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What could be more inviting than a lakeside cottage? How about two “cabins” in one open, airy floor plan? Unlike traditional cramped cabins, this Maine retreat wraps live-big amenities in rustic charm.

*Photographer: James Salomon
Illustrator: Carson Ode
Architect: James A. Sterling,
AIA; James Sterling Architect
Stylist: Isabel Smiles*

Topped with its own pitched roof, this bumped-out “window box” is Barbara Schneider’s favorite reading spot because, no matter what the weather is outside, it’s always a cozy in-the-woods seat. The little bay’s three tall, skinny windows also capture more through-the-trees sunlight for the living room.



Perfectly Paired

BY SHARON L. NOVOTNE



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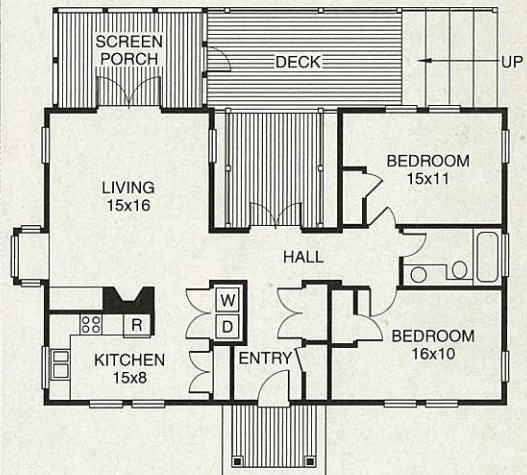


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hen Bob and Barbara Schneider and their son, Jackson, aren't cross-country skiing, they're snowshoeing. When they're not fishing, they're waterskiing or tubing.

That's why this outdoorsy family moved to Maine, after all, to enjoy the lakes and woods. What they really needed, they decided, was a lake home. But what they initially bought, then sold, was a cabin with small, low windows that choked off what little light filtered through the surrounding, dense forest.

"As much as we loved it—and we kept it for six years—we learned what we didn't want in a lake house," Barbara explains. What they learned were important lessons on "siting" a house—orienting the floor plan and windows to capture as much light as possible for as long as possible. "We wanted exposure to the sun. We wanted level ground. We wanted to see the sunset, as opposed to the sunrise, because we lost the sun at two in the afternoon."



Plan number 32122

Bedrooms:	2
Baths:	1
Total Living Area:	1,100 sq. ft.
Construction Cost:	\$100 per sq. ft.
Architect:	James A. Sterling, AIA James Sterling, Architect
To Order Plans:	Page 159
Blueprint Price Code:	B

A simple covered entry between the two halves of the house mimics the twin gables. The bump-out to the left surrounds the living room window seat with natural light.



A spectacular granite-face fireplace soars to the ridgepole in the living room. This living room is sunnier than the typical cabin because of high gable-end windows and the little bay window. Thinking big tames this flowing space, so the relaxed seating, artwork, Shaker-style built-in cabinet, and rug and fabric patterns are all dramatically oversized.

It also had to be a relatively easy weekend commute from their home near Portland, Maine, and it had to fit their future. “We wanted something that would fit us now ... and twenty years from now. And fit our son when he has a family so many years from now,” Barbara says, adding that they plan to stay in Maine when they retire.

On a snowy January day, they fell in love with the fourth home they viewed: a two-in-one cabin with high-volume living spaces, lofty sun-catching windows, lake views through the trees, and a floor plan that offers public and private sides. Fourteen-year-old Jackson fell in love, too, that day—with snowmobiles as he watched them skittering across the lake. He’s been saving up for one ever since.

“We wanted to be able to make wonderful memories right away. We didn’t want to have to build,” Barbara recalls. “There’s a sense that people feel about this place ... It has a sense of magic to it, just a timelessness. We can go up for just an hour to check things, and by the time we come home, we feel like we’ve been in another world. It’s just so calming.”

Part of this timeless feeling comes from the regional design touches that Portland architect James Sterling, AIA, used in the 1,100-square-foot home. His original clients for the cottage wanted an exterior that would recall the looks of a traditional Maine “camp”—simple, one-room cabins in the woods offering basic shelter from cold in the winter and mosquitoes in the summer. A family misfortune, however, kept the original owners from enjoying what they had helped create.

A central entryway leads to a courtyard deck that’s a staging area for outdoor activities and entertaining, and the two “cabins,” situated on either side of this connector, are each 16×28 feet.

Nobody uses the entry on an everyday basis because there’s ample access on the lake side. The simple entry opposite the lakeside is just that, an entry but not the “front door.” Sterling designed it so “you can come in and drop your luggage and keep going straight through” to the real attractions—the deck, the old-fashioned screen porch, and the woods with paths leading down to the lake, beach, and boat dock.

The deck railing that lends texture and

The L-shape kitchen’s wrap of birch cabinetry, *below*, begins on the flip side of the living room’s fireplace/storage wall. With high-efficiency appliances, a casual dining spot and, opposite the sink, enclosed storage for the pantry and a washer and dryer, this small kitchen doesn’t compromise on function.



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On the home's private side, both bedrooms mirror the volume, high ceilings, and gable-end awning windows of the public spaces. In its carpeting, artwork, painted chest, and crisp plaid linens, this bedroom *above* warms up with a palette of deep blues against the white-and-pickled-wood backdrop.

formality to outdoor living areas has weather-hardy detailing. A rounded handrail and pitched-top posts—mimicking the roof angle—spill snow and water and prevent ice, pine needles, and leaves from filling crevices. “Good, detailed railings can last a long time, but poorly detailed railings, especially if they’re in the woods, can rot out,” Sterling explains.

Inland Maine weather and regional style influenced the four-season home’s design. The steeply pitched roof sheds heavy, wet snow, and has deep, protective overhangs.

What appear as two cabins on the outside are two specialized spaces inside. On one side are private spaces in the form of two bedrooms and a bath. “Then, with a healthy separation, you have the more public space, which is the living room and kitchen,” Sterling explains.

“The interior walls are nonstructural. You could take all the walls out inside the cabins, and you’d have just one space,” Sterling says. The ridge beam carries the load of the roof all the way across and down the rafters to the walls, creating, on the public side, a living room and kitchen with a dramatic granite-face fireplace that soars through the vaulted ceiling.

To overcome tall trees and wide setbacks that made it impossible to place a house on or near the water, Sterling turned the home slightly on the lot to give it glimpses of the lake through “view slots” in the forest. It’s set about 100 yards from the shoreline. As they were excavating for the poured-concrete foundation

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Cabin Customizing

A small footprint and a flexible floor plan make the Schneiders' lakeside getaway definitely a go-anywhere home that's easy to adapt to different sites, regions, lifestyles, and even family sizes.

"You can take the pieces apart and reassemble them in different ways," says Portland architect James Sterling, AIA, who designed the home. "A lot of people like this house. They are really drawn to it. They say it's the best small house they've ever seen." The appeal, he adds, stems in part from the home's "strong sense of enclosure and strong sense of being a little cabin in the woods."

His suggestions for customizing the home include:

- Changing the way it connects to the ground. The Schneiders' home has a full basement, but it could be built on posts, on a slab, and "probably on the side of a mountain because it has that flexibility to it," he says.
- Varying the interior connector: the entry hall and the outdoor courtyard deck. The two sides of the home could be slightly offset. "You might put in steps," Sterling explains. "For example, one cabin might drop a foot or two, so you might have a connector that steps down. Or the cabins could move, wiggle this way or that and turn." The entry and courtyard deck could also be enlarged, spreading the two sides farther apart and making a grander entryway.
- Replication. "You could flip [the plan] and probably do two more [cabins] on the back side. You might enter and have two to the left and two to the right, or go straight ahead and perhaps do two more," Sterling says. For example, on a peninsula, "You might have two [cabins] facing opposite directions. You might have four little cabins."

and the stakes were in, Sterling recalls, "we actually shifted the building another ten degrees. We cranked it a little bit south of west. We wanted a little bit more sunlight in certain spaces, and also it made the view just a little bit better."

High ceilings and custom-made awning windows set high in the gables keep the home comfortable in the summer. "Up in the lakes area it can get hot and very muggy. Both of the big square windows at either end of the gables open up to get as much air circulation as possible," Sterling explains. "It's just beautiful because you get all that light coming down and filtering through those big gable-end windows and splashing around on white walls."

From the maple flooring to new-but-nostalgic furnishings like this spindle bed and the slat-back rocking chair, rich natural woods fit the family's vision of an easy-going getaway below. The two bedrooms are separated by the bath for more privacy.





More than a retreat from mosquitoes, the home's screen porch *above* is designed for old-fashioned comfort. It extends indoor and outdoor space by opening to the living room and the deck. Woodwork is finished with a clear preservative and the same opaque green stain used on the exterior of the cabin.

The home has oil-fired, forced-air heat to supplement the Rumford-style fireplace in the living room, and it can be air-conditioned.

Barbara says the home feels roomy because the ingenious design emphasizes light and keeps necessities, like storage, compact yet efficient. White walls and white cedar ceilings pickled with a white semitransparent stain visually expand spaces. "The color that you bring to it is with the furniture you put in and the artwork you put in," Barbara says. "What we want to try and do with the walls is get artwork now as we travel."

Because the outdoors is the focus of everyday living, Portland interior designer Isabel Smiles picked furnishings in water and forest hues to go with natural and painted woods. "It's comfortable and welcoming. It's an action-oriented house, so nothing is too precious. You wouldn't care if the wet dogs came in," she says.

Among the family's favorite architectural features are the granite fireplace—"just gorgeous," Barbara says—the living room's built-in Shaker-style cabinet that's both library and entertainment center, and the south-facing "window box" bay. Sterling punched out the bay so people actually feel like they're sitting outside. "You get a good dosage of sun there.



It's a nice place to sit on a sunny afternoon in wintertime as well as summer," he says.

The Schneiders love to barbecue and picnic, but there's a movable feast of casual dining options indoors, too. The little kitchen makes room for a bistro table and chairs, and the screen porch has a drop-leaf table for small buffets and snacks. Leggy tile-top coffee and side tables in the living room pull up for cozy fireside meals. Barbara says the compact kitchen is deceptively hardworking: "It's very functional, very simple, very straight-to-the-point. You don't really need any more than what's in the kitchen."

To anchor the new home to its woody setting, builders preserved stands of tall oaks and maples, carved some pathways through the trees and blueberry bushes, and added shade-loving plants to the landscape. "We have multiple varieties of hostas, and it's just an incredible sight," Barbara says of the maintenance-free landscape. "In fall, it's absolutely unbelievable."

Since the Schneiders have settled into their

new home, they've come to treasure the easy pace of lake life and living near the small town just across the lake. They've made the acquaintance of a pair of loons that stops by regularly. Jackson has discovered that the screen porch is a great place for sleep-overs where he and his friends can spread out their sleeping bags. And he and his dad are contemplating a try at ice fishing.

Just as important is the lively community near this cabin. "It has a town center, it has a town library, it has a core of people who live there year-round," Barbara says. "We can see being a part of that when we retire. We try and use local craftsmen and local people whenever we can because we believe in giving back to the community." □

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In this updated Maine cabin *right*, outdoor living spaces such as an old-fashioned screen porch and a courtyard deck focus all the action on the lake. On the exterior, custom stains create the honey hue on Eastern white cedar shingles, and the forest green on red cedar clapboards and trim.