

Artful Aerie

Eastern hemlock siding (treated with a natural finish to preserve the wood and hasten weathering) and a "board-formed" concrete foundation — cast using a traditional technique that leaves a wood imprint on the surface — help the home blend with the land.

A home for a family (and their pet birds) nests among the trees on a precious Washington County plot

TEXT BY SARAH STEBBINS PHOTOGRAPHS BY TRENT BELL



OPPOSITE A bridge connects the tower entry with the kitchen. Balancing most of the home on steel columns was a logistical feat executed by Brunswick structural engineer Albert Putnam and Bucksport builder Nate Holyoke. Ellsworth's Atlantic Landscape Construction filled in beneath with mulch paths and native plants. **ABOVE** "I wanted the feeling of being on a ship," the husband says of the impetus for the tower deck. Due to height limits, the projection is only 35 feet tall, but its narrow shape and juxtaposition with the rest of the building make it feel loftier, architect Russ Tyson says.

For one family "from away," returning to a remote stretch of the Maine coast each summer isn't rational so much as gravitational. How else can you explain piling three young boys into a station wagon and driving for three days from Orlando to a rustic log cabin on Englishman Bay? During their six-week stay, the brothers' sleeping quarters weren't much roomier than the car's backseat: two bunked in a low-ceilinged loft and the third decamped to a wooden playhouse outside. "Down East, the rocky coastline, it gets in your blood," explains the eldest brother, who is now grown and owns this home on a nearby plot with his wife. "My dad hasn't missed a Maine summer in 78 years."

That includes the year he was born — *in* the log cabin.

According to family lore, "his mom made whomever turn the bed so she could give birth while looking out the window facing the ocean," the wife says. Erected as a hunting lodge by the brothers' great-uncle, the place has been passed down to the middle sibling. The parents bought another house a mile from the cabin and the husband-and-wife owners of this home (who asked that their names and town be withheld) built on an adjoining wooded lot.

After years of crashing with family, the Boulder-based pair sought a retreat with more space for their brood, which includes 10- and 4-year-old daughters, two macaws, and an African grey parrot. They wanted a place that felt of a piece with the land, like the cabin, but with Scandinavian-inspired styling — and a tower. The husband envisioned climbing a ladder ("a throwback to the ladder we had to get into the cabin loft") to a deck atop the projection, where the girls could marvel at the clear night sky with their astronomer-grandfather. "The birds, the rooftop



"The birds, the rooftop deck, the stargazing — the vision that came into my head was *Swiss Family Robinson*."



The soaring straightaway frames a panorama of sea and spruces on one side and a secluded courtyard on the other.

In the three-season porch, a double-sided, board-formed concrete fireplace divides the living and dining areas; its raised hearth “gestures toward the water,” architect Tom Lane says, and provides extra seating. Sharing this space with three parrots meant eshewing perches, such as shelving, the animals might claw, and going light on furnishings — something Kennebunkport designer Krista Stokes says the owners were inclined to do anyway. “They only wanted a few pristine things” — like this Stewart-Schäfer metal-and-Icelandic-sheepskin chair.



OPPOSITE FROM TOP Icelandic sheepskin pillows Stokes had sewn into stool covers warm the minimalist kitchen. “Corner windows [such as these] make you feel like you’re outside,” Lane says. **THIS PAGE FROM LEFT** On the water side, the three-season porch gives way to a 40-foot-long Alaskan yellow-cedar deck. StandFast Works Forge, of Parsonsfield, crafted the steel ladder linking the office to the roof deck; the rug is from Portland’s Angela Adams.



TIP
SAVE ON FINISHES: PINE PANELING AND FLOORS AND BALTO-BIRCH CABINETS ARE ECONOMICAL AND VERY “MAINE.”



deck, the stargazing — the vision that came into my head was *Swiss Family Robinson*,” says Russ Tyson, principal at Portland’s Whitten Architects, who worked with project architect Tom Lane to translate the string of nouns into a structure.

A path the family had worn through the spruces and birches as they walked from a protected cove at one end of the property to a pebble beach at the other oriented the architects in the dense forest. They devised a narrow, U-shaped building — brought to life by Bucksport’s Nate Holyoke Builders — with a bedroom wing facing the cove and a living/dining/kitchen wing angled toward the beach and open ocean beyond. Elevating the home on steel columns created the castaways’ tree-house vibe Tyson imagined and allowed the path the family started to extend beneath the building, feathering it into the forest.

The mulch-covered route wends from the waterfront to an entry tower, crowned with the desired ladder-accessed deck, to a parking area a few hundred yards away. Inside the house, you feel as though you’re traversing another nature path, thanks to expansive glazing that immerses you in the woods and allows you to see through to the far reaches of the building. Curated

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overlooks stop you along the way, the most dramatic being in the glass-encased, three-season porch that connects the kitchen/breakfast nook with the bedroom wing. Conceived as an aviary, of sorts, for the family’s pets, whose whistling and peeping fill the air, the soaring straightaway frames a panorama of sea and spruces on one side and a secluded courtyard on the other.

But, for the homeowners, the pocket views are no less precious. In the master bedroom, for example, the architects trained a window on an island lighthouse that, as a boy, the husband thought was named for the uncle who built the family’s log cabin. “It turns out it doesn’t have any real meaning,” he says. “But it has meaning to me.” □

