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ANTIPODEAN INLAND

A contemporary family compound in the woods of western Maine provides peace for a globe-trotting couple

BY KATY KELLEHER

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JEFF ROBERTS

At first, builder Mark Conforte wasn't sure he wanted to build houses anymore. He'd been working for five decades; it felt like time to retire. "We got his name from a friend with a house on Horseshoe Pond," says one of the homeowners. "We called him up and convinced him to have coffee with us, even though he said he wasn't doing this kind of work. After 15 minutes, we had him laughing." A few minutes later, Conforte acceded. "They're just super nice, hilarious people," he says. "I'm 68. I'm not a kid. But he [the husband] had me in the palm of his hand."

With an auspicious beginning like this, it's no surprise that the project was a success. Everyone involved, from architects Rob Freedman and Mike Bedell of Kennebunk River Architects to interior designer Polly Lewis of Lewis Interiors, expressed gratitude for the other members of the team. Of course, it helped that the homeowners had worked with both the architects and designer before (on both their shingle-style beach house in York County and their pied-à-terre on Beacon Hill in Boston). Conforte was the newbie to the group, but he fit right in. "He really made the project fun," says the homeowner. "This is the twentieth home we've lived in, and by now we have a good idea of what we want. This house reflects us, but it also reflects everyone who worked on it." Conforte agrees: "It's tailored to them, like a good suit."



When it came to aesthetics, the design brief was fairly simple: the couple wanted midcentury modern by the lake, with a dash of Australian inspiration thrown in. The homeowners had lived abroad for years, and they wanted this inland getaway to remind them of their time Down Under—hence the mono-pitched roof and oversized windows. “When we set out to do the Lovell project with them, we were tasked with something very different from what we had done with the couple before,” says Bedell. “In the past, they leaned toward a more traditional style. This time, they wanted something crisp, clean, and modern.” Unlike their beachfront property, this wasn’t conceived of as a family home. The homeowners knew it would likely be just the two of them heading up to Lovell. “I didn’t like the idea of walking past empty bedrooms all the time,” the homeowner says. Plus, the couple is in their 60s, and though they’re in good health they’re thinking about the future. “We liked the idea of being able to live just on one floor.” While they don’t currently have any grandchildren, they wanted to make space for their kids and friends to come, stay, and ski. “The result was a

small family compound with a main house and a secondary accessory structure,” says Freedman. “They wanted privacy. Essentially, this house was for them—their own little place.”

They also didn’t want to disturb the natural landscape too much. Since the five-acre site is sloped, this presented a challenge for the architects. “They didn’t want the house to stand out. They didn’t want to have people on the water see a ginormous wall coming out of the earth, which is how we came up with the idea of building a platform out of natural materials,” says Bedell. “We used boulders picked up on-site to elevate the house and natural materials, like the red cedar siding, to help it relate to the surrounding environment.” A boardwalk made from ipê links the two structures, allowing water to flow freely downhill during spring melt or summer storms. “The original design had a covered walkway,” reveals the homeowner, “but it looked too much like a conference center.” Landscape architect Patrick Carroll suggested creating an open-air walkway surrounded by blueberry bushes and other native plantings. “Now you go from

Designed by Kennebunk River Architects and built by Mark Conforte, this midcentury modern-inspired lake house was imagined as a winter getaway (opening spread).

“The site slopes down a lot towards the water,” explains architect Mike Bedell (above). “We wanted this building to feel very grounded and organic, so we ended up building a platform around the site of natural materials.”

Patrick Carroll of Carroll Associates Landscape in Portland used native plantings and low-lying stone walls to ease the transition from yard to forest while providing access to the pond below (opposite).







a stone entryway into this pretty boardwalk,” Conforte adds. “I’d give Pat a very high grade for that idea.”

Although the cabins can be used during blueberry-picking season, they were primarily intended as a winter retreat. Thus, there was no need for a big lawn and no reason to cut all the trees. Instead, Dan Woodward and his team at Valley Lawn and Landscape installed erosion-combating bushes, wooden walkways and porches, and stone stairs and stepping stones to help facilitate walks down to the water. The views from the irregularly shaped windows (some rectangular, some square, others irregular quadrilaterals) show white birch trunks and silvery evergreen needles. The water view in the main living room isn’t the focal point but rather a stately natural stone fireplace. This choice was unorthodox and the owners’ idea. “I think maybe the architects thought it was odd,” reflects the same homeowner. “But we have another house where you have big ocean views. Here, we wanted it to be more soothing and comfortable.” They brought in local mason Dustin Heath to construct a tightly fit fireplace made from Boston Blend veneer that stretches from the white oak floorboards to the hemlock

ceilings. (“That was a bit of my inspiration,” says Conforte. “I really like working with western hemlock. I’ve done so many Douglas fir ceilings in custom homes, and every now and then, you want to see something different.”)

The colors of the stone fireplace provided Polly Lewis with a jumping-off point for her design of the central lounge area. “The house features neutral colors, so here I used really simple, textured carpets, bound with pleather for detail, to ground the room,” she explains. The rugs, like the pleather ottoman, were custom-made for the space, as were the orange and teal pillows. “That was the pop of midcentury color,” Lewis says. “As soon as I showed them that fabric, it was done.” Since Lewis had worked with the homeowners before, she knew their preferences. She knew they weren’t wild about tile, and they tended to favor sculptural (yet simple) light fixtures. Lewis describes her clients as “down to earth” and “appreciative of good design.” But above all, they’re outdoorsy, and the space needed to reflect that. Hence the dog bath. “We didn’t have a lot of space for the mudroom, but we made it work,” she says. “It gets so muddy up there, it just made sense.” Near the entryways, the floors are a mix of slate, concrete,

Interior designer Polly Lewis used multiple stains on white oak to create a dynamic yet soothing wood-focused kitchen (opposite). “My approach is to strive for timelessness,” Lewis says. “This house is almost Scandinavian in feeling. Having lived abroad, the homeowners appreciated that.”

When it came to the light fixtures, Lewis wanted to make sure they felt dramatic without impeding any of the views. These globes, by Moooi (above, left), felt “light and airy” says Lewis. “When you drive up, you see them. They’re like sculptures to me.” The dining table and chairs (above, right) came from a Boston dealer specializing in Danish furniture.



and pebbled tile (in the dog bath). Simple Shaker-style cabinets hide winter gear, leashes, and towels, and radiant heat comes through the floor to help dry muddy boots and paws.

Lewis took a “timeless, organic approach” to finishes and furnishings throughout the house. “Nothing is overly grand or large,” she says. “But as the design came together, they began to see how simple and elegant it is.” Black windows feel crisp and contemporary against the warm red tones of the wood, and simple white porcelain tiles add a soft polish to the kitchen and bathrooms. She worked closely with cabinetmaker Joe Pollak on the cabinets and pantry, the floating vanities, the custom-built desk, and the built-in shelves in the study. During their travels, the homeowners had once stayed in a hotel with arrangeable beds, and they asked Pollak to recreate this feature for the guest room. “He’s an incredibly skilled

craftsperson, and he listened carefully,” says Lewis. “My favorite part of the build is all those wood details—they added so much style.”

As the couple has settled into the winter house, they’ve come to appreciate the thoughtful placement of the two structures, the treehouse-like atmosphere of their second-story study, and the convenience of both the outdoor shower (a late addition) and the dog bath. “It’s only an hour and a half from Saco, but it feels so far away,” says the homeowner. “Polly did a fantastic job of giving a sense of tranquility to the place. As soon as you get here, you take a deep breath. It feels like a sanctuary.” While the plantings are still growing in, he imagines they’ll soon be “spectacular,” like the rest of it. “I’m enormously lucky. Just coming up here is a great experience. It’s very quiet,” he adds, “except when our children are here.” **MH+D**

The owners’ suite features a wooden wall behind the bed to add warmth to the neutral-toned space (above, left). Lewis selected porcelain tile and simple floating wood vanities for the owners’ bathroom (above, right). “We were really thinking about how to keep it easy to clean,” she says.

(Opposite, from top) The movable, custom-built guest room beds were inspired by a hotel that the owners visited in Australia. Since this home is meant for winter getaways, the living room layout prioritizes the fireplace over the water views.





“My favorite part of the house, now that it’s all done, is the screen porch,” says builder Mark Conforte (above). “It’s the way you meander from the kitchen to the screen porch. And I like how it feels like it’s built around the Gormans. You take those people and it’s like tailoring a suit. It fits them so well.”

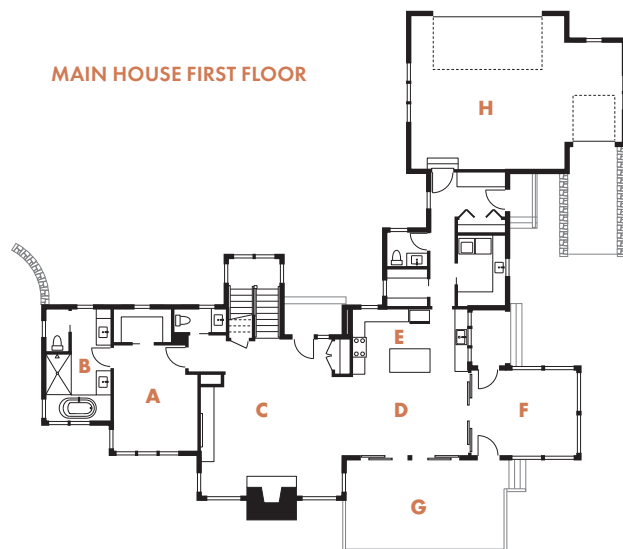
The dog bath (left) has been a convenience the owners have enjoyed, especially during mud season. The bath’s floors are a mix of slate, concrete, and pebbled tile. Simple Shaker-style cabinets hide winter gear, leashes, and towels, and radiant heat comes through the floor to help dry muddy boots and paws.

Rather than build one large house, they opted for several smaller structures connected by a boardwalk (opposite). The main house is for the couple, while the ancillary structure has space for their kids—and maybe someday, for grandkids.

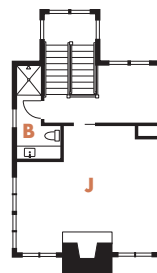


ARCHITECT: **KENNEBUNK RIVER ARCHITECTS**
 PROJECT ARCHITECTS: **ROB FREEDMAN & MIKE BEDELL**
 INTERIOR DESIGNER: **POLLY LEWIS**
 LOCATION: **LOVELL**

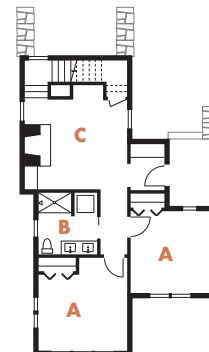
A Bedroom	D Dining Room	G Deck	I Bunk Room
B Bathroom	E Kitchen	H Garage	J Office
C Living Room	F Screened Porch		



**MAIN HOUSE
SECOND FLOOR**



**GUEST HOUSE
FIRST FLOOR**



**GUEST HOUSE
SECOND FLOOR**

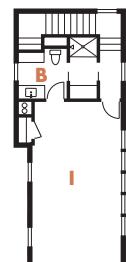


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