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JULY 2021

MAGIC IN THE WOODS

THE REVIVAL OF TWO FOREST-BOUND HOMES ON MOUNT DESERT ISLAND

SUN+SURF
AT HIGGINS BEACH

INSIDE THE WORLD OF
ERIN FLETT

RHAPSODY IN BLUE
MAINE'S FAVORITE
COASTAL COLOR

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A photograph of a forest with tall, thin trees and a house visible in the background. The text is overlaid on the image.

FAMILY TIES

**WITH THE HELP OF ARCHITECT WILL WINKELMAN,
ANGELA DREXEL BRINGS HER FAMILY'S 1960S
PROPERTY ON MOUNT DESERT ISLAND INTO THE
TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY**

**BY ALYSSA BIRD
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JEFF ROBERTS**





It's a lot of pressure to make any sort of changes to a beloved family camp, especially when that camp has been around since the 1960s and is shared among six siblings. But Vermont-based Angela Drexel, the sibling who lives in closest proximity to the family's Northeast Harbor property, decided she was up for the challenge. Things escalated quickly, though, as the original idea of adding a winterized wing onto the existing '60s summer camp simply wasn't cost effective. "My father found the site and designed the original camp using Popsicle sticks," recalls Drexel. Dubbed "the Nub," after a nub of land that juts into Somes Sound, the seasonal structure features a unique shape that Drexel describes as "a cross between a mushroom and a Dairy Queen." The siblings settled on constructing an entirely

new year-round home elsewhere on the five-acre parcel. As the family spokesperson and project point person, Drexel interviewed architects near and far before landing on Portland's Will Winkelman. "I met with a lot of architects between Vermont and Maine because I wanted someone who understood what a special place we have here," she says. "You want someone to appreciate what you love, and Will was quick to do that. I knew that he would honor the land and design something appropriate to Maine."

However, before Winkelman could start designing anything, he and Drexel needed to identify where the new structure would live. "It's an iconic downeast setting with spruce ledges leading into the water," says Winkelman, who, along with Drexel, decided on a wooded area

This new residence serves as a year-round counterpart to the compound's seasonal camp, which the family built during the 1960s (opening spread). White pine wall paneling, red birch flooring, and hemlock beams appear throughout the home (above); the copper paneling above the fireplace in the living area is a nod to the structure's standing-seam copper roof. A mix of western red cedar shakes and boards lends interest to the exterior's simple rectangular mass (opposite).







perched above and to the north of the Nub. “The woods made it difficult to get a feel for the site and its topography,” explains Winkelman. “The terrain is steep, and there’s also a slope that runs perpendicular to where we were envisioning the building.” According to Drexel, the excavation work was quite a challenge. “We ended up with a pile of granite pieces two stories tall and no place to put them! Luckily, we ended up using some to construct two stone staircases outside and another chunk to shore up the surrounding land.”

With the site cleared, including more of the water vistas exposed (“Who knew there was such a view through all those trees!” exclaims Drexel), Winkelman and Drexel could focus on the design. The result is a budget-friendly rectangular footprint with a mono-pitched copper standing-seam roof that’s elegantly embedded into the hillside. Due to the aforementioned slope, one end of the unassuming front elevation rises

just five feet, while the other stretches more than 20 feet high. Even so, the entire structure maintains a low profile and remains tight to the landscape. “When you pull in to the driveway, your eye glances over the roof and continues straight out to the water, which is really what it’s all about,” says Winkelman. “And, even though a rectangle is a hard object, this house has a soft presence that melts into the landscape. I wanted the building to be subordinate to nature.” A mix of western red cedar shakes and red cedar boards breaks up the rectangular mass, especially on the front and side elevations. The water-facing facade, meanwhile, features an abundance of glass and a roofline that extends outward and upward. “The goal was to maximize privacy, views, and daylight,” says Winkelman. “A structure this simple actually requires a lot of discipline on an architect’s part. Therefore, we used high-quality materials in a rich, textural way so that the simplicity doesn’t fall flat.”

While designing the house, architect Will Winkelman considered sight lines and the visual connection to nature; from the elevated entry, one can see down a corridor, into the den, and out a window framing a large tree (opposite). Shaker-style cabinetry by Block Brothers Custom Cabinets and granite countertops provide a contrast to the pine paneling in the kitchen, which looks out to the front of the property (above).

Adjacent to the kitchen are the living and dining areas, which open onto an elevated ipê deck overlooking Somes Sound. Winkelman employed a mono-pitched roof to maximize both the natural light and the expansive vistas. "The roof opens up and out toward the view," explains Winkelman.







A critical piece of the puzzle was the third member of the project team, Bar Harbor-based builder John Dargis. Drexel—who, with Winkelman’s guidance, ended up serving as the construction manager (“We both wore multiple hats,” he explains)—tapped Dargis after learning of his skilled carpentry years earlier. “John’s patience is unlike anyone’s in today’s modern world,” notes Drexel. And it was smooth sailing from then on out: “The three of us clicked really well,” says Dargis. “We were all on the same page in terms of what we wanted in the end, and both Angela and Will were always open to collaborating and working together to find practical solutions. It’s such a difficult site, so a great deal of time was spent making sure that the home’s elevation and orientation were exactly

right. Will is just so good at sitting a building into its site. Where this one ended up is exactly where it belongs.”

At the core of Winkelman’s design scheme are sight lines, from the moment one pulls into the driveway and begins the descent down the path leading to the front door. A window adjacent to the front door offers a peek straight through the house and out to the view beyond, maintaining a strong relationship with the water. Once inside the entry, there are a few steps down into the living room. “There’s a sense of sequencing,” notes Winkelman, who uses small sets of stairs throughout to help delineate different spaces and maintain those strong sight lines. “I’m obsessed with creating visual axes as one moves through a building,” he says. “In the elevated entry, for

Despite not having any upper cabinets, the kitchen features plenty of storage, thanks in large part to a clever open pantry at the far end that is concealed within an alcove (above).

(Opposite page, clockwise from top left) The strong connection to the outdoors is maintained even in the staircase to the lower level. Winkelman designed the elevated deck to “float above the landscape without disturbing it,” he says. In the den, the pine paneling is paired with drywall. “Our impulse was to break up the pine in these areas,” says Winkelman of the den as well as this owners’ bedroom.





example, if you pivot left you will look down a hallway, into a bedroom, and out a window. The entire concept is about the connection to nature and the instinct people have to migrate toward daylight. The home's form is a response to light." Even the 1,300-square-foot lower level, which features a common area and two guest rooms, has plenty of daylight as a walk-out basement.

Without a doubt, the star of the house is the open-concept space on the 2,300-square-foot main level. The kitchen is positioned along the front facade, while the adjacent living and dining areas open onto an elevated deck overlooking the water. The "public" areas are mostly contained to the center of the floor plan, save for a den at one end of the house. "Having a secondary social space is a good idea for big families," notes Winkelman. Along with the den—which was initially on the plan as a bedroom—the main level's three bedrooms are strategically relegated to each end of the home. "We thought of

these rooms as 'defenders,'" he continues. "They serve to establish a private social area in the middle of the house. There are some neighbors nearby, so we really tried to nurture privacy as a core experience within this home."

As for the aesthetic, Winkelman stayed true to classic Maine materials, cladding most of the rooms in white pine boards. "It's a clean, reinterpreted version of a mid-twentieth-century Mount Desert Island retreat," says the architect. Drexel then furnished the house herself, curating a selection of many vintage and antique items from shops throughout Maine and Vermont. With plenty of space to gather now, the family can easily enjoy the property for generations to come. "When I first presented this idea to my siblings it was really a leap of faith on their parts," says Drexel. "But my father had actually wanted to build a compound all along, so I'm glad we were able to carry out his vision." **MH+D**

Due to the site's steep slope, one side of the house rises more than 20 feet, while the opposite end measures just five feet from the ground to the roofline (above): "The structure is meant to melt into the landscape," says Winkelman. The residence is situated above and to the north of the 1960s camp, dubbed "The Nub" for the property's nub of land that juts into Somes Sound (opposite).



ARCHITECT: **WINKELMAN ARCHITECTS**
 LOCATION: **MOUNT DESERT ISLAND**

- | | | |
|-------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| A Bedrooms | E Dining Room | I Owners' Bedroom |
| B Den | F Living Room | J Mechanical Room |
| C Deck | G Bathrooms | |
| D Kitchen | H Owners' Bathroom | |

MAIN LEVEL

LOWER LEVEL

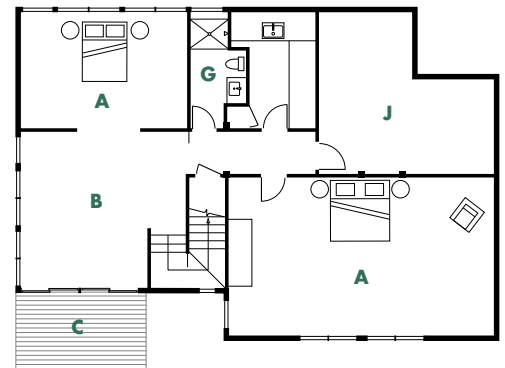
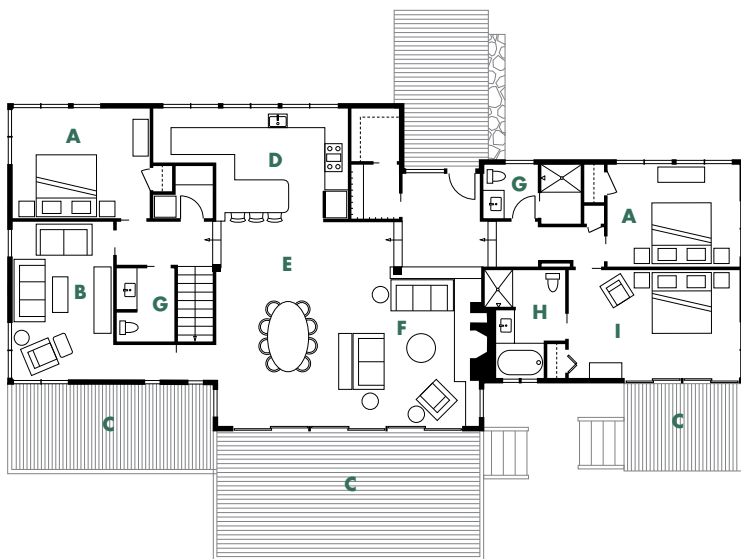


ILLUSTRATION: Tim Lohnes