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VOL. 4, 2020

Out of the City



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Distributor: Sheet Metal Supply | Photographer: A.J. Brown | Profile: Snap-Clad metal roofing | Color: Weathered Zinc

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-Nate Kipnis, FAIA, Principal, Kipnis Architecture + Planning



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On the Cover: X House by Snow Kreilich Architects.
Photo: Corey Gaffer Photography

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1880 Oak Ave., Suite 350
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847.920.9513

Publisher
Paul DeGrandis
Paul@SOLAbRANDS.com

Group Editorial Director
Patrick L. O'Toole
Patrick@SOLAbRANDS.com

Editor-in-Chief
S. Claire Conroy
Claire@SOLAbRANDS.com

Art Director
Erika Nygaard
Erika@SOLAbRANDS.com

**Creative Director
& Production Director**
Tracy Hegg
Tracy@SOLAbRANDS.com

West Sales Manager
Paul DeGrandis
Paul@SOLAbRANDS.com

Midwest Sales Manager
Zach Stenberg
Zach@SOLAbRANDS.com

East Sales Manager
Dan Miklosz
DanM@SOLAbRANDS.com

Southeast Sales Manager
Dan Agostinacchio
Dan@SOLAbRANDS.com

Product Resource Section/Classifieds
Mike Serino
Mike@SOLAbRANDS.com

Audience Development
Mike Serino
Mike@SOLAbRANDS.com

Projects Manager
Heidi Riedl
Heidi@SOLAbRANDS.com

Digital Programs Manager
Tim Steingraber
Tim@SOLAbRANDS.com

List Rental
Mike Serino
Mike@SOLAbRANDS.com

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FOR MORE INFO CIRCLE 5

 LaCANTINA DOORS

Idyll Time?



When we planned this issue last summer, the topic of vacation homes was a simpler concept to explore. Beautiful houses in beautiful places—what’s not to love about that? Second homes have long represented an ideal of how we could live, were we not tethered to offices and schools. And for architects, they’ve presented opportunities to design houses less burdened by complicated programs or constrained sites. At their core and at their best, they are more purely about design and immersion in primal pleasures—all in scenic settings that revive our connection to nature and her rhythms.

Of course, this pandemic casts a very different light on the purpose these houses now serve. For those fortunate enough to possess them, they are much more than a periodic indulgence. They’ve morphed from lighthearted escape to live-saving refuge. When we solicited projects for the issue, we sought second homes in a rural setting, as originally planned. But, as we began to report the stories behind our selections, we learned that nearly every owner had decamped full time to the vacation house.

Although this may seem as novel as the virus that beleaguers us, the truth is vacation homes have a long history of serving as sanctuary from disease. Prior to decent sanitation practices and infrastructure and the advent of air conditioning, cities were especially dangerous in the summer. Those with money fled to the mountains and sea to avoid warm weather pathogens and epidemics. Anyone who could would stay “above the fever line” until better weather tamped down the threat.

Cities were the center of commerce, so the cycle continued each year. That rhythm exists to this day. But those of us in jobs that can be performed remotely are beginning to question whether it should. What important advantages do cities offer when density becomes a danger instead of a convenience? With our children similarly unmoored from school, why wouldn’t anyone of means relocate to a more beautiful, bucolic, and restorative place?

It seems quite a few people are thinking this way at the moment. All the architects I spoke with for this issue say they are receiving multiple calls about designing vacation homes. Projects that were on hold are now moving forward; projects that were just a notion are now a priority. The former indulgence looks like a necessity to those feeling trapped in urban hot zones.

If you find yourself designing or building a second home for the very first time, please proceed with caution. You would do well to study the lessons of the architects and builders featured here. Each has a special reverence for the site and place, and all have a commitment to preserving the fundamental beauty of the setting. After all, nature can’t restore our balance in the world if we disrupt hers.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "S. Claire Conroy". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

S. Claire Conroy
Editor-in-Chief
claire@SOLAbands.com

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X PRESS YOURSELF

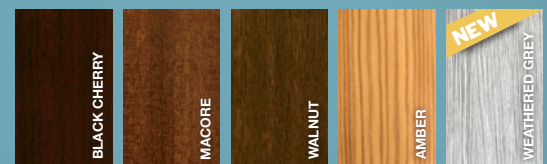
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FOR MORE INFO CIRCLE 7

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Second Nature

MAX LEVY, FAIA
DALLAS

Instead of a business plan, a network, or a specialty, Max Levy, FAIA, started his firm in 1984 with an idea: he would take on just one or two commissions at a time and devote an unusual amount of attention to each one. Good work begets more work, and this approach has led to a body of extraordinary buildings—mostly residential—rendered with beautiful hand sketches and carefully considered details. He and his staff of three still follow that upside-down formula: fewer projects in more time.

Starting out, “all I had was a love of architecture and a certain kind of talent,” Max says. “All I could do was hope to do good enough work that would attract more work. I recognized that the way to do that was to take a little more time on each project, putting sincerity into it.”

Sincerity is an apt word, for Max takes a humble, almost childlike, delight in how architecture can affect people on a personal level, particularly its capacity to reframe our awareness of nature. When that occurs, he says, it connects us back to our childhood. His ability to express this not just in architecture but in words and drawings has gained him a following among colleagues in Texas, where his lyrical prose, often accompanied by sketches of imaginary buildings, frequently appears in *Texas Architect*, and recently in the *Dallas Morning News*. Among the steady stream of design awards, including for his recent addition to Steven Holl’s landmark Stretto House, in 2017 he was given the O’Neil Ford Medal for Design Achievement, the highest design award the Texas Society of Architects confers. “Among his peers, Max Levy



Photos this page: Charles Davis Smith



Clockwise from the top: An early creative epiphany for Max Levy were the slender skylights at the Kimbell Art Museum. His version for the House on Rainbo Lake evokes its namesake locale. The architect is pictured at work. His first solo commission, a carport and greenhouse, captured runoff in watering cans.

is thought of as something like the poet laureate of Dallas architecture,” wrote Mark Lamster, architecture critic of the *Dallas Morning News*. But more on that later.

A native of Fort Worth, Texas, Max studied architecture at the University of California, Berkeley, where he learned from visiting luminaries such as Louis Kahn, Richard Neutra, Carlo Scarpa,

and James Sterling. Right after graduation, one event in particular influenced him. A friend invited him to tour the nearly completed Kimbell Art Museum. “It was pure architecture, no light fixtures, almost like an exquisite ruin,” he recalls. Max was captivated by the quality of light coming from the long, slender skylights slotted over the galleries. “Reflectors are suspended beneath

Photos this page: Charles Davis Smith



Above: Nature is the driving force and inspiration in the work of Max Levy Architect. The firm's special talent is weaving her best moments into architecture. House on a Pond directs water from the roof into a pool and channels it to the pond, strengthening the building's connection to its most beautiful natural feature.

the skylights that reflect sunlight onto the underside of the ceilings—natural light fixtures, Louis Kahn called them. I remember the weather that day, partly cloudy and windy.

“As the clouds raced across the sky and alternately veiled or revealed the sun, inside the galleries the ceilings were alive with natural light flickering on and off,” Max says. “I had been outside and hadn’t really noticed what was going on, but inside the building I did. Here was an example of how architecture can reframe your awareness of nature, and when it does that, there’s a soothing feeling of relief. That was a key discov-

ery that awakened me to architecture’s connection with nature.”

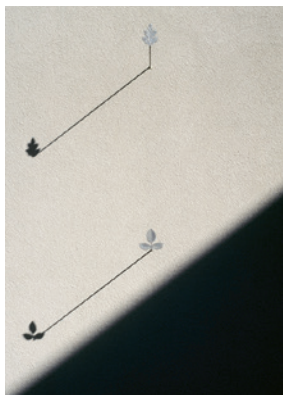
After receiving his architecture degree, Max worked for Joseph Esherick in San Francisco before joining the Chicago office of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill. His plan had always been to return to Texas, however, and he soon moved to Dallas to work with Bud Oglesby. “He was something of a Texas version of Joe Esherick in that he did exquisite, thoughtful work with a wonderful human touch, but was never very well known,” Max says. “He worked for [Alvar] Aalto when he was young and his buildings have a Scandinavian

quality with Texas accents. I think in today’s climate he would have more stature.”

A few years later Max went out on his own. “Dallas is a wonderful place to be an architect,” he says. “There is so much to be done here; any little win seems to be magnified. There is a great community of architects doing a wide range of work.”

The Storyline

One benefit of a small practice is that it’s easier to manage as long as the workflow is steady. For Max it has been, and teaching at the University of Texas at Arlington has helped him fill the occasional lull. He and his staff are engaged in every part of a project, which always begins with hand drawing, “resulting in projects with more depth and feeling,” he believes. Hand-built models are used to capture the soul of the building. “When you kneel down and look into a model, there is something childlike that arises in you,” Max says. “We try to make them beautifully crafted objects. When clients see the care that has gone into the model,



Steel leaves projecting on rods from the wall of Sunlit House cast shadows as the sun moves through its daily cycles and seasons.

they generally will give you all the lease you want. They think, oh, I'm going to be taken care of."

Whether the commission is a house, a columbarium, or a wedding/event center, the firm's buildings are never an abstract design exercise. "To be authentic and touching, the idea or story line of a project has to arise organically from the project," Max says. "So much architecture we see today is attractive but not memorable. The memorable ones tend to have a story line flowing through them—not just a look or a pose."

For example, Singing Bell Ranch is a long, slender house with cooling breezeways that replaced a house lost to fire on a working ranch. In the main breezeway, the architects suspended a big bell that the original owner had used to call the ranch hands in for lunch. Attached to a wind vane on the roof, the bell gives a single, gentle ring when the wind vane turns at a certain speed and angle. "The heart and soul of this ranch is the bell," Max says. "It only rings every few days, and when it does, it's an event."

His buildings consistently highlight a natural phenomenon in a subtle yet artful way. At House on a Pond, rainwater from the roof is channeled to a breezeway at the entrance, where it falls into a pool before cascading down a runnel to a pond. It doesn't even have to be raining for you to get a sense of the calming quality of rain, Max says; it's enough just to see all the apparatus that funnels water to the pond.

That sort of creative response can offset the grind of daily life. "Life is a feverish thing; we are all so worn out by it," he says. "There is in much of nature this mysterious, soothing quality. Architecture, of all things, has this natural capacity to reframe our awareness of it, quietly reminding you of what's there. Over the years we have gotten more fluent at finding ways of building one's awareness of rainfall, or of breezes, or



Photos this page: Charles Davis Smith

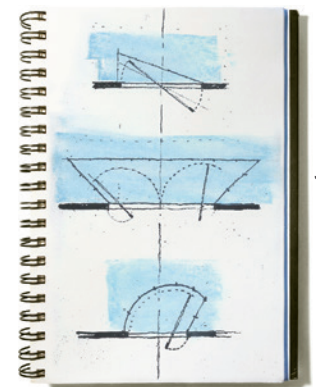


Illustration: Max Levy

In the House at Wind Point, wide windows pivot into screened enclosures to pull breezes (but not insects) inside. On the screened porch, a pivot door mirrors the same action on a larger scale. Max's notebook shows the history of the scheme's invention.

passages of the sun and shadows. All these things can be played with in buildings so they can quietly take away the aggravations of your routine and give you a little lift."

Intuitive and emotionally intelligent, Max looks for design efficiencies while focusing on ways buildings can make our lives better. He is adept at reconciling the client's aspirations with an unremarkable site, program, and budget. Whatever their purpose or story line, his lithe structures also explore the way light and materials coalesce in

space. And those materials are typically modest. With client budgets in the low-to-mid range of \$300 to \$600 per square foot, he often uses basic materials such as masonry, corrugated metal, and wood.

"Because so many of our projects have challenging budgets, we don't elaborate the surfaces or materials, just let them be, and then we try to magnify just a few details in a way that colors your perception of the whole building," he says. Sunlit House, on a flat, generic lot, features a grid of rods

Photos: Casey Dunn (below, center)

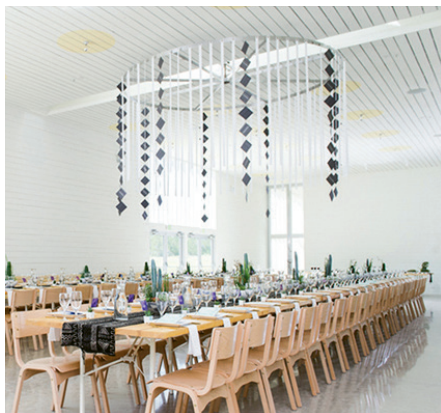


Photo: Casey Dunn

Top to bottom: At a wedding facility, a rooftop wind vane combines with a skylight and spinning ring to create a show of light and motion.

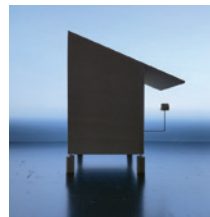
holding stamped steel leaves. Inserted into an exterior wall, they cast shadows that move in unison, their angles shifting with the seasons. And several memorable projects feature interior light fixtures made of plain porcelain sockets set in a circle of light-reflecting galvanized metal.

Another budgetary hurdle is finding a reasonably priced contractor who is willing to give the job an unusual amount of personal attention. Sometimes that is a subcontractor for builder houses who takes pride in being asked to do something different or artistic. “You can finesse those kinds of resources and get a good project out of it,” Max says. He adds, “I do think one reason people are attracted to the calling of architecture is that it exists at this unusual crossroads between the poetic and prosaic. We’re dealing with buildings we have to use every day, but it’s possible to inject this bit of idealistic world into that.”

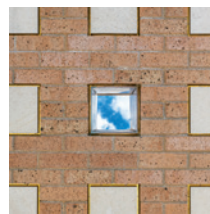
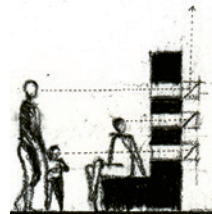
To Draw, Perchance to Dream

Even so, all architects struggle with how to sustain creativity in a daily reality that conspires against excellence. As Max puts it, “We have to run this gauntlet; that’s the maddening paradox. The world resists what we try to give it, and also hungers for what we try to give it. The challenge is to actively cultivate one’s inspirations, to keep a spark of life in your work. We’re blowing against the wind all the time. It’s very hard to push this idealism into society. The only way you can survive is by inspiration.”

This is something Max works on quite deliberately. Early on, he understood that the fees architects are paid would pinch his creative time on a project. That’s why his sketchbook is never far from reach. “I’ve found it’s important to pre-dream before you even get projects,” he says. “I try to set aside a little time each week to just kind of go sailing in a sketchbook, unattached to



Max Levy Architect



Top: Models explore ideas for a woodland house that revels in birds. Above: A columbarium reflects the sky through a series of mirrored views at different heights.

any particular project.” Over the years, those sketches have become his most valuable reference. “What happens is, you have all these thoughts fermenting, and when the right project comes along, you connect it to certain ideas in the sketchbooks and weave it into reality and work it out.”

For him, writing is almost as life-sustaining as drawing: the ideas he explores in articles for *Texas Architect* often find their way into his work. Similar to sketching, he says, you don’t really know what’s in your mind until you write about it. “It helps me cultivate a certain kind of thinking that deepens my work.”

These solitary meditations on design are also helping him weather the current Covid-19 pandemic. He recalls that when Louis Kahn lectured at UC Berkeley, someone asked him how he kept his spirits up during the Depression. The famous architect replied that he lived in a land named Le Corbusier. “He pored over the idealism and light in Corb’s amazing oeuvre,” Max says. “Regardless of what lies ahead, I’ve no doubt that the simple pleasures of architecture will abide.”—Cheryl Weber

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— John S. MacDonald, Architect, AIA
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This Asian-influenced villa in the Caribbean balances wind, water and energy as it dramatically rises out of the steep, volcanic cliff. Kolbe's Ultra Series windows and doors provided all the options needed for panoramic ocean views, ventilation, daylight, and performance. See John's full vision at kolbewindows.com/island

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FOR MORE INFO CIRCLE 8

Ship Shape

CHILMARK HOUSE
CHILMARK, MASSACHUSETTS
MOSKOW LINN ARCHITECTS





Opposite and this page: The double-height great room makes the compact house live larger. A box bay accessing the garden can accommodate the clients' piano. Pine beams over the Henrybuilt component kitchen contribute a rustic touch, while painted rafters and handcrafted built-ins in the living/dining area strike a refined tone. The RAIS wood stove swivels.

Moskow Linn wrote the book on vacation houses in Martha's Vineyard. Actually, they've written three about the rarefied retreat off the coast of Cape Cod, with the third volume coming in the near future from Monacelli Press. The Boston-based firm, led by Keith Moskow, FAIA, and Robert Linn, AIA, understands quite a bit about the island's varied villages and myriad of microclimates. Keith has spent a lifetime summering on the island, a stint working for a local builder while in school, and years designing houses there with Robert. Their passion for building sustainably, simply, and smartly is a natural fit for island devotees.

Those who are fortunate enough to have a second home often spend a great deal of time fantasizing about how to make it a primary residence. Something along those lines happened on this project in the scenic town of Chilmark. "Our clients were previously living in Newburyport and Cambridge. They came to us to design a weekend house that would eventually become their

primary residence in retirement, but the pandemic hastened their timetable for relocating, and they're there most of the time now," says Keith. "The husband had an attachment to the island, having spent summers there while growing up."

The couple, who are childless, had a tight budget and a lean program. They each needed a separate workspace (one doubles as a guest room), plus a shared living/dining/kitchen and a primary bedroom and bathroom. An extra full bathroom on the first level does double duty as a powder room and guest bath.

With such a simple list, the house easily fit within a straightforward bar plan. Still, a small alcove projects into the garden to embrace the family piano—it's a small move that enlivens the box. "They did not want a huge house," notes Keith. "They wanted it to accommodate only what they really needed, not what they thought they might need." The 3-acre site is adjacent to protected land, so it borrows privacy and prospect. Two stone walls mark a corner of the site, says Keith, and are a

defining characteristic on this part of the island. "We oriented the house on the highest point and clear-cut the overgrown vegetation to provide a meadow down to the wetlands."

With 3 acres, there was plenty of

The firm's passion for building sustainably, simply, and smartly is a natural fit for island devotees.





Custom-made, white oak built-ins clear clutter; textured wall tile contrasts with smooth surfaces in the baths; and the spartan primary bedroom is rich in vistas, including Chilmark's storied stone walls.

room to spread out, but spreading out is not cost-effective on a tight construction budget. Going up is less expensive, of course, but then you hit local building height constraints. Says Robert, "If you're going to have a second story there, you basically have to tuck it into the roofline. So the second-level office space gains headroom with dormers, and the loft studio has skylights."

The first level takes advantage of the stolen air rights, too, with the

main living/dining space soaring to double-height, raftered ceilings. "We have a sliding window system that opens to the view, and then small windows and the glass box for the piano on the back, garden side," Robert explains. The height and the borrowed views make the modestly sized room seem more open and expansive. These are all basic design tricks, so the art is in the execution.

"The challenge," Robert says, "is how do you make something so simple inter-

esting? And the answer boils down to finishes. The clients were adamant about keeping things minimalist but were very involved in the interior finish choices."

Project architect Sarah Carlisle managed the translation of those critical choices into architecture, including the component kitchen cabinetry system fabricated by Henrybuilt and custom cabinets for the bathrooms, bedrooms, and elsewhere. Finishes are, for the most part, kept light and bright—white oak

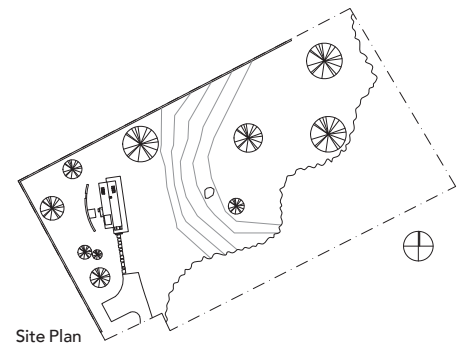


The client's art studio is tucked into the roofline to comply with town height constraints.

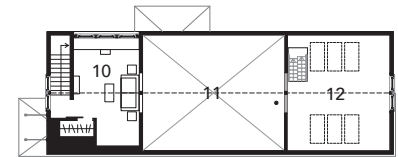
floors, rift-sawn white oak built-ins, and laminated pine beams over the kitchen and in the art studio. Where darker notes were preferred for contrast, white oak was given a darker stain—in the kitchen cabinets and the living room bookcases. Rafters in the cathedral ceiling are painted a creamy neutral for a warm but refined look over the principal living areas, while beams in the kitchen and owners' bedroom are left natural. Splurges of textured tile enliven the bathrooms.

The exterior materials are low-maintenance, hard-wearing cedar shingles and flat board, and locally sourced stone elements from a talented island mason. Given the firm's devotion to sustainability, the house is engineered for solid performance. "The key thing that we've learned makes the biggest difference is a tight envelope," says Keith. "We get it as tight as possible and then make sure we bring in fresh air.

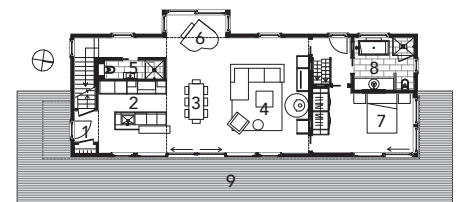
"The husband is a maritime attorney who loves boats," he points out in conclusion. "The house is completely taut and shipshape."—*S. Claire Conroy*



Site Plan



Loft Floor Plan



First Floor Plan

FLOOR PLAN | 1. Entry | 2. Kitchen | 3. Dining
4. Living | 5. Bath | 6. Piano Alcove | 7. Primary
Bedroom | 8. Primary Bath | 9. Deck | 10. Office/
Guest Room | 11. Open to Below | 12. Loft

Chilmark House

Chilmark, Massachusetts

ARCHITECT: Robert Linn, AIA; Keith Moskow, FAIA; Sarah Carlisle, Moskow Linn Architects, Boston

BUILDER: Farley Pedler, Farley Built, Inc., West Tisbury, Massachusetts

PROJECT SIZE: 1,525 square feet

SITE SIZE: 3 acres

COST: Withheld

PHOTOGRAPHY: Jane Messinger Photography

KEY PRODUCTS

CLADDING: White cedar shingles

CABINETS SYSTEM: Henrybuilt (kitchen)

COUNTERTOPS: Light gray solid surface

CUSTOM CABINETS: White oak

DRYWALL: ½-inch blue board with skim coat plaster

ENTRY DOORS/WINDOWS/WINDOW SYSTEMS: uPVC by Schuco

FAUCETS: Dornbracht (kitchen and primary shower); Hansgrohe (guest bath and shower); Duravit (primary bath)

FIREPLACE: Stuv 30

FLOORING: Quarter-sawn oak with an oil finish

FOUNDATION: 8-inch concrete walls

KITCHEN APPLIANCES: Miele; Futuro Futuro (vent hood)

HUMIDITY CONTROL: Heat recovery ventilator

HVAC: Mini-split system

INSULATION: Blown-in open cell foam

LIGHTING: Davey Lighting Marine Mast Light, SLV Lighting Eyedown LED (exterior); Fabbian, Sonneman Angled Plane, Belfer Wedge, Lightyears Caravaggio, and De Majo Bell

MILLWORK/MOLDING/TRIM: White oak

OTHER STRUCTURAL/WEATHERIZATION/BUILDING PERFORMANCE: 3-inch closed cell foam in roof and open cell below

RADIANT HEATING: Warmboard

RADIATORS: N/Q

ROOFING: Alaskan Yellow Cedar

ROOF TRUSS SYSTEM: 2-by-12s at 16-inches O.C.

ROOF WINDOWS: VELUX deck-mounted skylight

SINKS: Julien (kitchen); Duravit (primary bath); Ceramica Globo, Classic Lavabo

TILE: Atlas Concorde (primary bath, guest bath floors); Island Stone (primary and guest shower walls, primary bath feature wall); Nemo Tile (guest bath feature wall)

TUB: Wetstyle Cube (primary bath)

UNDERLAYMENT/SHEATHING: 1-inch ZIP System R-sheathing

VENTILATION: Panasonic exhaust fan (bathrooms)



An Outdoor Entertainer's Dream

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A Sense of Permanence

X marks the spot for a pavilion-like retreat rooted in its rugged site.

LOCATION: MARQUETTE, MICHIGAN

ARCHITECT: SNOW KREILICH ARCHITECTS

BUILDER: GREGG H. SEIPLE CONSTRUCTION AND HALL CONSTRUCTION

BY CHERYL WEBER



All houses strike up a conversation with their setting, and few have a livelier dialogue than the X House and the cliff on which it sits on Michigan's Upper Peninsula. Resting lightly on a rocky promontory above Lake Superior, the house is a platform for viewing both the tranquil sunsets and the mercurial, sometimes threatening weather that comes off the water.

The clients live in Miami, but this half-mile of coastline has been in the wife's family for years and includes a 1940s log-cabin compound shared among her siblings. The most recent land purchase encompassed this more-remote spot with

two coves and a boathouse. "To get to this rock outcrop you had to cross a stream and build a road to the place, but there was no question that it was the dominant opportunity for views," says Julie Snow, FAIA. "The couple has three grown daughters—one of them got married here last summer—and the idea was to create a legacy house, to achieve a sense of permanence."

It's isolated, but not too far from civilization. Five miles away is Marquette, a beautiful little town with a thriving Main Street and home to Northern Michigan University. An old mining area, it was settled by Finnish immigrants who val-



This page: With wings built on piers to preserve the rocky site, this house extends the reach of a legacy family compound to the best local views of Lake Superior. The house anchors to the ground at the intersection of its X-shaped plan, fortifying it against strong lake winds and weather.

ued and respected the land. “It was always interesting to me that the people who immigrated to the U.S. found landscapes like the ones they lived in before,” Julie says. “Marquette is a special place. The people are very pragmatic and connected to the land. The craftspeople who built this house were extraordinary. It had its challenges for them, but their commitment to the project made it work.”

Angle of Repose

Snow Kreilich Architects is made of the same DNA. The firm’s spare buildings, whether houses, workplaces, or transit spaces, are rooted as much in pragmatism as any aesthetic construct. This design represents an ideal intersection of occupying a site and keeping a respectful distance, since neither the firm nor their clients wanted to get in the way of this spectacular land that held almost a magnetic force on the family. As a result, “the architecture has a great deal of restraint, allowing this intensive occupation and the site’s presence in their daily lives,” Julie says.

Topography and views determined the footprint, if you can call it that. Facing north on the cliff above the two coves, the house is planted on the ground at the intersection of the

X, and its wings are not truly cantilevered but hover on piers above the uneven grade. The X’s converge at the entry foyer, which contains a powder room, mudroom, laundry, mechanical room, and pantry across from the kitchen. The X’s are formed by the living wing, stretching from the garage to the living room, and the longer bedroom wing with a media room at one end and the owners’ suite at the other.



This page: Walls of glass reach beyond the planes of ceiling and floor, blurring the boundaries between house and view. Waterfall counters of creamy marble segue seamlessly into limestone radiant floors.



To determine the angle of the two bars, Julie and her team set the floor elevation just high enough to clear the rocky terrain, sliding the bars back and forth to find a position that would not require blasting the rock, and keeping them as close to ground level as possible. “If we had pulled the bedroom wing to 90 degrees it would have been embedded in rock, and we didn’t want to do that,” Julie says. Canting it slightly also created an extraordinary view from the bedroom wing down to the east cove. The living wing has a panoramic view of the west cove, and outdoor stairs lead down to the beach where the owners launch their kayaks.

The house plays out the contradiction between a robust structure and a delicate appearance. Its thin, flat roof and 12-foot-high, 4-foot-wide sliding windows convey the feeling of standing on a platform with a cover. It is “stealthy,” as Julie says—practically invisible among the trees. But its steel framing handles heavy snow and resists uplift in high winds. It seems counterintuitive, but if ever there was a good reason to do a flat roof, it is here. Snow is a good insulator, but it also blows off a flat roof relatively cleanly, compared to a pitched roof, where snow accumulates on one side of the roof and blows off in deep piles on the other, she says.





This page: Smooth and rough materials on the exterior and interior of the house echo the site's natural character, left intact by the pier foundation. Glass walls return the placid silver blues and greens of lake waters.

At the entry, a garden planted in the sculpted rock outcrop welcomes visitors. Vertically installed cut Baltic bluestone covers the garage walls, piercing into the foyer and media wing and reappearing on the living room and owners' bedroom fireplaces. The entryway's bluestone "is like an X marking a place on the land," Julie says. "It has weight and balance because we used it in a vertical fashion. We had a robust discussion and testing of whether we should run it vertically or horizontally, and we thought vertically was the most powerful way of connecting it to the earth." Vertical window mullions were designed for the same effect. The windows disappear above the ceiling and run down to the sill line, contributing to the sense that the building is barely there. The remaining outside walls are clad horizontally in dark-stained cedar that recedes into the vegetation.

Minimizing "Noise"

Transparency is perfect for this idyllic spot, but it also poses an indoor-comfort challenge in the winter, especially for clients who live most of the year in the tropics. "It's hard to build a house for a couple from Miami in Northern Michigan," Julie says. "They wanted to feel cozy and enclosed at the same time they're enjoying the magnificent view they have."

Radiant heat, along with a wash of warm air along the glazing, keeps the interior toasty on cold days.

On the other hand, the air-conditioning is rarely used, because large sliders open up fully to catch cross breezes from the lake—at 300 to 400 feet deep, the water temperature rarely rises above 60 degrees. Glass rails were installed for fall protection outside the sliders on the east and west sides of the living wing and on the north face of the bedroom wings. In the owners' bath, a big tub sits directly in front of a slider, allowing them to bathe at an open window, concealed from the rest of the world.

"When you have a site like this, you want to have a sense that you're really in this place, winter and





Baltic bluestone, cut into strips and installed vertically on exterior and interior walls and chimneys, suggests the ragged bark of evergreen trees.

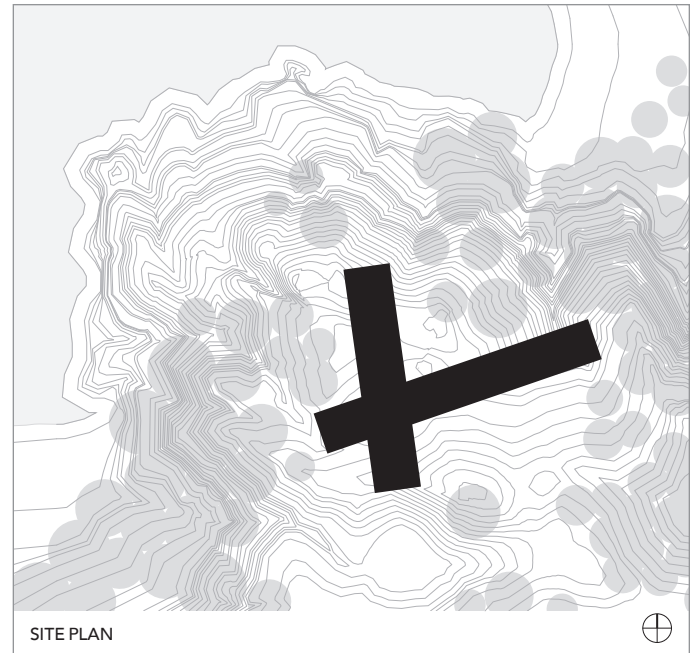
summer,” Julie says. That indoor-outdoor relationship is reinforced in various ways. Valders gray limestone floors, laid in a tight plank, run right out onto the terraces, and the white underside of the roof plane continues inside on the ceiling. The media room, also the husband’s office, has a slider opening to the long living wing terrace, allowing him to watch sports while keeping an eye on the grill.

A pared-down interior material palette minimizes the “noise,” Julie says. The cabinetry is dark-stained oak, and marble countertops were chosen to roughly match the color and grain of the limestone floor. “The idea was to create a family relationship of the two stones that touch each other,” Julie says, referring to the kitchen countertops that waterfall the cabinets to the floor.

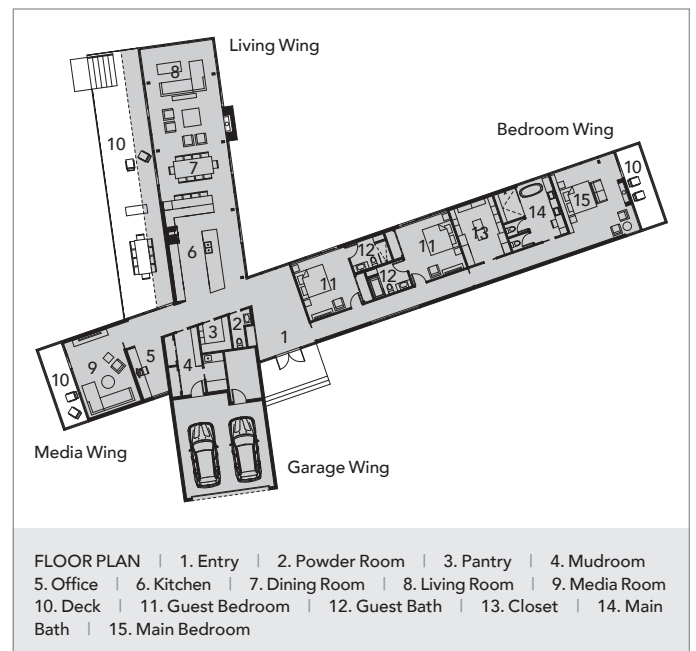
Precision Fit

One challenge of building in a rural part of the Upper Peninsula is that there are few other houses of this caliber, so the local construction crew was learning new processes from the moment it broke ground. Julie describes the structure as a concrete base with a steel croquet hoop. Multiple piers support each wing, and lateral forces are absorbed in walls and beams running in the other direction. “The concrete guy created a form that fit perfectly on the rocks,” she says. “He did an amazing job of creating a support for the house without getting concrete all over the rocks.”

“The construction was tricky all the way to the finish,” agrees general contractor Gregg Seiple, who has since retired. In fact, this ambitious project was his swan song. He had worked on previous projects for the family and knew it would be his last. “If I hadn’t known them as well as I did, it would have been more daunting,” he says. “Many of the subs I had used for years. I told everyone who came



SITE PLAN



FLOOR PLAN | 1. Entry | 2. Powder Room | 3. Pantry | 4. Mudroom
5. Office | 6. Kitchen | 7. Dining Room | 8. Living Room | 9. Media Room
10. Deck | 11. Guest Bedroom | 12. Guest Bath | 13. Closet | 14. Main Bath
15. Main Bedroom

“When you have a site like this, you want to have a sense that you’re really in this place, winter and summer.”


—Julie Snow, FAIA



Built for generations of extended family to enjoy, the house has served in the meantime as a restorative and uplifting escape from the current pandemic's hot zone.

to bid on it that in 30 years, when you're taking your grandkids around to show work you did as a young man, you're not going to take them to a tract house. This is a legacy project. I got them motivated that way."

One learning curve was installing the LED lighting system with Cat5 wiring. Another challenge was setting the media room's gigantic pocket door, which weighed about 500 pounds, Gregg says—"getting all the hangers on and getting it to roll properly." Working collaboratively, one concession to the comfort level of the third-generation stone masons was to use metal mesh and thinset mortar to install the vertical bluestone cladding, rather than the mechanical clip system the architects had spec'd. And the high skill level of the drywall finishers is evident on the expansive ceiling in the living wing, where glancing light shows up any imperfection.

Good architecture has so many layers, and what is almost as tangible as the house itself is the sense of serenity and security the couple feels here, far from their home in a Covid-19 hotspot. "They're feeling very grateful and happy to have this place to be right now," Julie says. "They never planned to live there full-time, but with the pandemic they are rethinking that. They have been there since March. It's an opportunity to escape something scarier than what we normally retreat from. The vacation house has turned around how we think about escape." 





X House

Marquette, Michigan

ARCHITECT: Principal-in-charge: Julie V. Snow, FAIA; principal: Matt Kreilich, FAIA; project architect: Tyson McElvain, AIA; project designer and architect: Carl Gauley, RA; Mary Springer, AIA; project manager: Pauv Thouk, AIA, Snow Kreilich Architects, Minneapolis; consulting architect: James Larson, RA, Building Solutions, Minneapolis

BUILDER: Gregg H. Seiple Construction, with Hall Contracting, Marquette, Michigan

STRUCTURAL ENGINEER: Meyer | Borgman | Johnson, Minneapolis

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT: Flourishes, Marquette

PROJECT SIZE: 3,955 square feet

SITE SIZE: 19 acres

CONSTRUCTION COST: Withheld

PHOTOGRAPHY: Corey Gaffer Photography

KEY PRODUCTS

ARCHITECTURAL PANELS: Powder-coated aluminum panels

BATHROOM FIXTURES: Duravit, Geberit

COOKING APPLIANCES: Wolf

COUNTERTOPS: Madreperola (Stone Source)

DISHWASHER: Bosch

FLOORING: Valders gray limestone

INSULATION: Dow Building Solutions

LIGHTING: Element, Luminii

LIGHTING CONTROLS: Lutron

PAINTS: Sherwin-Williams

PLUMBING FITTING: Dornbracht, Waterworks, Artos, Nikles

PLUMBING FIXTURES: Julien, Toto, Duravit, Geberit

REFRIGERATOR/FREEZER:

ROOFING: Georgia-Pacific

SIDING: Western red cedar with solid black Rubio Monocoat finish

SINKS: Julien (kitchen)

TOILETS: TOTO

WINDOWS: Fleetwood





Out of the City

Three rural vacation homes restore the
rhythm of nature to everyday life.

BY CHERYL WEBER AND S. CLAIRE CONROY



Rural Retreat

SOUTHWEST WISCONSIN
REHKAMP LARSON ARCHITECTS

Minnesota has a strong cabin culture, and Rehkamp Larson Architects has designed more than its share of this building type over the years. The Minneapolis-based practice ranges freely among city, suburban, and rural, including weekend retreats on the spectrum between simple and bespoke. With Wisconsin just to the east, farmhouses are part of the regional vernacular too, and this rural retreat is a blend of those two typologies.

The 90-acre site lies three and a half hours from Minneapolis in the Driftless Area of Wisconsin, so-called because it was never covered with ice from drifting glaciers, leaving intact rolling hills with microclimates that are ideal for organic

farming. “It could never be completely filled with corn because of the rivers and woods, but there are hillsides that face just the right way for crops,” says Mark Larson, AIA. An old barn still stands on the property, but the original house had withered away.

In many ways, the building area was ideal. On a hilltop with long views, the land has good drainage, and as an established farmstead, the old house had been well sited, as they often are. Positioning the new building roughly on the spot of the old one meant that the existing driveway and utility lines could be used and no mature trees were in the way.

Indeed, an ethic of frugality infused the design, and vernacular architecture

lent itself handily to this approach with its standard framing spans, durable materials, and simple roof forms that shed water. With its front facing south, the structure’s massing evokes a farmstead’s multiple buildings, such as the granary, chicken coop, or pole barn. A glazed entryway/mudroom links the living spaces on the west with the garage on the east. “A mudroom at the front door isn’t what you’d do in the city,” Mark says. “But the front door is right by the garage, so there’s a place for jackets and boots. The small covered front porch gives formality to it, but the space is absolutely a connection between the garage and main part of the house, and the front and back.”



This page and opposite: This rural Wisconsin vacation home is designed for informal, messy, relaxed country life. From the salvaged wood exterior to the mudroom located right at the front door, the house is at ease with its casual purpose, shifting more time to family pursuits or simply stealing away to read a book by the fire.





This page: Southern yellow pine flooring and Doug fir ceilings, walls, and trim link to the area's farmhouse and cabin traditions.

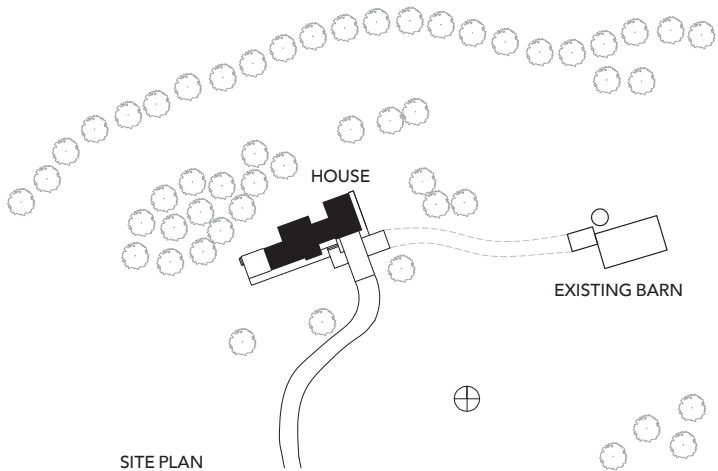
The two-story central section—kitchen and dining room below, two bedrooms, a bath, office, and laundry above—has a gable roof, while the two-story east volume—garage with owners' suite above—has a mono-pitch roof that gives the composition a fresh, modern feeling while also suggesting a shed.

Balancing those two rooflines, a perpendicular lower gable encloses a slightly vaulted living room and covered porch. "The porch deck extends past the roof, so the house gets more open as it moves to the west," Mark says. On the north, a breezeway behind the entry corridor connects a workshop at the back of the garage with a screened porch behind the dining room. "Breaking up the massing allows opportunities for nooks and crannies, daylight and views between the space," says Mark.

Material Rhythm

Timber sets an appropriately rural tone, but here it is hardly a cabin cliché. The beefy exterior siding—a "find" by the owner—was salvaged from interstate sound barriers in Chicago. An inch and a half thick and heavily weathered, it establishes an aesthetic rhythm. "It needs no treatment and is so thick you notice it's different from regular siding," Mark says. "It only came in certain lengths, and the building was too tall to run all vertical board, so the joints are both vertical and horizontal. They ended up becoming part of the rhythm in a modern way. It's not tongue-in-groove, so the small screws are exposed; the assembly is part of the detail."

This super-thick siding was painstakingly prepped by hand in builder



SITE PLAN

Rural Retreat

Southwest Wisconsin

ARCHITECT: Principal-in-charge: Mark Larson, AIA; project architect: Ryan Bicek, AIA; Laurel Johnston, AIA, Rehkamp Larson Architects, Minneapolis

BUILDER: Justin Halverson, owner; Tom Parr, sawyer; Eric Nedland, superintendent; Travis Gnewikow, foreman, Bad Axe Log Homes & Supply, Viroqua, Wisconsin

INTERIOR DESIGNER: Brooke Voss Interior Design, Minneapolis

PROJECT SIZE: 3,200 square feet

SITE SIZE: 90 acres

CONSTRUCTION COST: Withheld

PHOTOGRAPHER: Scott Amundson Photography

KEY PRODUCTS

DOORS: Marvin

FAUCETS: Kohler

FLOORING: Tile X Design

GARAGE DOORS: Clopay

LIGHTING: Hi-Lite, Elk, Hubbardton Forge, Nuevo, Arteriors

RANGE: BlueStar

REFRIGERATOR: LG

OVEN: Thermador

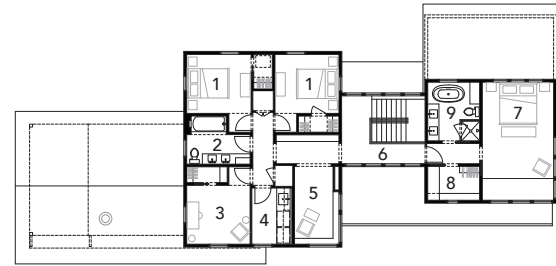
SINKS: Kohler

TOILETS: Kohler

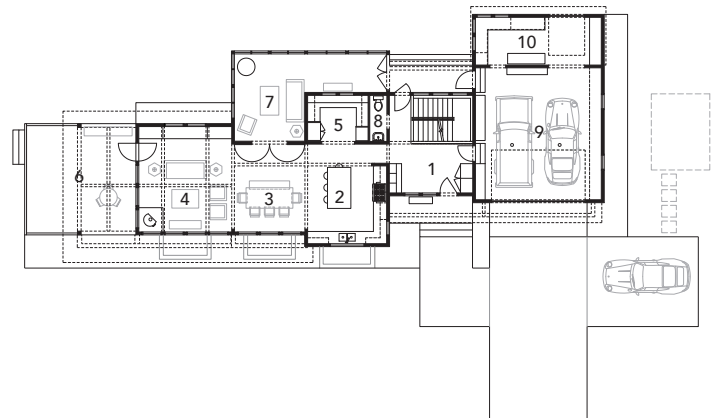
TUB: Kohler

WASHER/DRYER: LG

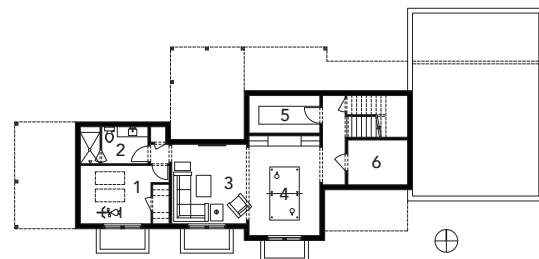
WINDOWS: Marvin



UPPER LEVEL PLAN | 1. Bedroom | 2. Bath | 3. Office | 4. Laundry
5. Library | 6. Link | 7. Main Bedroom | 8. Main Closet | 9. Main Bath



MAIN LEVEL PLAN | 1. Entry | 2. Kitchen | 3. Dining Room | 4. Living Room
5. Pantry | 6. Porch | 7. Screened Porch | 8. WC | 9. Garage | 10. Workshop



LOWER LEVEL PLAN | 1. Exercise Room | 2. Bath | 3. Family Room | 4. Games
5. Wine Cellar | 6. Mechanical Room



“Breaking up the massing allows opportunities for nooks and crannies, daylight and views between the space.”

—Mark Larson, AIA



This page: The compact second level contains secondary bedrooms and the owners’ suite in its own realm over the garage. The salvaged exterior cladding comes indoors at the stairhall and showcases one of the owner’s prized road bikes.

Justin Halverson’s shop. “There were fasteners in it, screws that had broken off,” he says. “We took wire mesh wheel grinders and polished it. That drew some of the decay and dirt out of it, gave it some depth, and made the wood grain more visible.” The boards were pre-drilled and fastened with 6-inch torque screws, with the heads painted black. “I’m pretty sure the house is bulletproof,” Justin says. “It’s the hardest stuff we’ve ever worked with, but the end result was worth it.”

Against this rhythm, windows are set in singles or ganged up to create corner cutaways that provide multidirectional views. Corten steel around the base of the house keeps the envelope’s 2-inch-thick insulation panels from showing along the foundation. In addition to bringing a modern vibe, “the Corten steel needs no maintenance, didn’t need to be tuck-pointed, and brings a rich red color to the architecture,” Mark says. Metal-and-glass garage doors allow light to reach the back of the garage, where the outdoorsy owners keep their bikes and cross-country ski equipment.

Reclaimed materials were used liberally inside too, including southern yellow pine flooring and Doug fir ceilings, cabinetry, and trim. In the kitchen, a blue-painted island and stone and stainless steel countertops are cool counterpoints to the wood, and floating shelves make it easy for guests to find a drinking glass.

The exterior’s ipe reappears in the entryway and continues up the stairwell wall, where the husband’s much-loved road bike hangs like a piece of art. “The entryway has the feeling of a link that connects the house to the garage form, as though you’ve left one building and are passing through to another,” Mark says. The vertically installed ipe wall boards and open-riser steel staircase also create a vertical link, giving the



This page: Like area farmhouses that were added onto over time, this retreat embraces meandering rooflines of varying pitches and an almost improvisational assemblage of volumes.

entryway the illusion of being two stories tall. “The vertical ipe draws your eye down to the main level,” and vice versa, Mark says.

Vacation homes often pay homage to the more relaxed and rewarding side of family life, and that’s true here as well. In addition to the bike’s position on the stairwell wall, there are other gestures to the owners’ favorite downtime activities. The pantry—an open extension of the kitchen—facilitates their love of cooking with local farm fare; the architects included shelves for books and nooks in which to read them, and built-in firewood storage for the living

room’s wood-burning stove. Frequent entertainers, they also have a basement guest room and TV room, and plenty of yard space for tents.

Like all good buildings, this rural retreat is a considered response to time, place, daily life, and budget. “It is a good expression of a balance between the scope and detailing and budget, trying to be smart about doing a frugal house that has an authentic beauty,” Mark says. “That was one of the most interesting parts of the house: it feels like it belongs to the place, and many of its materials will look better with age.”
—Cheryl Weber





Lawless Retreat

JONES, MICHIGAN
SEARL LAMASTER HOWE



The Lawless Retreat is almost, but not quite, the antithesis of the clients' full-time residence, a modern loft tucked into the trusses of a former church in Chicago's Wicker Park neighborhood. Their vacation getaway, on a wooded hillside in Central Michigan, embraces the cottage ideal with a cozy, knotty cedar aesthetic. However, its bones are unmistakably modern. Led by principals Greg Howe, AIA, and Pam Lamaster-Millett, AIA, the design is organized as a series of solids and voids on a 3-foot module.

"It was a process to define the aesthetic character," says Greg. "We started with a more classically contemporary approach, but then as we got further into materials, the rustic layer was added."

During the owners' search for a property, which involved camping out on three sites that made the short list, they had the good fortune to find this plot abutting a state park with walking trails and a Boy Scout camp. The 2.6 acres are on a narrow strip of land that runs from the crest of the hill to a valley



containing a wetland, rising on the other side. "It feels like the middle of nowhere, in a good way," says Pam.

The house may be in nowhere, but its tenacity belies the laid-back setting. And it appears structurally simpler than it is. In plan, the main north-south axis is a rectangle containing the public zone and a guest bedroom, while a stairwell and screened porch form a

Hardy cedar, steel, and slate allow this compact vacation home to recede into its wooded site, while leaving the owners plenty of time to relax and enjoy their time out of the city.



shorter cross-axis that supports the owners' suite upstairs. Its main axis starts at the front door, where visitors are treated to an uninterrupted view through the house. This spine, along the east side, steps down about 5 feet with the natural terrain, from the entry to the kitchen, dining room, and living room at the far end. Along the way, trees are visible through floor-to-ceiling windows, creating the feeling that you're descending a hill.

Bisecting this corridor are telescoping doors that open to a screened porch on the east side of the kitchen. "That arrangement solved a problem we often face when dealing with a screened porch," Greg says. "By setting it to the side of the house, you aren't looking through it to the outside and staring at the back side of your patio furniture."

Some of the building's complexity came from the large overhangs that occur on both the north and south. A pair of glulam beams, appearing at the front porch and piercing the back wall of the house, rest on bearing points on the entry and the living room wall. However, in the kitchen they were hung from the upper floor. "There are limits on the length of glulam timber you can

The house reveals inside how it steps down the steeply sloped site. Meticulous attention to selecting, dimensioning, and detailing materials set this home apart from its rustic neighbors.





get, and we needed a seam,” says Greg. “We didn’t have bearing points in the kitchen. That argued for suspending a central section from above, versus supporting it from below.”

Elemental

An equal part of this house’s appeal comes from the neutral, local material palette of cedar, steel, and slate. Solid yet spare, rustic yet sophisticated, they help the house disappear into the dense forest. Vertical cedar boards with a medium char define the front porch and fireplace volume and frame the windows and screened porch, while the rest of the house is clad in horizontal fiber-cement boards. Tongue-in-groove knotty cedar planking on the underside of the deep soffits, sealed to maintain its natural color, continues inside on the ceilings. The effect is warm and womb-like.

The design team considered charring the siding on site, but in the



The front porch and fireplace wall are clad in vertical cedar boards with a medium char. The blackened steel fireplace surround adds a modern industrial touch to the Rumford firebox.



“We aim for ... something that’s not a source of maintenance and worry, more of an escape.”

—Greg Howe, AIA

end opted for a factory finish. “The idea of a guy on a wooded site with a torch was a bit terrifying,” Pam says. “We wanted to take the guesswork out of it. Natural cedar has a lot of visual character, and we wanted to make sure the toasting was pretty consistent. It still has this handcrafted look but is more controlled.” Adds Greg, “The clients were interested in a stained finish, but experience told us that stain wouldn’t be the most resilient, and we thought the char added a nice layer of texture to complement the lap siding, which is pretty clean and pristine. We went through a lot of samples from the company. There’s a lot of precision and artistry to it.” Inside, charred cedar also defines the living room fireplace, in combination with blackened sheet metal.

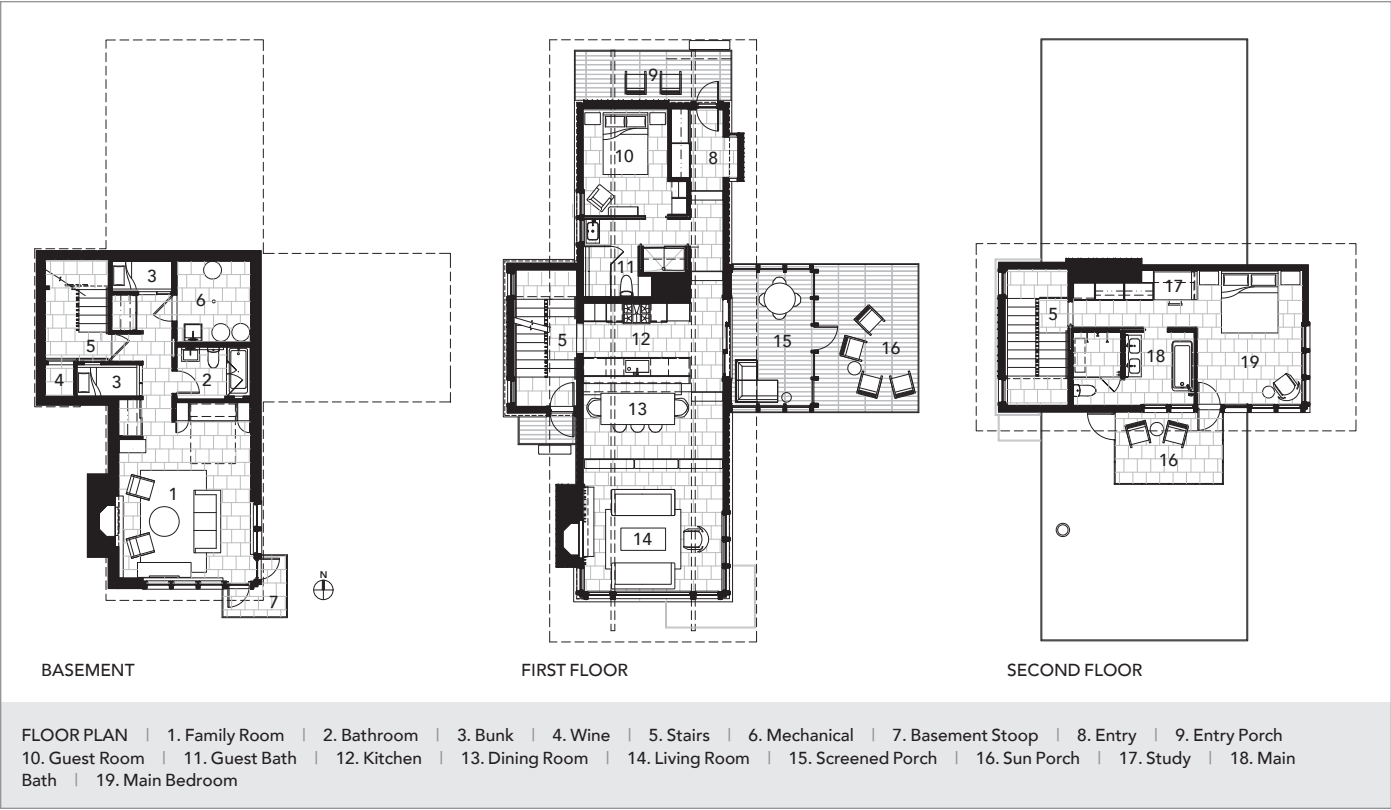


The owners’ suite occupies the entire top floor—tucking in a workspace, a bedroom with a spot to read a book, and a treetop deck. Slate-tiled radiant floors are heated with a geothermal system. Water trickles down the terra-cotta tiles of the owners’ shower, like underground streams in a cave. A skylight above ushers in a beam of natural light.

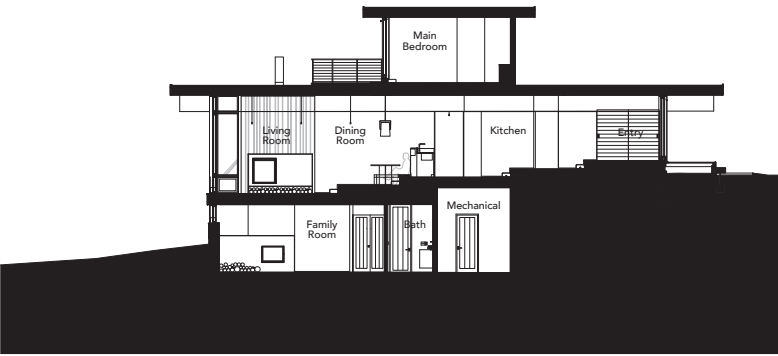
The choice of flooring was guided by the architects’ eye for detail and ability to identify even the smallest discrepancies. Slate flooring, radiant heated with a geothermal system, was selected over porcelain tiles because the tiles didn’t follow a true 3-foot module: even though they’re sold as 18-inch squares, they’re made using machinery based on the metric system, Greg says. This kind of exactitude helps to set the house apart

from a happenstance cottage. “A lot of existing cottages in Michigan had to be built as a small rectangle, and people added on over the years,” Pam says. “We wanted to preserve the idea that these cottages aren’t just a rectangle anymore. Having an implicit and sometimes explicit grid gives the house a rigor.”

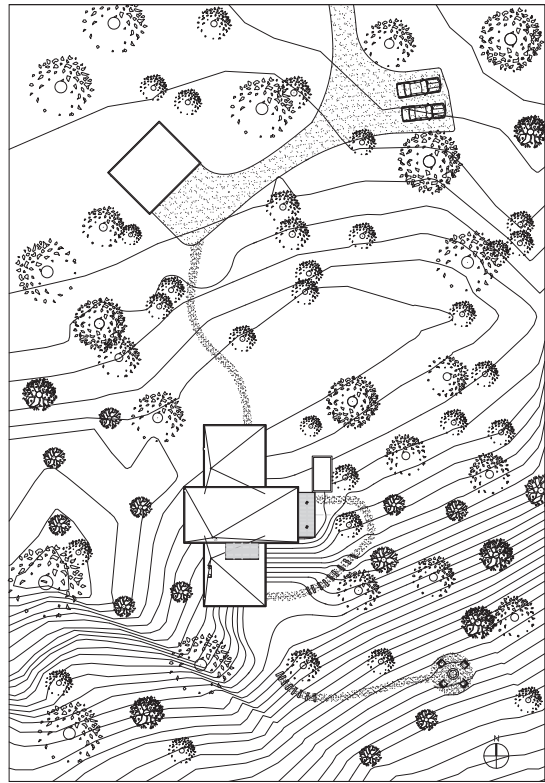
Other interior finishes reinforce the woodsy vibe. Oak kitchen cabinets were dye-stained a deep greenish-black color



EAST SECTION



WEST SECTION



SITE PLAN



The house is optimized for the empty nest couple, but can swell to accommodate returning adult children and other guests. The lower level offers a bunk room, family room with a Murphy bed, and private access to the outdoors.



to evoke wet tree bark, in contrast to white marble countertops sourced in Vermont. Upstairs in the owners' bathroom shower, textured terra-cotta tiles absorb and reflect natural light from the skylight. "Water trickling down the tiles is like discovering an underground cave through a circuitous route," Pam says. These kinds of effects can't be computer rendered, Greg observes. "More and more these days, your sense of surprise when you go to a jobsite is less because you've seen it modeled so many times digitally. But you can't model the materials we have in this house with a realistic sense. Each time we'd go, something new would be installed, and their richness was a surprise."

Builder Jake Estkowski was hired when the house was well underway, after the initial general contractor was terminated because of his excruciatingly slow pace. Jake quickly got construction back on track, including taking on the metal base trim. "You're mixing modern with wood products, trying to figure out how to put metal against a rough slate surface," he says. "We had to put it on first and tile up to it, so you don't see any fasteners."

At the top of the client wish list, of course, was space for guests. The owners' children are grown, but the extended family often spends time here, and the house can sleep 13, which is a lot for 2,425 square feet. With two



bunk rooms, a bath, and a family room with a Murphy bed, not to mention a wine cellar, the basement accommodates extras quite comfortably. This level too is meticulously detailed with an airy, louvered stairwell that runs up to the top floor, and built-in bunk beds made of black-stained wood. Cozy and tight, they have the feel of an old train car.

In many ways, this project embodies the ideals of a second home, which an increasing number of people are seeking in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic. “In the last three months, we’ve been getting a lot of phone calls from people interested in doing vacation homes,” Greg says. “This house suits the owners’ needs but is no bigger than it needs to be and is efficient in terms of performance. Those are goals we aim for in doing a retreat—something that’s not a source of maintenance and worry, more of an escape.”—*Cheryl Weber*

Lawless Retreat

Jones, Michigan

ARCHITECT: Principals-in-charge: Greg Howe, AIA, and Pam Lamaster-Millett, AIA; project architects: Laura Lee McAllister, AIA, and Lauren Dellinger, AIA, Searl Lamaster Howe Architects, Chicago

BUILDER: Jake Estkowski, Estkowski Construction, St. Joseph, Michigan

LANDSCAPE CONSULTANT: Jason Ballew, Chicago

PROJECT SIZE: 2,425 square feet

SITE SIZE: 2.6 acres

CONSTRUCTION COST: \$400 per square foot

PHOTOGRAPHY: Tony Soluri

KEY PRODUCTS

CABINETRY: Ikea/Carson Custom Millwork

COOKTOP: Thermador

CLADDING: James Hardie

FAUCETS: Hansgrohe, Grohe, Schluter

FIREPLACE: Renaissance

HARDWARE: Häfele, Emtek

HOME CONTROL: Nest

HUMIDITY CONTROL: Honeywell

HVAC: WaterFurnace

LIGHTING: Element, Edge

LIGHTING CONTROL: Lutron

PAINT: Benjamin Moore

RANGE: Thermador

REFRIGERATOR: Sub-Zero

ROOFING: TPO

ROOF WINDOWS: Velux

SINKS: Elkay, Duravit

THERMAL & MOISTURE BARRIER: Tyvek

TILE: Cle, Royal Mosa

TOILETS: Toto

TUBS: Lacava, Grohe, Kohler

VENTILATION: Panasonic

WASHER/DRYER: LG

WINDOWS: Kolbe Windows & Doors

WINE REFRIGERATOR: Sub-Zero



Retreat on a Pond's Edge

DEDHAM, MAINE
ELLIOTT ARCHITECTS



“I just love old barns. Farmers just knew intuitively how to put them together—a window goes here, so you can get to the grain. Those buildings were practical, not precious,” says architect Matt Elliott, AIA, principal of Elliott Architects in Blue Hill, Maine. “It’s almost impossible to deliberately create that kind of beautiful improvisation.” Perhaps, but *Retreat on a Pond’s Edge* comes close to that kind of serendipity, where problems solved also spark surprise and delight.

The term “pond” here is somewhat of an understatement. Technically, the primary difference between ponds and lakes is depth not breadth, and this pond stretches across nearly 200 acres. It may be shallower than a lake, but there’s plenty of room for leisurely water sports, and plenty of fresh-water sustenance to support a bounty of wildlife.

The wooded property occupies 25 acres on a point, roughly at the center of the pond. It’s accessed by a long, shared driveway from the main road. (The owners, whose principal residence is in Florida, needn’t concern themselves with regular winter plowing of their portion.) The journey of anticipation begins as visitors leave that main road and travel the winding drive to the guest



Opposite and this page: House on a Pond’s Edge in Maine is as much about getting there as being there. To preserve the rocky, forested land, the architects, builder, and owner allowed both the house and its boardwalk to find their natural bearings.



This page: Like the light and shadow that dapples the forest, the house is a study in contrasts. Exterior and interior materials were selected for durability, texture, and low maintenance. The winding boardwalk terminates at an open porch between the entry to the main house and the guest quarters. Opposite the entry and the open porch is a self-contained screened porch.

parking area for the house. The owners can keep going until they reach a convenient carport under the house, but this secret passage is not obvious to others.

Once parked, guests are directed to a maze-like boardwalk that twists and turns through the forest, shifting left and right around glacial erratic boulders tufted in moss and ferns, and avoiding the girth and roots of spruce, pine, and

the occasional sinewy birch tree. Here's where the team borrowed the farmer's liberty to improvise and allowed the boardwalk to follow the natural perambulations of a walk on foot.

"The boardwalk floats across the ground with just minor support points," Matt explains. "We didn't even really draw it—we just gave it to the contractor. Together, we looked

at each condition as you go along and determined where we'd need a support point, or where a boulder could support it. Sometimes in tricky situations, if we draw it too much or dictate it too much, it doesn't turn out as well."

As the boardwalk climbs out of the forest and becomes a bridge to the house, structural drawings were, of course, required. And the entire path





is engineered for reasonable, aided wheelchair access. A slightly lowered border at each side also cautions distracted walkers not to stray too close to the edge.

Once reached, the destination doesn't disappoint. Like the boardwalk, the two-story mini compound weaves its way across the rugged site, careful to leave natural contours where they belong. "We thought of the foundation kind of like the glacial erratics on the site," Matt recalls. "We have these solid masses—three concrete objects that are like boulders here and there—and then we have these piers off which things hang. It allows everything to flow under the house and creates wonderful dappled light."

This is not the typical modus operandi for building on scenic properties

The owners include an interior designer who led the interior finish selections, carrying out the theme of light and dark contrasts. Each window frames another picture-perfect view of the forest. The simple bar plan facilitates the flow of light and breeze through the main rooms of the house.



In the owners' suite the bedroom bows to the forest prospect, while the bathroom strikes a bolder stance. Strong swaths of vein in the stone are a natural complement to the foliage beyond the corner window. A soaking tub drops down at the corner, immersing bathers in the view.



in Maine. Many a builder and architect have blasted their way through glacial boulders and clear-cut forests to achieve the perfect flat pad for the house. “But our clients loved the site and they were afraid of ruining it,” says Matt. “They said, ‘We don’t want anyone to mess up all of this beautiful mess!’”

“We tell our clients that we need to understand the site and what belongs there. If you don’t, you’ll wreck what you love about the place,” he continues. Luckily, these clients understood this intuitively. One is a noted interior designer, who recognized immediately that he needed architectural expertise to fully realize the opportunity of the place.

All agreed that the property called for a contemporary solution, but one cloaked in vernacular materials. Cedar shingles and metal siding are regional favorites—for good reasons. “First of all, they’re low maintenance, which is important for a vacation home,” Matt explains. “Wood shingles last a long time here on a vertical surface with a rainscreen detail.”

Where the materials depart from the local norms is in the scale of the shingles and the color of the siding. The flat roof is also atypical, but actually handles snow loads in a more graceful way than the more common pitched roofs in the area, says Matt. “You don’t have snow coming down in great sheets in incon-

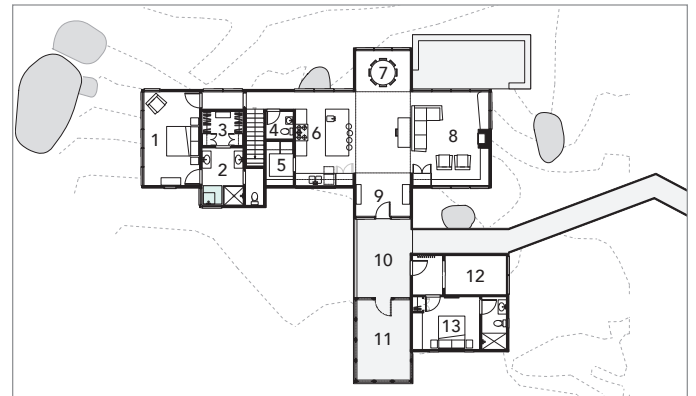
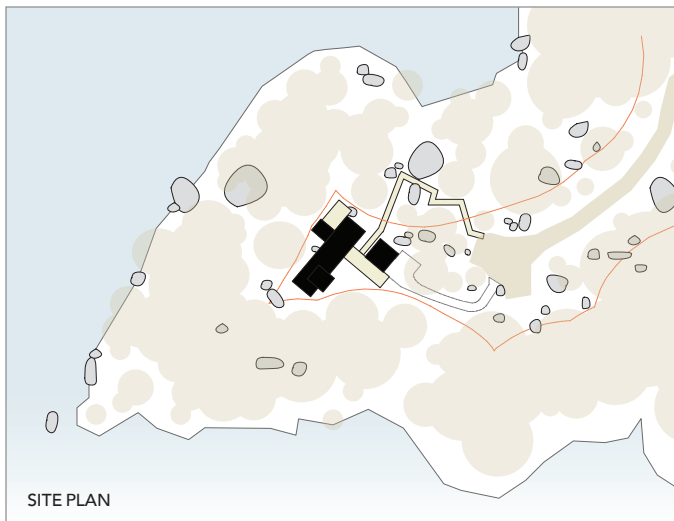
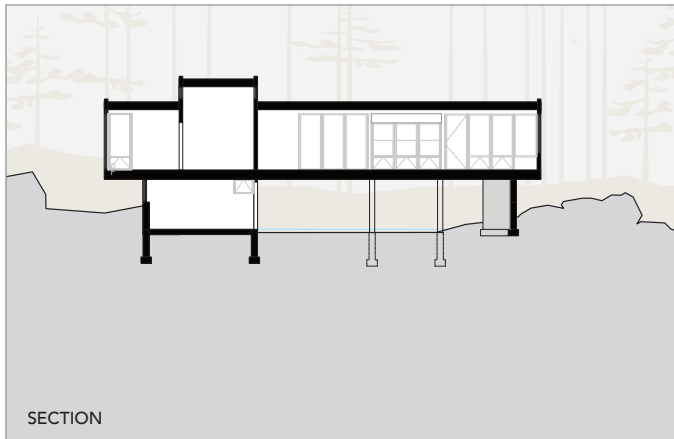
venient places, and flat roofs are really bulletproof these days.”

Charred wood was an early favorite for the areas where dark metal siding appears, but the material was a budget buster. “The Kynar-coated metal achieves the same goal—it’s long-lasting and it kind of disappears into the shadows,” he notes. “Even these cost choices end up making it more interesting. Sometimes limits aren’t bad. Coloration is important, but the challenge is how do you keep costs down.” Because the site is on a pond and not the ocean, salts were not a concern, so the metal siding is harder galvanized steel instead of aluminum.

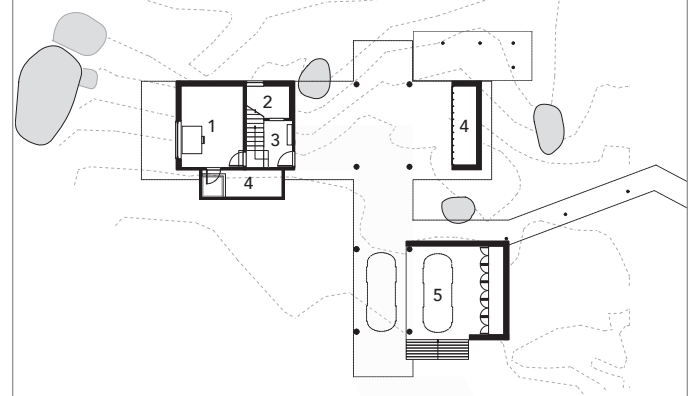
The biggest splurge was the owners’ decision to pull the house apart



A window just 18 inches high bathes the hallway to the owners’ bedroom (and the family dog) in the soft light of the forest floor.



MAIN LEVEL | 1. Main Bedroom | 2. Main Bath | 3. Dressing
4. Powder | 5. Pantry | 6. Kitchen | 7. Dining | 8. Sitting | 9. Entry
10. Covered Porch | 11. Screened Porch | 12. Office | 13. Guest Suite



LOWER LEVEL | 1. Office | 2. Utilities | 3. Mudroom | 4. Storage
5. Carport



Cedar shingles are upsized for a more modern look and placed on a rainscreen for longevity. Long-wearing steel siding receives a contrasting, dark Kynar coating that suggests charred wood.

into components—the main house with owners’ suite and separate guest quarters connected by open and closed porches. Located atop the carport, the guest suite also contains an office

“We need to understand the site and what belongs there. If you don’t, you’ll wreck what you love about the place.”

—Matt Elliott, AIA

for one of the owners; the other owner has a lower-level office under the main bedroom.

The house is a simple bar scheme with some bump-outs, which allows light and breezes to fully penetrate the rooms. Large expanses of windows and glass entry doors visually connect major interior and exterior spaces, but there are still a few unexpected little windows

to frame a special view here and there. In the corridor between the living area and the owners’ suite, a low window draws attention to dappled foliage below the house. “It’s only about 18 inches high,” says Matt. “And it’s about letting light wash across the floor.”

The interior designer owner led the finish selections inside the house, carrying out the theme of balanced light and dark elements—like the shafts of shadow and sun that punctuate a forest. It was a matter of continuing the story that began at the entrance of the property. “We always try to build a narrative, so we’re all starting from the same point,” says Matt. “The story of this building is the experiential way you approach it through the site, walking along the boardwalk, past boulders and ferns you can reach out and touch.”

It’s a beautiful improvisation, indeed—at once practical and, yes, possibly even precious, in the best sense of that word.—S. Claire Conroy

Retreat on a Pond’s Edge

Dedham, Maine

ARCHITECT: Principal-in-charge: Matt Elliott, AIA; project architect: Isaac Robbins, Elliott Architects, Blue Hill, Maine

BUILDER: William Peregchuk, Acorn Builders of Maine, LLC, Hancock, Maine

INTERIOR DESIGNER: Stephen Peck Design Consultation

STRUCTURAL ENGINEER: Becker Structural Engineers, Portland, Maine

PROJECT SIZE: 2,482 square feet

SITE SIZE: 25 acres

PHOTOGRAPHY: Trent Bell Photography

KEY PRODUCTS

CABINETS: Custom by Acorn Builders

COUNTERTOPS: Custom cast concrete

CLADDING: Native cedar shingles, locally milled; MBCI metal siding

DECKING: Magaris

ENGINEERED LUMBER/ROOF TRUSS SYSTEMS: LVLs; TJIs

ENTRY DOORS/WINDOWS: Marvin Signature Collection Ultimate

FASTENERS: Simpson Strong-Tie; custom

FLOORING: Concrete slab

FOUNDATION: Cast concrete
INSULATION/HOUSEWRAP: Spray foam; rigid insulation; TYPAR

LIGHTING: LSI Abolite (exterior); Juno (interior)

LIGHTING CONTROL: Lutron

RADIANT HEATING: Cast in slab

RAILING: Custom with Feeney Cable Rail

ROOFING: EPDM over tapered insulation

TUB: Custom cast concrete

VANITIES/LAVS: Kohler; American Standard

VENTILATION: Panasonic Whisper Series (bathroom)

Outside and Inside



1



2

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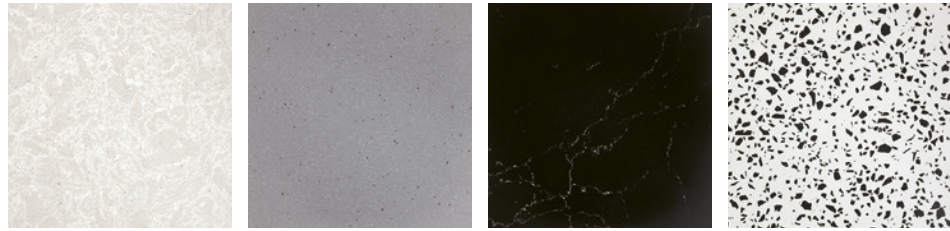
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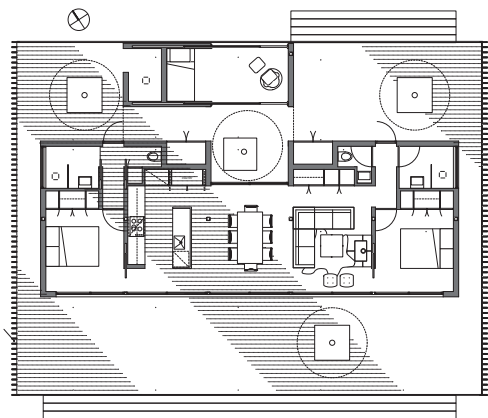
Catch of the Day

MESSANA O’RORKE
WELLFLEET, MASSACHUSETTS

“This is not a mega-mansion on the beach,” says architect Brian Messana, AIA. Instead, the architects’ inspiration for the vacation house on 2 acres overlooking Cape Cod Bay was “Asian fishing traps.” Wooden, weathered, and practical, they capture what’s of value and filter out what’s not. That’s the goal of this deceptively simple building—to pare away all but nature’s nourishment.

The basic bar plan positions two nearly identical primary bedrooms at either end of an open great room. A small “bunkhouse,” placed roughly front and center of the great room, creates a protected entry point for the house, shielding it from strong coastal winds and rain.

Cedar fins wrap the house, becoming alternately screen, shade, and pergola. “Like the fishing trap, we had this idea of a double skin that would allow filtered light and air to pass through the house,” Brian explains. “We wanted to use wood to replicate in a modern way the typical cedar siding used on local saltbox houses. It’s low maintenance, and it’s a very beachy aesthetic.” —*S. Claire Conroy*



Project: Cape Cod House, Wellfleet, Massachusetts; architect: Brian Messana, AIA, and Toby O’Rorke, RIBA, partners, Messana O’Rorke, New York; project size: 1,200 square feet; site size: 2 acres; illustrations: Messana O’Rorke

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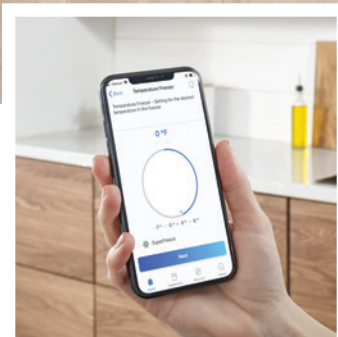


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