

# Cape Experience

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'The Drowsy Chaperone'



Photographer and writer Stephanie Foster will exhibit her dramatic pictures of the Province Lands dune scape at Cape Cod Museum of Art beginning with an artist's reception on Nov. 18.

Photo by Stephanie Foster

## Dune scape

By Johanna Crosby

Living in a dune shack on the Outer Cape conjured up romantic images of sublime isolation for photojournalist Stephanie Foster.

Five years ago the West Harwich resident entered her name in a lottery to spend a week in one of the dune shacks located in the wilds of the Province Lands. She was thrilled when her name was drawn until she read the small print. The shack lacked running water, electricity and an indoor toilet.

"Am I crazy?" she remembers thinking. "I had a feeling of panic."

Her husband, commercial photographer Frank Foster, offered to join her but Foster declined.

"I wanted this experience to be mine," she says. "The idea of being alone for a week intrigued me. I had never done that. It was scary and liberating at the same time."

And she was game to test her survival skills.

Foster will share her unique adventure in "The Dune Shack Experience," an exhibit at the Cape Cod Museum of Art in Dennis. On display will be 20 of the hundreds of photographs Foster snapped during three week-long stays in 2005, 2007 and 2009 at the C-Scape shack in Provincetown, along with excerpts from her dune diary, a descriptive account of her experiences.

The dune shack experience was a radical departure for Foster, 68, a Boston native who worked as a model and fashion photographer. She and her husband moved to the Cape 25 years ago where she's carved out a second life as a

writer/photographer and a master gardener who grows flowers from seeds and sells them at local farmers' markets. The dune shack experience suited her credo "to find the beauty in life and then share it."

Last year, Foster opted to live in the dune shack in late autumn after her flower-growing season. She packed linens, plenty of food and bottled water, warm clothes and her cameras, pens and paper to document the adventure.

She settled into the rustic two-room shack and quickly fell into a routine, rising before dawn and doing daily chores such as bringing in the firewood, drawing water from the pump and cooking on a propane stove. Surprisingly Foster savored the primitive life.

"I felt like a pioneer woman doing the kinds of things I have never done," she says. "I loved the simplicity and pureness of it."

Foster spent her days walking the beach picking

A photographer's solitude at C-Scape shack gives way to unbounded creativity

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beach plums and pretty stones shaped like the moon. She carried a staff to ward off coyotes. But her main focus was capturing the dramatic landscape with her camera. At night she read by the light of a kerosene lantern. She reveled in the quiet and the solitude.

“The aspect of the silence is a wonderful thing,” she says. “It gives you time to think about things, ... You hear the breeze and a bird sing. We don’t have silence. We have so much clutter and noise in our lives. I discovered I could be alone and entertain myself with my own thoughts and discoveries. I was good company for myself.”

### If you go ...

**What:** Stephanie Foster’s “The Dune Shack Experience”

**Where:** Cape Cod Museum of Art, 60 Hope Lane, Dennis

**When:** Nov. 20 through Jan. 23; artist reception 5:30-7:30 p.m. Nov. 18; gallery talk noon Dec. 16.

**Information:** 508-385-4477 or [www.ccmoa.org](http://www.ccmoa.org)

Foster also enjoyed the freedom from deadline pressures and the demands of the outside world.

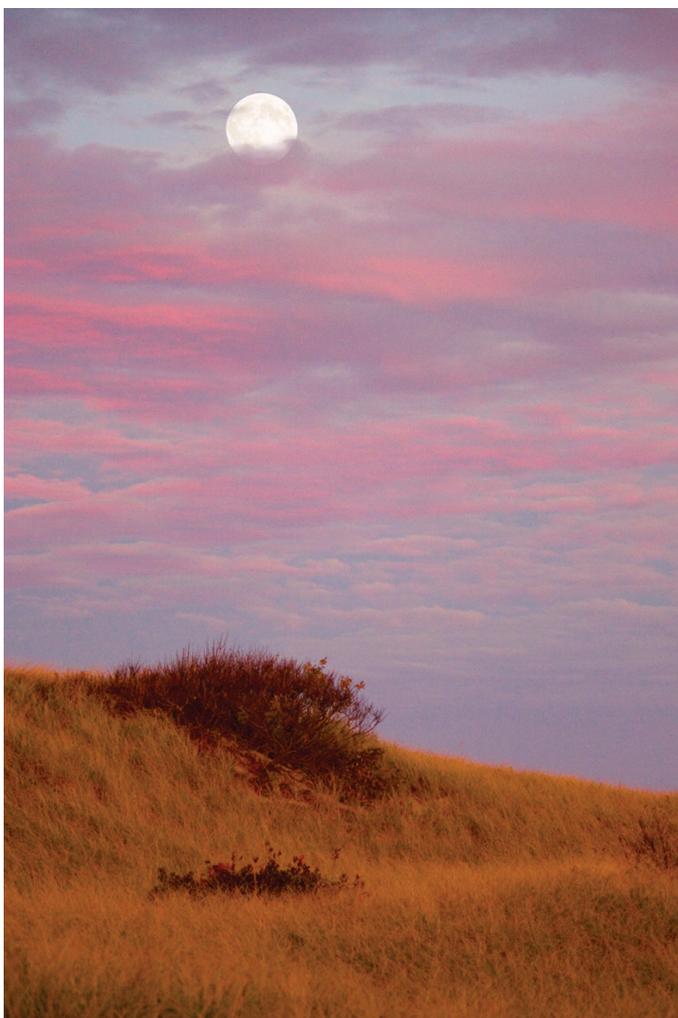
“It didn’t matter how I looked. I didn’t worry about my hair or make-up. It cuts through the superficial way we live our lives.”

Yet there were some harrowing moments including the appearance of mice, which she dreads. There was also the night of a hurricane-force storm.

“The wind was howling and the shack was shaking,” she recalls. “A window blew in. I was scared to death.”

By morning the winds were still raging “but it didn’t seem as scary,” she says. “I felt very proud that I got through it.”

After each stay Foster was reluctant to leave the solitude



**Foster captures the moon rising over the Atlantic and the dunes.**



**A sunset reflected in the windows of the dune shack.**

Photos by Stephanie Foster

and peace of the remote shack.

“I didn’t like the re-entry after being in my own perfect bubble,” she says wistfully. “I wanted to prolong that moment of silence. But the bubble shatters.”

Yet the dune experience will forever be a part of her.

“It made me a stronger per-

son and more aware of the world around me,” she says. “One of the things that is amazing in the dunes is the sky. It surrounds you. At home you get bits of the sky. You don’t have that sense of vastness. Sometimes I’m driving on the highway and see cloud formations and I wish I was in the dunes to see them.”