

# VINEYARD GAZETTE

---

**Archived Edition: Friday, February 17, 2012**

## **Renaissance House**

Renaissance House, a retreat for artists and writers in Oak Bluffs, is accepting applications for its 11th year of operation.

Renaissance House is sponsored by the Helene Johnson and Dorothy West Foundation for artists in need. Both women were writers of the Harlem Renaissance. Ms. Johnson died in 1995 and Ms. West in 1998.

The program is from June to October in Oak Bluffs. A resident can stay for one or two weeks.

Helene Johnson, a poet and summer Martha's Vineyard resident, had to stop writing in order to support her family. Her cousin, novelist and short story writer Dorothy West, a year-round Martha's Vineyard resident, worked at the Harborside Restaurant until Jacqueline Kennedy spotted her writing in the Vineyard Gazette and gave her the opportunity to simply "stare at the trees and do nothing." This enabled her to write "The Wedding," a best-selling novel based on the life of Helene Johnson's daughter, Abigail McGrath, who founded Renaissance House in 2001 in their honor.

Renaissance House is one of the few retreats for issue-oriented writers, writers of color and writers on social justice. The guests enjoy formal sit-down dinners with local artists, who in the past have included Jessica Harris, Kate Feiffer, Susan Klein, Robert Hayden, Marty Nadler, Nat Benjamin, the late Phil Craig and Shirley Craig and Brooks Robards, as well as "imported" artists such as Robert Pinsky, Janet Hill and Elisabeth Benedict.

Silent Wednesdays, in which nobody speaks all day, is followed by a day of readings of the writers' works by a professional reader on Thursdays and Fridays, at the Katherine Cornell Theatre in Vineyard Haven; the residents present the work that they have prepared during that week.

Applicants should send a hard-copy sample of their work and a letter explaining why they think they need to get away to:

Renaissance House, Att: Abigail McGrath, P.O. Box 3048, Oak Bluffs, MA 02557.

Reader Feedback

**Tuesday, February 21, 2012 11:31pm**

What is the cost, accommodations and week availabilities for the retreat?  
- Camille M Garcia

**Sunday, March 4, 2012 1:54pm**

In response to the question,  
Each writer has their own room. Each writer has three meals a day which includes a picnic lunch and a lobster bake in Menemsha.  
At this point, August is filled up, but June, July and Sept still have slots available.  
- Abigail McGrath , Oak Bluffs

---

© 2012 Vineyard Gazette