

MHD

MAINE HOME + DESIGN



\$5.95US 12>



0 74470 03137 6

THE ARCHITECTURE ISSUE

Maine Home +DESIGN

207-772-3373
mainehomedesign.com

If whole or part of this article is reproduced online, we ask that
a link back to MaineHOME+DESIGN be placed. Thank you.



Mountain

Caleb Johnson Studio envisions a striking contemporary retreat in Bethel that serves as a gathering place

by Alyssa Bird // Photography by Trent Bell

They say opposites attract, so why wouldn't the saying ring true for a person's design sensibility? When Sarah Iselin decided to build a vacation house in Bethel, she knew she didn't want it to be anything like her primary residence in Newton, Massachusetts, a 1905 Arts and Crafts home with elaborate details and traditional furnishings. Iselin had fallen in love with this area of Maine while on a family ski vacation a few years ago. "I heard about Sunday River ski resort and decided to rent a house nearby," explains Iselin. "We arrived after dark, but I woke up the next day to the most extraordinary, jaw-dropping mountain views. Two weeks later, I put in an offer on the two-and-a-half-acre lot across the street from our rental." As a busy healthcare executive whose job requires extensive travel (the pandemic aside), her goal was to create a "minimal, efficient, uncluttered, and low-maintenance house that my three teenagers and our friends could enjoy."

Enter Portland-based architecture firm Caleb Johnson Studio, known for its cool, contemporary structures that are expertly integrated into the surrounding landscape. "I went to art school, and I've always been design oriented, so I knew that I wanted the experience of building a house one day," explains Iselin, who, coincidentally, discovered Caleb Johnson's work on *Maine Home+Design's* website. "I approached the

firm with a fairly modest scope, and they were able to deliver a design that was both clean and elegant. And although modern isn't the predominant aesthetic in this community, the house still feels appropriate because the rough cedar cladding is in keeping with Maine's vernacular." In fact, the striking eastern white cedar on the exterior is one of architect Caleb Johnson's go-to materials. "It's not fancy, but I use it on everything because it's rot-resistant, locally sourced, and authentic to Maine," says Johnson, who worked closely with Iselin as well as the firm's Bud Angst and David Duncan Morris to conceive the 2,700-square-foot four-bedroom house. "She wanted a modern counterpoint to her historic home in Massachusetts," says Johnson. "A structure's design evolves through the floor plan, and for that we really leaned on Sarah to tell us exactly how she wanted the space to function."

Homeowner Sarah Iselin commissioned Portland-based Caleb Johnson Studio to design a clean and contemporary vacation house in Bethel where she, her three teenagers, and family friends could go to unwind after a busy week (opposite).

Majesty



Making the most of the mountain views, accommodating large groups, and being able to cook and entertain in a casual, laid-back way were at the top of Iselin's list. "The house needed to allow for big ski weekends with friends, but also feel cozy when Sarah is there alone," says Angst, the architectural designer overseeing the project. With this in mind, the firm divided the residence into three zones by floor: a lower-level guest area with two bunk rooms that sleep four to six people each, the main living area that encompasses the public spaces, and a serene upper level that houses the owner's suite (Iselin's favorite spot because it's the only room with views of both Mount Washington in New Hampshire and Maine's Mount Abram), plus an

additional bedroom. "We created an efficient and simple floor plan," says Angst. "It functions just as well for 16 as it does for one." The biggest design hurdle, according to Johnson, was the steep site, which drops off quickly from the road. ("I bought the property during the winter, and when the snow thawed, it was a whole lot steeper than I thought," recalls Iselin.) "We normally try to avoid a three-story rear facade in favor of keeping the building tight to the landscape," says Johnson, "but here, we had to embrace the slope and find a graceful way around it." The solution involved a sculptural deck off the main living area that's angled to allow natural light to flood the lower level, which has direct access to the yard.



The 2,700-square-foot four-bedroom residence (left) was sited to take advantage of mountain views in two directions. In the dining area (right), a light fixture from Hollis and Morris hangs above a table from Vermont Farm Table and Louis Ghost chairs by Philippe Starck for Kartell.





The living area contains sofas from Mitchell Gold and Bob Williams, a cocktail table from Design Within Reach, and a chair from Room and Board. The artworks are by Rita Maas, and the cowhide was made by an artisan in Poland.



To carry out their design, the architects worked alongside Bethel-based Clearwater Builders. “This isn’t a run-of-the-mill house,” says Clearwater Builders’ founder Bruce Lilly. “Our firm normally works on more traditional mountain-style homes, so this contemporary project was a nice change of pace. I also appreciated seeing the planning process unfold, because Caleb was able to fit a lot of living space within a modest footprint. The design is practical and very well thought out. Not all architects have the building knowledge and experience that Caleb does.”

Inside, the surfaces were also kept sleek and simple, with white walls and ceilings, white oak flooring and cabinetry, limestone and porcelain tile, and raw metal accents. “Sarah prefers natural, low-maintenance materials,” says Angst. “That’s actually what led us to

install reclaimed-wood walls in the bunk rooms.” Architect David Duncan Morris, who serves as the director of design at Caleb Johnson Studio, helped select the interior finishes and architectural details in addition to working with Iselin to furnish the home. “This house is meant as a retreat from Sarah’s busy life, so we didn’t want her constantly having to clean and worry about upkeep,” says Morris. “There’s no fuss or frills, and nothing is too precious.”

However, durability doesn’t mean having to sacrifice luxury. “Sarah loves beautiful things and appreciates design,” notes Morris. “She especially likes pieces that feel handmade, and she paid careful attention to the tactile quality of the various objects and materials we were considering for the home.” In Iselin’s bedroom, for example, they opted for a handcrafted four-poster “that brings

Adjacent to the dining area, the kitchen (above) features white oak cabinetry, white quartz countertops, backsplash tile from Old Port Specialty Tile, and a Wolf range. The lower level contains two guest bunk rooms, each one using reclaimed wood from Portland Architectural Salvage as an accent (opposite top). The owner’s bath (opposite bottom) is light and bright, with limestone flooring, granite countertops, a custom white oak vanity, a Badeloft tub, and Brizo fittings.



The family room, located on the lower level, is outfitted with a sectional from RH, a cocktail table from CB2, Reach by Michel Droge hangs above a media console by Room and Board. The eastern white cedar exterior (opposite top) was applied using a reverse board-and-batten technique. Caleb Johnson Studio designed an unconventional angular deck off the main living area to allow maximum natural light into the lower level (opposite bottom).







some romance into the space,” says Morris. It serves as a focal point on the upper floor, where whites and linens are meant to create a peaceful retreat from the rest of the house. The lower-level guest area is “comfortable and inviting, with furniture that you sink into,” he continues. Meanwhile, the main floor is the most formal area, with streamlined furnishings in more colorful, dressier fabrics such as velvet, which adds texture and sheen. “We chose essential pieces that were in line with the restrained architecture,” says Morris. “The building is a beautiful study in wood and glass, and the interior should reflect and harmonize with it. In order to keep the tailored residence from feeling cold and unwelcoming, we brought in softness through the furnishings, which give a home life, comfort, and vitality.”

This simple vision—free of knick-knacks and clutter—is exactly what Iselin had envisioned. “I can easily hand a set of keys off to friends and not stress about anything,” says Iselin, who likes to share her home with loved ones even when she’s not able to join in on the fun. “I just never imagined it could be this perfect. This was meant to be a ski house, but I didn’t realize how much I would adore it during the other seasons.” And the home has become even more important to Iselin since the pandemic hit, serving as a weekend sanctuary. “The mountains are my religion,” she says. “It’s the place I go when I need to gain perspective on life. When I arrive at the property, I can feel my blood pressure drop and my heart rate slow down.” **MH+D**

In the owner’s bedroom (above), a light fixture from Brendan Ravenhill Studio hangs above a four-poster from Gat Creek. One of the project’s biggest design challenges was the sloping site (opposite). “We normally try to avoid a looming three-story facade, but we had to find a graceful way around it,” says architect Caleb Johnson.



ARCHITECT: **CALEB JOHNSON STUDIO**
 LOCATION: **BETHEL**

- | | | |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| A Rec Room | F Deck | K Living Room |
| B Laundry Room | G Garage | L Dining Room |
| C Bathrooms | H Breezeway | M Kitchen |
| D Bedrooms | I Mudroom | N Owners' Bedroom |
| E Sauna | J Mechanical Room | O Owners' Bathroom |

BASEMENT

FIRST FLOOR

SECOND FLOOR

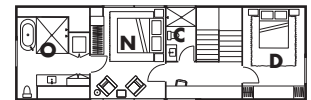
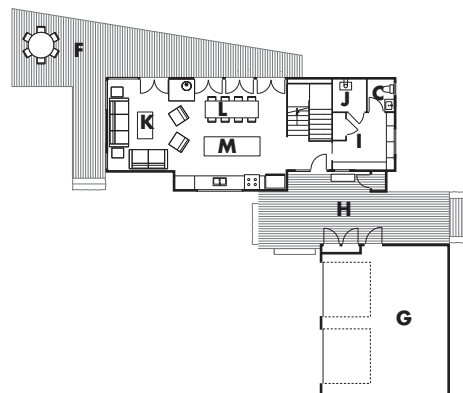
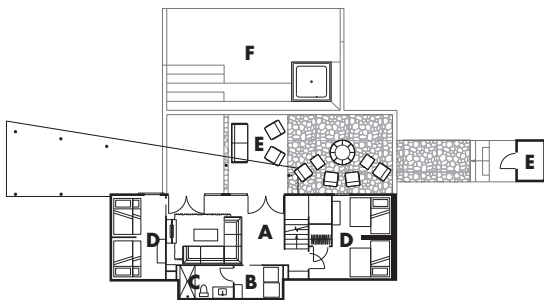


ILLUSTRATION: Tim Lohnes