

The Provincetown
INDEPENDENT

2023 INDIE INSIDER'S

SUMMER GUIDE

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"This shack was 'owned' by Jeanne Chanel," says Paradise. "But it was referred to as Frenchie's, who according to Josephine Del Deo was a chorus girl and, rumor had it, stayed here on a vacation with Bette Davis." (Photo by Jane Paradise)

CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

A WALK IN THE DUNES WITH JANE PARADISE

Where the light changes in an instant, a photographer has to be ready

BY KATHI SCRIZZI DRISCOLL

Jane Paradise begins a spring walk into the Provincetown dunes at the same spot where she first encountered them in the 1960s, as a child on family vacations. She slips into a chained-off parking lot along Route 6 and from there to the landscape where she and her brother used to run up and down the hills of sand.

As she walks, Paradise searches for and wonders about animal tracks, notices landscape changes that have happened over the winter, and seeks glimpses of the storied dune shacks that have been subjects of her photography for more than a decade, since she moved to Provincetown.

Passing the nearly 90-year-old Ray and Nicky Wells shack, she recalls its multiple rooms and broad windows on the sea and points out a few others visible on a ridge above the beach.

Here are C-Scape and Euphoria, shacks close enough to the Snail Road path that visitors would stop to ask questions when she stayed in them.

The uphill road to the Jones Dunn shack has filled with so much sand that a vehicle wouldn't stand a chance, Paradise notes. The recent repair work at the shack looks good, though.

Many of the shacks have multiple names, Paradise says, because they commonly refer to both past and present occupants. "It gets very confusing," she says. For example: "Annabelle and Randolph Jones bought this shack from the Meads family; then the Park Service awarded a lease to the Dunns," says Paradise, referring to the change in stewardship of the shacks after the Cape Cod National Seashore was created. "But in front of the shack is a sign, 'Annabelle,' recognizing the

Joneses — so I call it the Jones-Dunn shack.”

Suddenly, the clouds pull back and the sun shines bright. Paradise stops. “The light is so beautiful now,” she says. “It changes in an instant. You have to be ready.”

Paradise has long aimed to be ready for the instants behind the hundreds of photos she has taken of the shacks and the lands and sea around them. The views and stories here that have filled her camera lens and thoughts for so long are now collected in *Dune Shacks of Provincetown*, paired with quotations from shack caretakers, artists, naturalists, and writers. It is, writes journalist and documentarian David W. Dunlap, “a vibrant photographic poem.”

Since it was published last December, the book has led to a talk at the Provincetown Art Association and Museum and an exhibit at the Mary Heaton Vorse house. This summer, Paradise will discuss the book at a June 22 signing at the



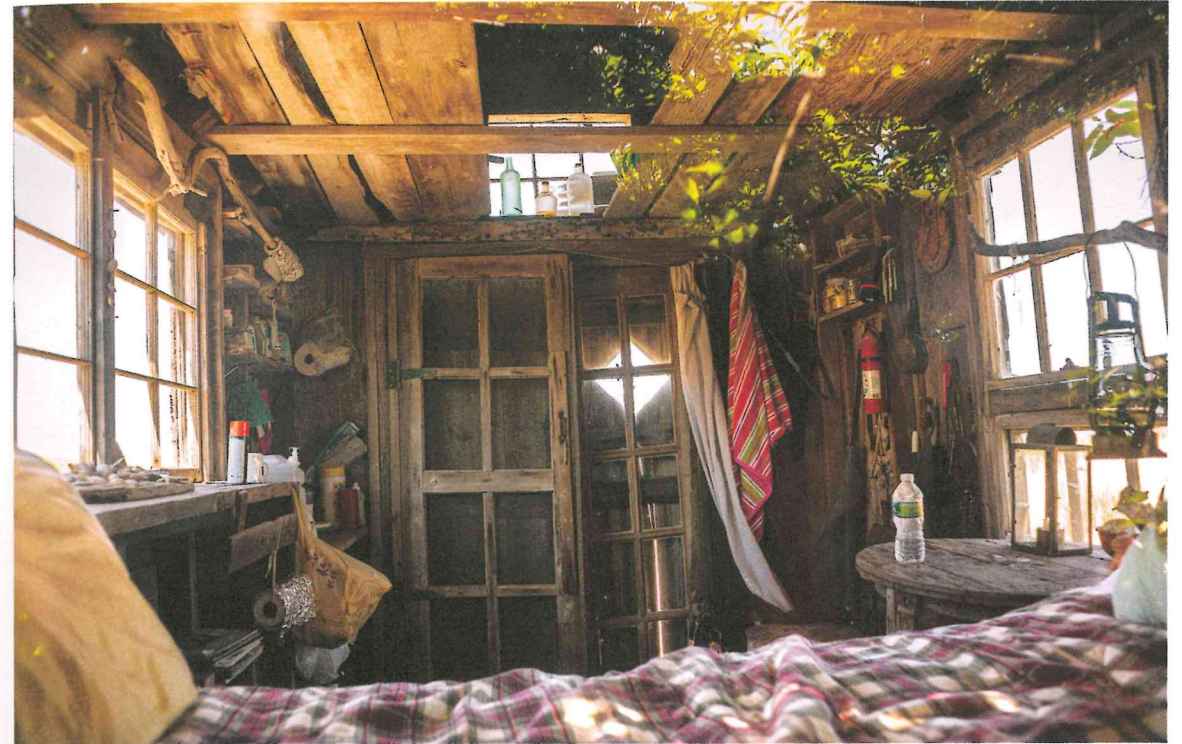
Jane Paradise, photographer and author of *Dune Shacks of Provincetown* (Schiffer, 2022). (Photo by Kathi Scrizzi Driscoll)

Cape Cod Museum of Art in Dennis, where her photographs can be seen through July 30.

“I seem to have tapped into something,” she says of the wide interest in her photos of the isolated shacks that have welcomed families but also artists and writers including Mary Oliver, Eugene O’Neill, and Jack Kerouac.

“For me, it’s a combination of the history and the light,” she says. “And the character of the shacks themselves. And the interiors. And the uniqueness.” She pauses. “And the people.”

The makeshift cabins were built between the 1920s and 1950s, some around 1800s lifesaving huts, and most with debris and fragments of shipwrecks. Paradise has researched and witnessed decades of debate about the preservation of the structures and the 2012 placement on the National Register of Historic Places of the 19 shacks that still stand here along more than five miles of



Paradise’s photograph of the Kemp-Tasha shack captures the appealing simplicity of its accoutrements. (Photo by Jane Paradise)



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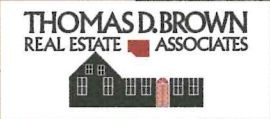
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Euphoria is one of the shacks managed by the Peaked Hill Trust. (Photo by Jane Paradise)

the protected back shore. The Register defines the Dune Shacks of Peaked Hill Bars Historic District as a “cultural landscape.”

Most of the shacks are leased by families; one is privately owned; and a few are available for limited stays through lotteries held by the Peaked Hill Trust and the Provincetown Community Compact. Paradise’s multiple stays have included a two-week artist’s residency.

Paradise remembers wondering about the shacks: “How do you get there? What’s it like out there?”

She found answers when she and her husband, Frank, first stayed at the Fowler shack. On that land of sand with no electricity or running water, the quiet is broken sometimes by a neighbor, but more often by the ocean itself and by passing motorboats and loud seals that she says, if the wind is

right, also stink up the place. “We loved it,” she says.

While they reveled in the peace and seclusion, Paradise admits she and Frank walked into town one night for a shower and a hot dinner. During an October stay in 2021, she escaped to her car for a night at home when she was caught at C-Scape during a nor’easter.

“It’s cold — you get chilled to the bone,” she says. “The rain is just pelting down, the winds coming through the boards, and you’re trying to plug the holes.”

After so many stays and all her research, Paradise says she is more attached to the shacks than ever. She now knows what it’s like out there. But she’s still curious. “I feel like I should do another book,” she says, then laughs. It’s just that there is more to learn, she says, about all the people who have stayed here. ■