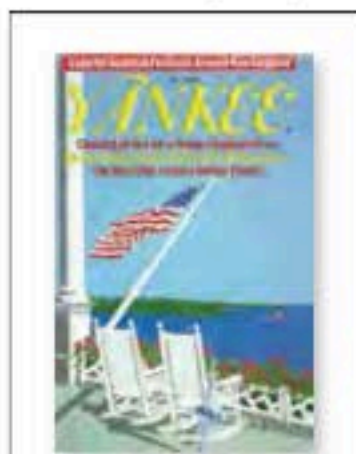
Nantucket's best-known printmaker captures a world of eternal summer.

BY ANNIE GRAVES

Nantucket weather catapults across the 30-mile stretch of water off Hyannis and changes as abruptly as a teenager's mood. High winds can ground the ferry—as it has on my first attempt to visit printmaker Eric Holch—making appointment-keeping a dicey proposition. When the Hy-Line finally does take off the next day for the one-hour crossing from Cape Cod, we see gray skies the color of pewter, an impressive squall that literally spits precipitation, and sudden, radiant sun.

"We make it an event when we're stranded in Hyannis and the ferry doesn't run," says Holch when he meets me at the landing. We stroll next door to the Old South Wharf, where he points out five different galleries that have featured his work since 1978. Most are predictably small and adorable; one is a former scallop shucker's shanty. Then we head up Main Street's sweep of wobbly cobblestones to his home and studio at 5 Pine Street, a short walk away. "This is my morning commute," he grins.

Weather figures prominently in Holch's dazzling Nantucket summerscapes.



July 1989:  
Twenty-seven years ago, a Holch design, from his 28"x34" serigraph called *Grand Afternoon*, graced the cover of *Yankee*.

Brilliant, bold serigraphs—silkscreen artworks as colorful as tropical birds—these are the idealized landscapes of summer dreams. A place where Adirondack chairs always face the sea and white sails skim the water. Where gray-shingled cottages soak up the Nantucket sun, lighthouses stand like sentinels, and skies are deep, deep blue. They don't get any bluer.

Born in 1948 in Andover, Massachusetts, Holch grew up spending summers on Nantucket; his mother was an artist, and he recalls his parents requiring every houseguest to create a painting: "Painting and looking at landscapes was part of my youth. They would all head down to the wharf and paint the same scene. You never knew what you'd get. Some would paint the overall scene; some, one little piece of it. Everyone saw it differently."

One look in particular would influence the future artist: a stylized print by well-known Nantucket



PHOTOGRAPHS BY  
CARY HAZLEGROVE

printmaker Bobby Bushong, called *Fall*, that Holch's father gave him when he was 15. But for decades Holch put his artistic talents to work in advertising, eventually starting his own agency, while simultaneously working on his own paintings, until one day something clicked.

"This is the painting that started it all," Holch says, pointing out his *Summer Solstice*, painted in 1974 and given pride of place in the crow's-nest studio on the top floor of his handsome house, which he speculates maybe "belonged to someone like the bosun's mate—not fancy, but a nice house." The painting, from the point of view of a stark white porch, looks out to horizontal bands of color: pale sand, dark-blue sea, lighter-blue sky. A bright-yellow towel drapes over the porch railing. Simple and evocative, it looks like a silkscreen print, but it's not.

"I had no idea how to do silkscreening," Holch confesses. "I found someone who knew how and learned from her. I made a print based on this painting.



It sold out and won all kinds of awards.” He became hooked on the process of sketching the preliminaries, working out the composition, cutting stencils for each individual color, and then printing layer upon layer—a process that can take up to four months for a large, complex print. Eventually Holch’s “hobby” began to catch up with the income from his 9-to-5 advertising job. Licensing agreements included jigsaw puzzles in Japan, dinner plates, and ties for Allyn Neckwear (*Rainbow Fleet* is still a best-seller).

Holch pages through several small square notebooks filled with enchanting sketches, some dashed off, others diminutive and tidy. “Silkscreen is

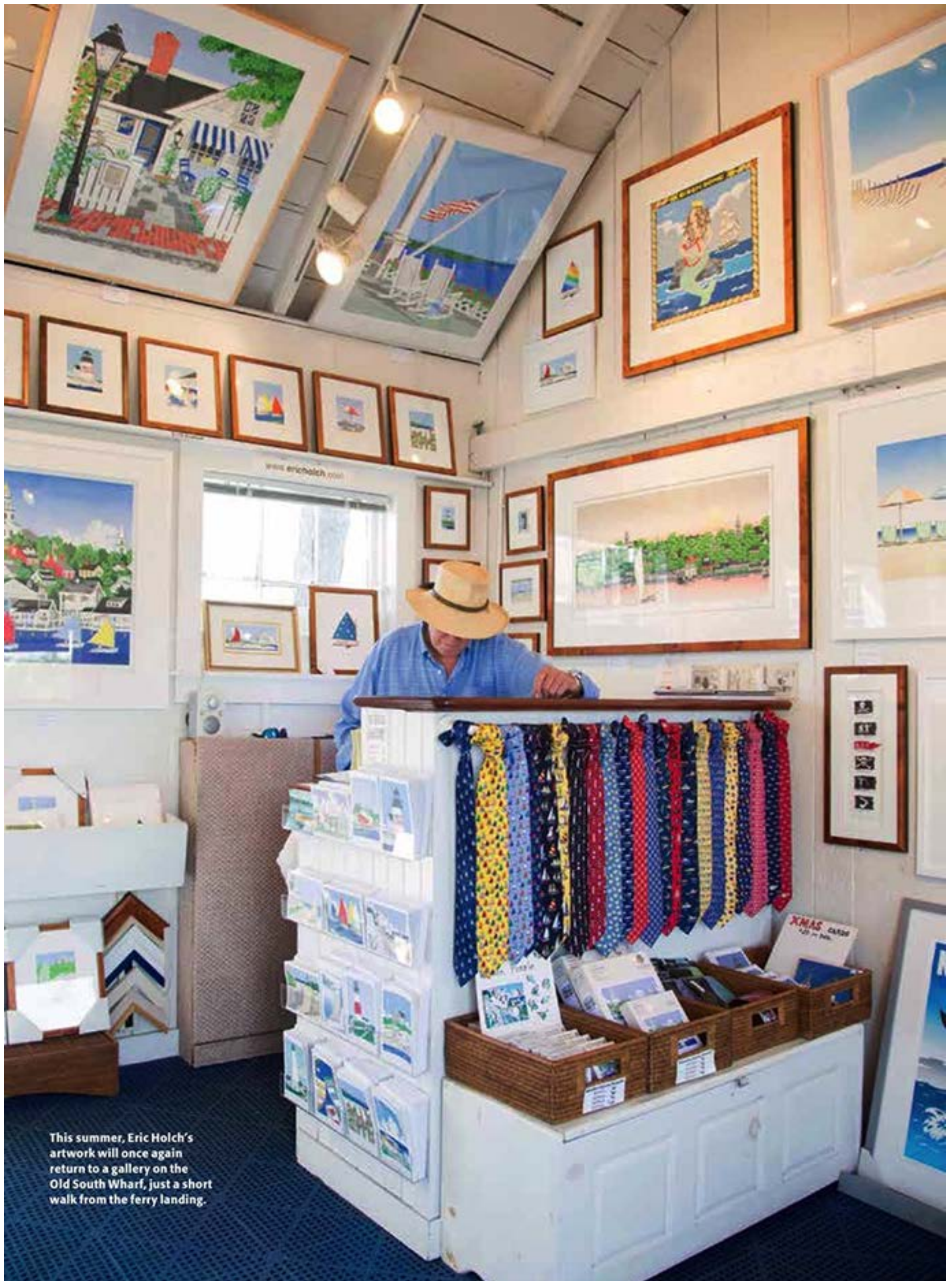
## ‘I like to get to the essence of what I’m looking at.’

the perfect medium for me,” he says. “You’re forced to simplify. You can do a lot, but you can’t do everything. I happen to like that. I like to get to the essence of what I’m looking at.”

The essence is, of course, Nantucket, whose population swells from 10,000 to 60,000 in the summertime. Besides original limited-edition prints, Holch has done 30 posters of the island, each capturing something iconic. “I’m always just very aware of how beautiful Nantucket is,” he says. “You saw my commute—it’s spectacular. We’ve been all around the world—I love coming back here. You walk around town ... then something gets you and you just have to sketch it.”

*In season, see Eric Holch’s work at 9 Old South Wharf; by appointment at his in-home gallery at 5 Pine Street (508-228-7654); or online at ericholch.com. Miniatures (3½ x 5) \$60; posters around \$210; larger pieces \$2,000.*





This summer, Eric Holch's artwork will once again return to a gallery on the Old South Wharf, just a short walk from the ferry landing.



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