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Architect Tom Murdough of Murdough Design in Boston designed his parents' 2,800-square-foot guesthouse to mirror its beautiful setting and take in views of the lake. The sliding window in the living room, custom-made by H. Hirschmann Ltd. in West Rutland, Vermont, helps make the transition from inside to out with tracks that are embedded in the sill so they are flush with the floor and neither stepped on nor seen.



ROOM FOR Everyone!

A BOSTON ARCHITECT DESIGNS A HANDSOME GUESTHOUSE TO ACCOMMODATE A GROWING
FOURTH GENERATION AT HIS FAMILY'S SQUAM LAKE HOME.

BY ANDI AXMAN | PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHUCK CHOI



ARCHITECT TOM MURDOUGH refers to the guesthouse he designed for his parents' Squam Lake property as a "lakeside camp." Although the house is new construction, it sits nestled among tall hemlocks and pines so wide you can barely wrap your arms around them; their branches shade the ferns, witch hazel and shadblow growing below. The house's standing-seam copper roof blends perfectly into this forest setting, and even the chimney stones complement the soft gray tone of the trees' bark. Nearby is a vernal pond that's been there forever.

Once inside the guesthouse, you realize this is no rustic cabin—impeccable craftsmanship and thoughtful design surround you. Radiant heat emanates from beautiful American black walnut floors. Walls of clear-grade Western red cedar

cast a warm glow. Stainless-steel counters, oversize windows, custom-made furniture and a neutral palette lend a contemporary flair. It's no wonder the house was recognized by the American Institute of Architects New England chapter in 2011 with a merit award for design excellence.

Needing a guesthouse

Squam Lake has been important to Murdough's family for a long time. His grandparents began summering there in the 1940s. They grew to love the area so much that they bought a 3.4-acre property on the lake. "They wanted a nice, comfortable lake house with modern comforts, where multiple generations of the family could spend time together," Murdough says.



Tom Murdough's sons—Tommy (in the blue shirt, left) and Alexander, then ages six and four—run past the deck that wraps around the guesthouse (below) along the one-hundred-foot path to the main house, while Glen, then age two, plays indoors. Belknap Landscape Company, Inc. did the masonry for the fireplace (left), using cut fieldstones from local sites. Andy McSheffrey of A. N. McSheffrey Woodworks in Belmont made the living room coffee table, chairs and ottoman (left and below), while Ryan Godsoe of Raven Hill Woodworking & Design in Holderness made the kitchen and living room cabinets (bottom).



A high ceiling and second-story windows bring light and views of the tall trees into the kitchen, enhancing the cabin-in-the-woods feel of the guesthouse. Stainless steel on the countertop, cabinet hardware and stairway rail (facing page) “echoes the elegant, streamlined qualities of boat construction,” Murdough says. “I also like stainless steel’s reflective quality—it brings the landscape in.” Wood used throughout the house—American black walnut flooring by Carlisle Wide Plank Floors and clear-grade Western red cedar on the walls—is a nod to the traditional building material of the main house. Ryan Godsoe of Raven Hill Woodworking & Design in Holderness made the cabinets in the living room and kitchen from black walnut veneer-face plywood.



In 1967, his grandparents hired architect Bill Mead, who lived in Center Harbor, to design a house. “He knew the vernacular architecture of the lake, and was influenced by the buildings of Frank Lloyd Wright and also the Japanese,” Murdough says. “Mead’s designs were clean, simple and modern in their day as well as rooted in local tradition.” Mead designed a five-bedroom, 3,400-square-foot house, and Murdough’s grandparents “treasured the house,” he says. “I probably would not be involved in architecture had it not been for this house.”

Murdough says the house’s design was “unconventional and surprising to me, demonstrating a sensitivity to space,

materials and the beautiful site.” The family room has a large, granite chimney with a broad hearth and muscular redwood timber structure juxtaposed against precisely detailed interior finishes “that have a poetic counterpoint to one another,” Murdough says. “Despite their visual interest, these features are ultimately quiet and yield to the beauty of the lake.” More than forty years later, these were the springboard for Murdough’s design parameters for the guesthouse.

In the span of those forty years, Murdough’s father and two uncles grew up, had families of their own and outgrew the property. The three brothers bought an adjacent property on the lake, and eventually Murdough’s father took over

The Murdough boys enjoy meals at the kitchen island, where eight can sit comfortably. The top of the island is Pietra Bedonia, a feldspathic sandstone that looks like the granite in the landscape. A steel frame for the house allowed oversized windows; because there is "no window trim, the frame had to be very precise and everything had to fit perfectly," says John Robinson of Wood & Clay, Inc., the project's contractor.





his parents' house. "I have such fond memories of spending time with our grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins," Murdough says. "This has always been a place where family comes together." He remembers all the cousins sleeping in the bunkroom at the adjacent property, which was a wonderful bonding experience. "We had a blast as kids, got in to trouble together and had all sorts of fun. The family culture is so important here."

In 2008, Murdough's parents decided they needed a guesthouse. One of Murdough's three brothers was married, another was engaged and there were four grandchildren. The entire family would spend two weeks at the house in August, and the main house was getting crowded. "Each family had one bedroom, and there was a lot of humanity in one house," he says.

After a few family meetings, the goals for the project emerged. "Fortunately, we all share some fundamental values about this property and place," Murdough says. The family wanted the design of the guesthouse to live up to the beauty of the site and be consistent with the family culture. "We wanted a quiet, modest house that didn't stick out but was of a high quality and able to be enjoyed by future generations."

Murdough, who is the only architect in the family and the only one who lives in the East (Lincoln, Massachusetts, is his home), was tasked with designing the house. "Working with my family and also being the client was very educational," Murdough says. "I got to see first-hand what clients go through, which has given me better perspective as an architect." It also helped that Murdough's wife, Tina, is a trained



Left: With its view of the lake, the children's bunkroom, which sleeps six, feels like it's in a tree-house. A. N. McSheffrey Woodworks in Belmont made the furniture from Western red cedar; the drawers don't have any hardware, and Tom Murdough says, "Andy [McSheffrey] sized everything perfectly."

Below: The children's bathroom has three sinks, two toilets and a large shower stall with two showerheads, so several kids can get cleaned up or ready for bed at the same time.



architect and "helped me see the big picture when the experience started to feel overwhelming."

Murdough had established his firm the year before, in 2007, after working for seven years at Maryann Thompson Architects in Cambridge, which does a lot of residential work on the Cape. "The guesthouse was the first ground-up building my firm designed and was a big step professionally," Murdough says. "I'm especially grateful to my staff, architects Jenny Tjia and Rachel Hampton, who were crucial collaborators."

Planning begins

While the discussion for a guesthouse began in the summer of 2008, actual construction didn't begin until the following summer and needed to be finished by July 4, 2010.

"My brother Jody was getting married and wanted to have his August 7 wedding reception at the lakehouse," Murdough says.

Murdough and his father interviewed several contractors; from what they gleaned from those meetings, in addition to referrals from clients, they decided to hire Wood & Clay of Gilford, who'd built many homes in the Lakes Region. By November 1, 2009, they were finishing up approvals and breaking ground. "Wood & Clay had a fantastic team of tradespeople on board, and were ready to tackle a very challenging schedule and design," Murdough says. "I was very skeptical we could hit our ambitious deadline and build to the quality level we desired, but they ran with our vision and far exceeded my expectations. They are great team players."



Both the master bedroom and the guest bedroom feature desks that were custom-made in solid walnut by A. N. McSheffrey Woodworks. "Someone often has to work while they're at the lake," Tom Murdough says, "And this gives them a quiet place to be."

Design elements

The main purpose of the guesthouse was to give the brothers and their families privacy and more space. To that end, Murdough's design included two bedroom suites, each with dedicated bathrooms and desk areas. "Someone often has to do work while they're at the lake," he says. In the main house, that happened in the twelve- by twelve-foot study, with everyone trying to work together.

For the children, the guesthouse has a bunkroom that sleeps six. More can sleep on the couch. To accommodate older guests, one of the bedrooms is on the ground level, with access off the breezeway.

One thing the guesthouse doesn't have is a dining room—the kitchen island serves as the place to eat. Eight can sit comfortably around it, or ten with "a little nudging. Usually, we eat at the main house in summer," Murdough says, "but in winter, we eat at the guesthouse."

The palette inside is neutral, so as not to compete with nature. On the kitchen counters is Pietra Bedonia, a feldspathic sandstone that looks like the granite in the landscape. Stainless-steel hardware, countertops and stairway railings echo the streamlined and elegant qualities of boat construction, Murdough says. He also likes stainless

steel's reflective quality—"it brings the landscape in," he says.

Another way the guesthouse speaks to place is by its furnishings, which were custom-made by Andy McSheffrey of A. N. McSheffrey Woodworks in Belmont. "I didn't think Adirondack-style furniture was called for in this house, nor was high-end modern," Murdough says. "Like the main house, we aimed for quiet but well-crafted furniture that emphasized the beauty of the materials and construction, but didn't distract from the lake view. Andy made chairs, side tables, beds, an ottoman and a coffee table, and we are thrilled with his work—he is an impeccable craftsman!"

McSheffrey—who studied furniture making at the North Bennet Street School in Boston—used solid walnut for all his pieces. "It's a stable wood and durable, with a beautiful dark color," he says. "Tom has such a passion for design and craftsmanship, and it was a true pleasure working with him."

On the outside, Murdough wanted to differentiate the guesthouse from the main house. "The main house has a deck with great sunset views," he says. "We wanted a complementary experience, and embedding the cabin among the trees gives it a more intimate and wooded environment."

But Murdough also wanted to pay homage to the main house. He did this by using a similar color palette, scale and corresponding geometries, but in some cases used different materials, such as the copper roof and clear cedar-lined interior.

Murdough's top priority was to have the house look like it had been there for a while, which presented challenges to the builder and landscape architect. "The site was tight, given our restrictions for access and the necessity to protect trees," says John Robinson, one of the owners of Wood & Clay, Inc. "Also, part of the house's frame is steel and its measurements had to be very precise, as there is no window trim." The strength of the steel also allowed the frame to span larger openings for expanse of windows, and gives the roof a thinner and lighter expression.

Belknap Landscape Company, Inc. in Gilford took additional measures to protect the trees. Thick layers of wood chips were put down to reduce the impact in work zones, and dedicated paths were created for people and machines to travel on during construction. Trees were harvested from around the property and replanted in strategic locations. "There are twenty-four-foot hemlocks within six feet of the house that are doing well today," says Hayden McLaughlin, owner of Belknap Landscape Company. After construction, Belknap also reforested existing flora, such as ferns; relocated around twenty boulders, each weighing between three and five tons; and moved decayed logs from the woods to other locations around the house, to enhance the natural look of the landscape.

Bringing the outside in

One of the house's outstanding features is its expanses of windows. "There are whole walls of glass coming to a corner and no trim around the windows, so the framing had to be within a fraction of an inch," says Kevin Beland, Robinson's partner at Wood & Clay and project coordinator for the guesthouse. "These were not your standard openings for windows."

Because Murdough wanted oversized windows to prioritize the view and blur the difference between inside and out, he had all the windows custom-made by H. Hirschmann Ltd. in West Rutland, Vermont. "Tom did a fabulous job of making a fluid transition from inside to out," says company owner Rolf Hirschmann. He says one way Murdough

achieved this was subtle, but effective—on the large slider in the living room, the tracks are embedded in the sill so they are flush with the floor and neither stepped on nor seen. "Tom sets himself apart with these details," Hirschmann says.



To reduce heat loss in winter, Murdough specified glass for the windows that's high efficiency and rated for low-emissivity (low-E). "The first time we used the guesthouse in winter, it was fifteen degrees below zero outside with the wind chill, but it was so comfortable inside that the kids were just in their PJs."

Mission accomplished

This summer, when the extended Murdough family gathers at Squam Lake, there will be nineteen people, including nine grandchildren. "My boys, nephews and nieces are the fourth generation to enjoy this property," Murdough says, "and that family tradition is the reason we did what we did with the guesthouse. The decisions we made are an investment beyond our lifetimes." NHH

The guesthouse sits nestled among tall hemlocks and pines. "While we have views of the lake, the house feels embedded in the woods," Murdough says. "The point of being here is being outdoors."

Resources

A. N. McSheffrey Woodworks
608-7427 • mcsheffreywoodworks.com
Belknap Landscape Company, Inc.
528-2798 • belknaplandscape.com
Carlisle Wide Plank Floors
446-3937 • (800) 595-9663 • wideplankflooring.com
H. Hirschmann Ltd. (802) 438-4447 • hhirschmannltd.com
Murdough Design (617) 536-7992 • murdoughdesign.com
Raven Hill Woodworking & Design 536-2261
Wood & Clay, Inc. 524-3128 • woodandclay.com