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## BACK TO COOL

The new season brings  
big collars, pleats, and  
- hallelujah! - sexy boots

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**THE TRICKIEST TREND**  
How to wear sheer  
without getting fired

**MODEL CONFIDENTIAL**  
The untold story of  
the woman behind  
Boston's prettiest faces

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SEPARATE BEDS?**

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FIGHT ONE DISEASE**

## DISPATCH

## Thinking Big

Nantucket may be an island for the rich, but its Whaling Museum hopes an overhaul will lure day-trippers who don't have whale-sized wallets – while preserving a piece of the past. **By Carol Beggy**

**A**pproached from Steamboat Wharf up Nantucket's Broad Street, the Whaling Museum looks as if nothing has changed in decades. But peek inside the former candle factory, and you'll see a \$12.8 million renovation and a nearly overwhelming display of artifacts from a time when the island was the whaling capital of the world.

On Nantucket, where the population swells in the summer months to an estimated 40,000 people, efforts to attract more tourists have long competed with fears of Disneyfication. That's why the Nantucket Historical Association's understated renovation of its Whaling Museum (paid for privately) has been such a relief for those who worried about what the downtown location might have become. Closed for 18 months before reopening in June, the expanded museum has already started to bring in a steady flow of visitors – including day-trippers coming just for the new attraction. A big draw, hanging from the ceiling, is the 48-foot-long skeleton of a sperm whale that washed up on the island in 1998.

Attendance is "exceeding expectations," says Frank Milligan, the association's executive director, who notes the group hopes to persuade teachers to make the Whaling Museum, the 1800s House, and its other properties part of field trips to Nantucket.

At the peak of the whaling industry in the early 19th century, Nantucket shipped whale products like candles and oil all over the world. The island's whaling fleet and more than 30 factories employed thousands and brought fabulous wealth to a few. The Whaling Museum's red-brick building was once one



**THE 48-FOOT-LONG SKELETON** of a sperm whale that washed up on Nantucket, along with an old whaleboat and other artifacts, greets visitors to the recently renovated Whaling Museum run by the Nantucket Historical Association.

of those thriving factories; it was built in 1846 and acquired by the historical association in 1929. The renovation created space to show off many items once hidden in storage.

These days, whales more commonly adorn golf slacks than lure tourists to book rooms and \$15 museum tickets. Still, most of Nantucket's summer and year-round residents rallied to get the facility rebuilt. The project received a broad range of support, from local artisans and craftspeople who worked on parts of the building to individual donations of more than a \$1 million from folks like Teresa Heinz Kerry. "There really was a passion, as odd as that may sound for some,

on the island about getting this project done," says Bruce A. Percelay, a Boston developer and chairman of the project's building committee.

Although not big by museum standards, the project was a huge undertaking for the island. Three years passed from planning to reopening, with the major construction beginning in September 2003. Crews flew from the mainland each day. "We took a 15,000-square-foot building that had not been touched in years, and now it's a 28,500-square-foot world-class museum," Percelay says. Was it on time? "Yes, despite everything." Was it on budget? "It was remarkably close," he says. "Remarkably

close." He adds that Nantucket's last winter was among the worst on record.

Milligan expects the historical association to reach its fund-raising goal of \$25 million by Labor Day. Most of the donations have come in modest amounts. "We sent a mailing to every property owner on the island," he says. "I think they wanted to see this great place saved." On an island where location is everything and the smallest cottage can fetch millions, the downtown site of the museum and the historical association's office is a coveted spot. "We like our location," says Milligan. "We really like our location." **BG**