



A Little Piece OF HEAVEN

A home built to make you feel as though you live among nature. | By Rachel Ellner | Photography by Chuck Choi



This award-winning home in Center Harbor on the shores of Squam Lake is designed to bring the outside in.

ON THE SHORE of a lake dotted with cottages and grand mansions old and new, this Center Harbor house stands out. It makes extensive use of modern energy—and labor-saving construction materials. There are spectacular views of Squam Lake through floor-to-ceiling windows and expansive decks. The glass and natural wood exterior blends beautifully into the old birch and beech trees on the site.

The façade, broken up by the decks and hugging the hillside, doesn't mar the views of neighbors or boaters on the lake, despite the main house's 7,000-square-foot floor plan. It's attached by a skywalk to a 2,200-square-foot guest house with four multiroom suites, each of which can accommodate four guests.

Little wonder that the house was honored by the New Hampshire chapter of the American Institute of Architects in 2020 after completion in September 2018 and by *New Hampshire Home* as Home of the Year for 2021.

It is, in the architect's words, a "house on steroids." But size and grandeur aren't everything. After three winters and almost two years actually living there, how have the owners—active semi-retirees who moved up from the Boston suburb of Newton—fared?

"It is beyond what we ever imagined," says homeowner

Julia Byers, an artist, therapist and professor emerita from Lesley University. "When inside, it feels like we're outside. I can be in a snowstorm, but I'm not out in the snow. We can see the lake from all the rooms in the house, and we can see everything grow. The way the light comes in, it can seem like we're in a tree-house. We're surrounded by nature but also the house's beautiful cedar wood walls, all so soft, calming and cozy.

"This morning, I woke up," she says, "opened the door to the outside and heard all the sounds of nature, all the chirping. It's like a little piece of heaven."

Byers says she and her husband—Steven Holtzman, a biotechnology entrepreneur and executive—especially love how the "great room," a vast entertainment area flowing into the modern kitchen, encourages people to gather. "When we have lots of people over, small groups cluster by the fireplace, on the couches or in the kitchen—but all are together in the same space," Byers says. "It's sweet when we get our big families together, or when we host retreats or performances."

When construction was completed, Byers and Holtzman hosted a party for the workers and their families. "The plumber arrived on his Harley with his girlfriend riding behind, and he immediately took her to the basement utility



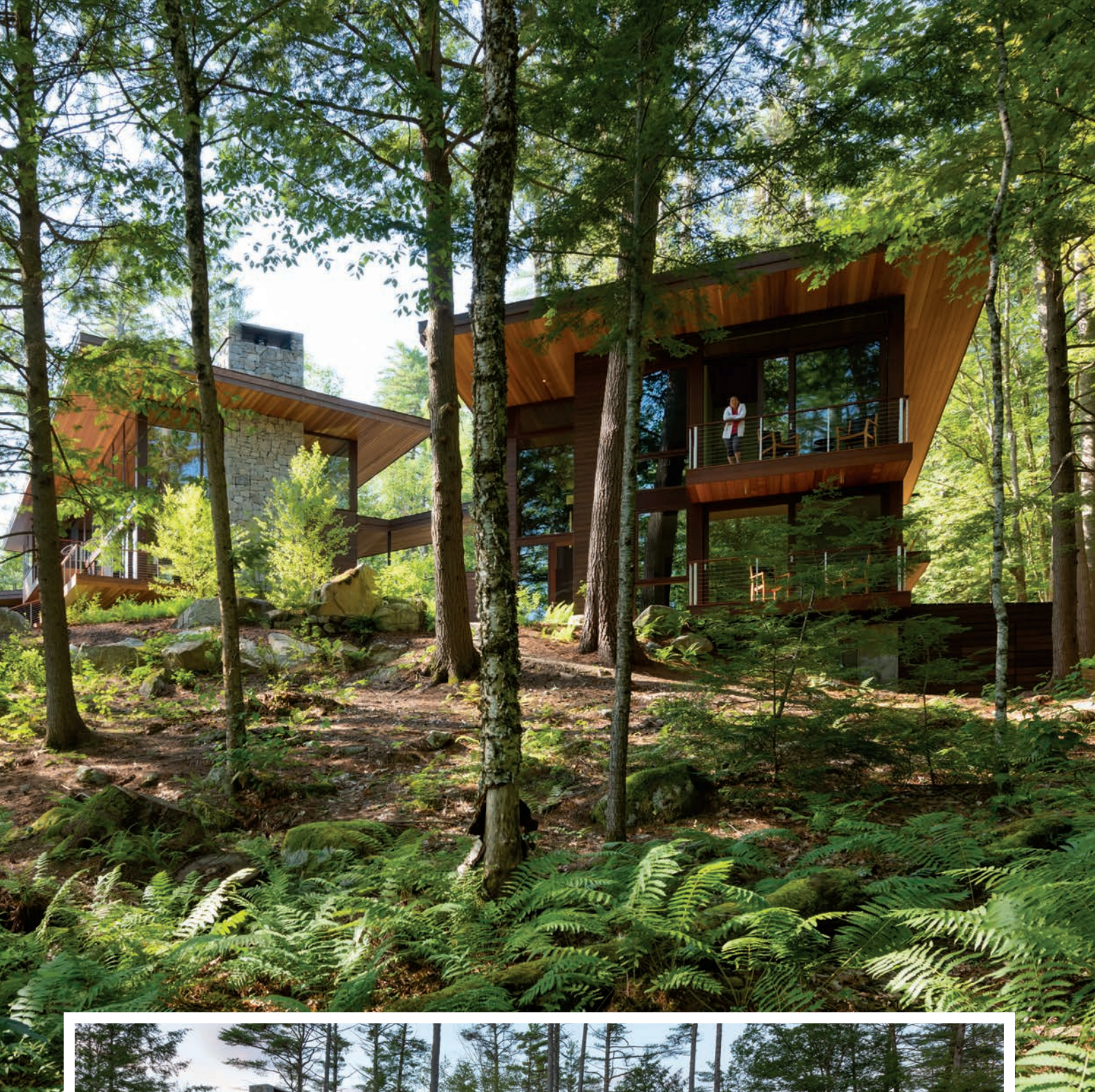
The 7,000-square-foot main house is connected by a skywalk to a 2,200-square-foot guest house. It all blends into the hillside and provides stunning views of the lake.

room to show her his work on the radiant floor heating system. She seemed quite impressed."

The admiration between owners, builders and designers was mutual. Architect Tom Murdough, of Murdough Designs in Concord, Massachusetts, and every contractor interviewed for

this story lauded the clarity and decisiveness of the owners. Many talked about the long discussions and savvy decisions among the craftspeople, leading to a masterpiece completed in only 13 months.

"There was a lot of fast-tracking by us and the general contractor, pre-



The home's modern design, fairly unusual for New Hampshire, doesn't feel out of place thanks, in part, to the use of dark wood on the exterior.

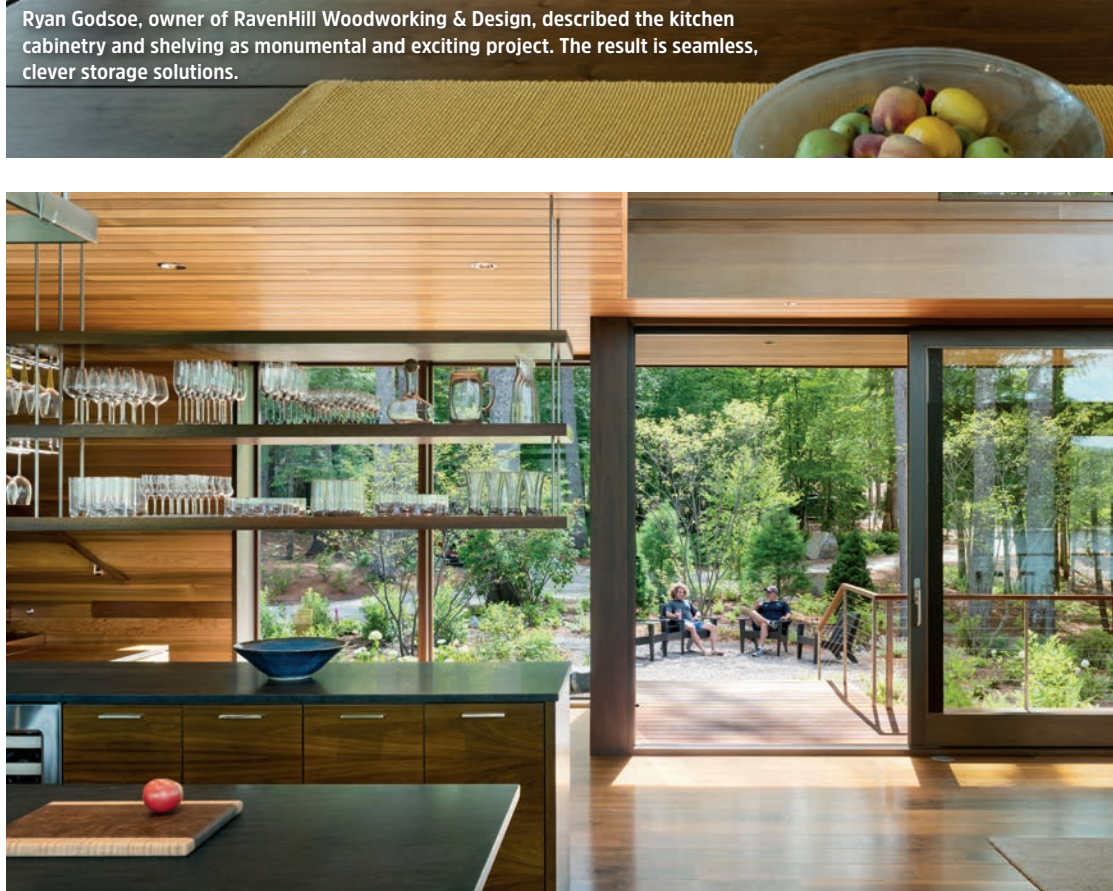
ordering windows, structural steel and cabinetry before the building construction started," Murdough says. "This allowed the builders to close up the structure by the winter of 2017. We try to source locally, using products and trades people in the area. The general contractor, Wood & Clay, followed through with great execution." The black walnut used in much of the cabinetry was an exception.

Murdough also notes that his design task was made easier because there's no distinct contemporary building style in New Hampshire, despite the presence of many old structures. "It would be artificial to build something new that looked like old structures, but with modern materials," he says. "We use the technology and building science we have now to make the construction durable and energy efficient, and to create new design opportunities, such as the expansive windows. But we do pick up on contextual cues from the vernacular, such as dark wood exteriors to blend with the landscape. We're not doing International Style white houses."

Standing seam metal roofs like the one on this house are common in New Hampshire, especially in agricultural structures, to shed snow and rain, Murdough says. Also, the insulation value is around R60, far more than the norm, to keep ice dams from form-



Ryan Godsoe, owner of RavenHill Woodworking & Design, described the kitchen cabinetry and shelving as monumental and exciting project. The result is seamless, clever storage solutions.





ing and damaging the structure. The low-slope flat roof avoids an energy-wasting attic; and a high roof peak on a house this size that would have added to the home's visual bulk.

Window insulation values have improved, he says, "and the clients wanted to connect with the outdoors. They wanted to see the sun and open the view to the landscape—all the things that make a building more habitable and enjoyable."

The windows—supplied by H. Hirschmann LTD in

West Rutland, Vermont—are framed in handcrafted mahogany with multipane insulated glass and are very draft-tight. "Building science is evolving quickly, especially with regard to sustainability and the building envelope," Murdough says. "We take a measured approach. For a lake house, we want to keep it simple and not rely on a complicated, super-smart-technology package. We specified a 10 kW solar array, over-insulated the envelope [roof and outer walls], and used passive heating,

cooling and ventilation to minimize energy use."

Ryan Godsoe, owner of RavenHill Woodworking & Design in Holderness, handled the cabinetry. He describes it as a monumental and exciting project. Wood & Clay and Murdough brought him in before the house existed, although much of his normal work is perhaps best described as wedging shelves, cabinets, kitchens and beds into existing, classic homes.

"Many people see this stuff as fairly simple—boxes and things like that," God-



Top: Homeowners Julia Byers and Steven Holtzman

Above: Tom Murdough, AIA, of Murdough Design

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Top: Every room, including the master suite, feels connected to the outdoors.
Above: A covered skywalk connects the main house to the guesthouse.

soe says. “But when you peel back a few layers, it becomes very difficult. There’s a high level of precision you have to work to, grain-matching, sequence-matching on many of the panels, drawers and doors around a room. Very challenging.”

“I like little nooks everywhere,” Byers says. “I can keep moving around the house to different nooks.”

“The main design was done by Tom and his team,” Godsoe says. “I took their conceptual drawings and

moved their ideas into working drawings we could actually build from. We’d all coordinate to finally arrive at a drawing that everyone was comfortable with and begin fabrication, after sourcing that walnut from all over the East Coast—it is not something that is readily available in New Hampshire.”

Godsoe says walnut is the right wood. “Not overpowering, with great grain characteristics, and lends itself to the interior. You don’t want



Above: Homeowner Julia Byers' studio is filled with natural light.

to contrast woods too much. It would look like someone's high school shop project."

He also had to trust the builders to exactly follow the measurements that he had also been given. For the great room cabinetry and in the game room, Godsoe was not locked into any walls; so even a 26-foot-by-4-inch long run of cabinetry could be built before the house existed.

But the kitchen was a great example of problem-solving, Godsoe says,

"because husband and wife both enjoy cooking, and it involved so many different trades—plumbers, electricians, framing—and all had to be coordinated to pull the kitchen off.

"The one island with shelves for the glasses, suspended from the stainless-steel rods," he says. "There's an incredible amount of engineering and coordination to get the blocking up in the ceiling, then call in the metal fabricators to build the shelves that hang from



Above: Wood & Clay owners Kevin Beland and Shannon Robinson-Beland





Left and below: You feel like you're sitting in the forest when outside on the home's gorgeous deck. Even though it's surrounded by trees, views of Squam Lake are unobstructed.



it." One giant but barely noticeable cabinet hides a second refrigerator, great for big gatherings.

The house includes an art studio, and the couple is renovating a barn at the top of the property near the road as well. Byers says the studio design started with her research. "Once a week, I would visit other artists' studios and look at their ideas. I like things on wheels. I do

a lot of retreats for women and various groups. Depending on the size of the group, I want to be able to move things around. Materials like paints and ceramics are in organized boxes under the table. Cabinets get too messy. It derives from a Reggio Emilia pedagogy."

The studio floor is plain plywood, "meant to have clay and paint fall on it," Byers says. A dumbwaiter



PHOTO BY CLAYTON BOYD

Winter is no problem for this energy-efficient home that features the latest in technology and building science.

connects the studio to the basement, “particularly helpful to bring heavy bags of clay up, and fragile ceramic creations down to the huge 3,000-pound kiln for firing,” she says.

“It is wonderful to have natural light in any kind of studio,” Byers says. “It is beyond what I expected. The sense of peace and creativity is divine.”

The landscaping was designed by Richardson & Associates, based in Saco, Maine, and executed by Miracle Farms Landscape & Property Management, just up the road in Moultonborough. Aside from the native stone, birch and beech found on the property,

there’s a pool, tennis court, paddle tennis court, driveway shared with a neighbor, and conservation easement that limited the size and location of new features. Under state law, any construction within 250 feet of the lakeshore has to be approved and construction is generally restricted within 50 feet of the lake.

“Chris Maroun and his team at Miracle Farms were off-the-charts wonderful landscapers. They planted at least 100 native blueberry and raspberry bushes, blending in with the existing vegetation,” Byers says. “Visitors often remark about how lucky we were to find property with so many berry

bushes. Neighbors, bears and a family of four deer are free to forage.”

Byers says her husband was once worried a bit about isolation after living his whole life in major cities. “But it hasn’t turned out that way at all,” she says. “Since retiring from his last CEO job in January 2020, he has made many friends, some through regular platform tennis and tennis play.”

As for Murdough, “This was our fifth project on Squam Lake, including my own family home. We just finished a project on Winnepesaukee, and have three more in progress on Squam.” Byers and Holtzman found him by asking Google about “architects and Squam.” His name popped, even though his offices are in Concord, Massachusetts.

It seems many prospective clients have followed. **NHH**

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