

Dwell+ Exclusive

This Scandinavian-Inspired Retreat in Maine Updates the Owner's Childhood Cabin at a New Location

In Englishman Bay, where his relatives have summered since the 19th century, a musician builds an idyllic hideaway for his family and their three parrots.

Text by
Debra Spark

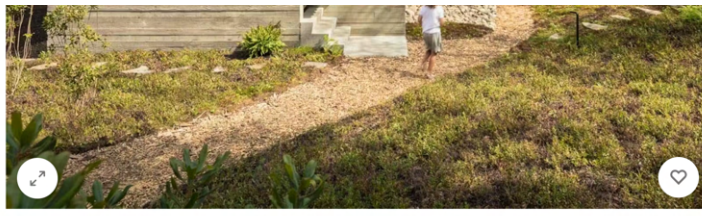


View 15 Photos



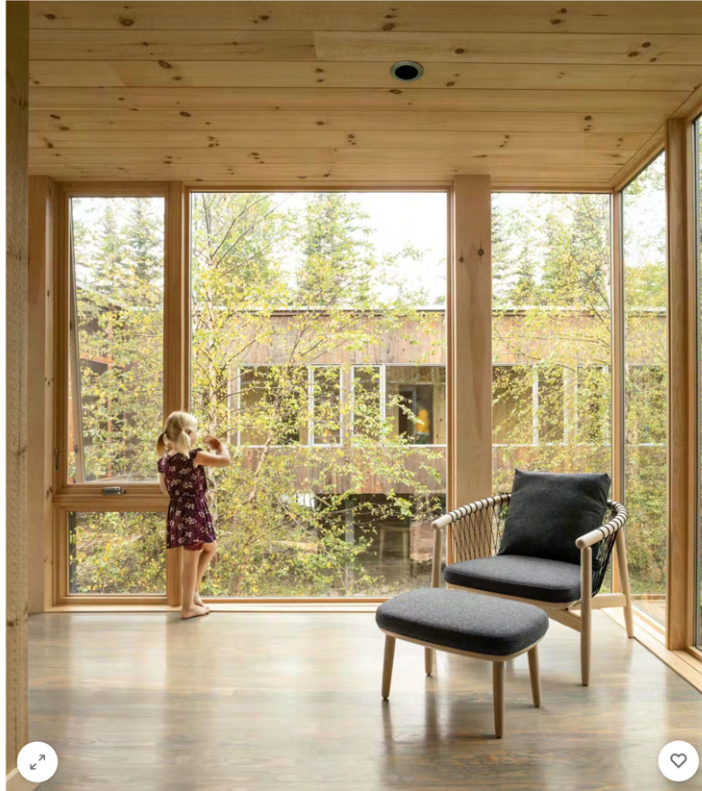
"When I was growing up, we went to a little log cabin in Maine," says a musician now based in Colorado. "It sounds romantic, but it really was three boys stuck in a one-room cabin with a loft. Maine can be rainy, foggy, and dreary. We'd go a little stir crazy." Like many childhood summers, his was a mix of boredom and adventure. Part of the romance was his family's deep roots in the isolated area of Englishman Bay, a two-hour drive east of the bustling seaside community of Bar Harbor. His father had been born in the cabin, and relatives had been summering in the region since the 1880s. And, on sunny days, Maine was fun. He and his brothers played in the woods and clambered over the rocks by the ocean. All the same, he and his brothers were ready to go home at summer's end.





Englishman Bay Retreat resides on a plot of land next door to the homeowner's parents' property; he remembers traversing it as a child to get to the pebbled beach. Clad in hardy local hemlock and raised on galvanized steel piers with board-formed concrete wrapping the ground floor's mechanical systems, the residence is designed to endure through the ages.

Photo: Trent Bell

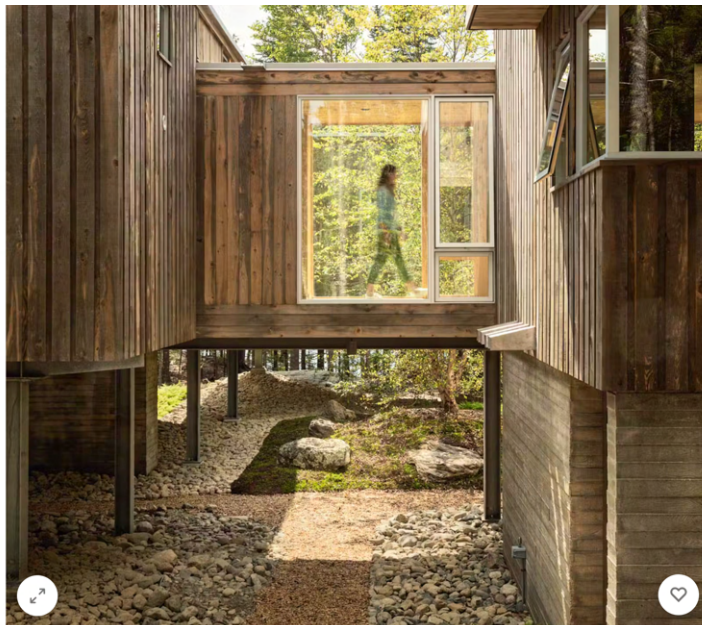


A Crosshatch Chair, designed by Eeos for Geiger from Herman Miller, anchors a glass-wrapped reading nook.

Photo: Trent Bell

Now he, his wife, and their two daughters still visit Englishman Bay, but their vacation home is decidedly more stylish. In late 2015, they asked Whitten Architects and Nate Holyoke Builders (in Portland and Holden, respectively) for a durable, minimalist home, simultaneously rustic and Scandinavian, that would sit lightly on the land and make use of local materials whenever possible. (They knew Whitten and Holyoke's work because the team had built a nearby Norwegian-inspired home for the musician's cousin.) Principal architect Russ Tyson translated the family's request into a striking, partially transparent house with simple geometries. The U-shaped dwelling comprises three primary forms: a three-story entry tower with a roof deck, a rectangular bedroom wing, and a dramatic, three-season glassed-in porch—organized around a double-sided concrete chimney—that serves as a great room.





A glass bridge leads from the entry tower to the kitchen.

Photo: Trent Bell

The entry tower is the most complex of the volumes, as it includes a raised, ground-floor entrance hall, a second-floor powder room with a glass bridge that leads to the kitchen, a third-floor office, and a rooftop observation deck. The bedroom wing consists of a master and two children's bedrooms off a single hallway with a horizontal ribbon of windows. The three-season porch and adjacent kitchen link the bedroom wing and tower.



In the kitchen, Cambria countertops in Devon matte are paired with flat-panel, Baltic birch plywood cabinets and island. The seats, purchased from Etsy, are spray-painted steel stools from Wayfair; the Icelandic sheepskin accents are actually unstuffed pillowcases.

Photo: Trent Bell





Carl Hansen & Søn Wishbone Chairs by Hans J. Wegner surround a George Oliver Hesson Dining Table in the breakfast nook. The rug is from The Rug Company.

Photo: Trent Bell

Clad in relatively rot-resistant local hemlock and making use of Douglas fir for the porch framing, the house is raised up on steel columns. The height maximizes water views and allows one to venture under the house. Horizontal steel beams support the undercarriage of the home, and board-formed concrete appears under each section—at the entry stairs (where the concrete also hides the mechanicals), at the base of the porch chimney, and around the bedroom wing's plumbing.



The office, cantilevered over the trees, can also double as a playroom for the children. "I wanted a place that they would be excited to go to," says the homeowner, "creating a fun, whimsical house that would appeal to them 20 years down the road." A Mad Black Executive Chair from CB2 looks out at the trees.

Photo: Trent Bell



The Saloma Daybed from Westminster Teak, '60s-era Danish stools, and a colorful rug by Angela Adams round out the office. The steel ladder, created by blacksmith Tim Greene at Standfast Works Forge, leads to the rooftop deck.

Photo: Trent Bell

The homeowners asked for balconies to be cantilevered toward the water to suggest the prow of a boat and for a roof hatch at the top of the staircase leading to the rooftop deck. "It should feel like climbing out of an old wooden ship to the top deck," the husband told the architects.



A concrete hearth by Harkins Masonry, which can also act as seating, has a monumental presence in the three-season porch, which holds the dining and living areas. Matthew Hilton's Cross Extension Table for Case from Design Within Reach is paired with black ash Johansson J64 Chairs by Ejvind A Johansson for Frederica Furniture.

Photo: Trent Bell

Photo Categories: dining room, ceiling lighting, wood burning fireplace, light hardwood floors, table, two-sided fireplace, chair



Not only does the slanted roof allow for the parrots to fly around, but it also brings in light from one side to counteract the potential glare of water on the other. A Kelston 95" Sofa by Matthew Hilton for Case sits opposite a white Vik Chair by Stewart-Schafer featuring Icelandic sheepskin.

Photo: Trent Bell

As built, the house is brushed by surrounding foliage. The interior ceilings and walls are mostly Eastern white pine, the floor is a gray-stained Southern yellow pine, and the flat-panel kitchen cabinets and island are Baltic birch plywood. Given all this, the operating metaphor for the house as a whole is actually less ship than tree house. Principal architect Russ Tyson recalled *The Swiss Family Robinson* when he first heard the clients' hopes for the home, all the more so when he later realized that animals—specifically, the family's three voluble parrots—were "a surprisingly big part of the program," as Tyson puts it. To accommodate the birds' flight, the porch's sloped ceiling rises to 11 feet at its highest point. Meanwhile, horizontal surfaces were largely eliminated to prevent the birds from perching where they were not wanted.





The child's bedroom features a Chilton bedframe, Schoolhouse Electric bed linens, and an Angela Adams rug. The table and chair are from Blu Dot.

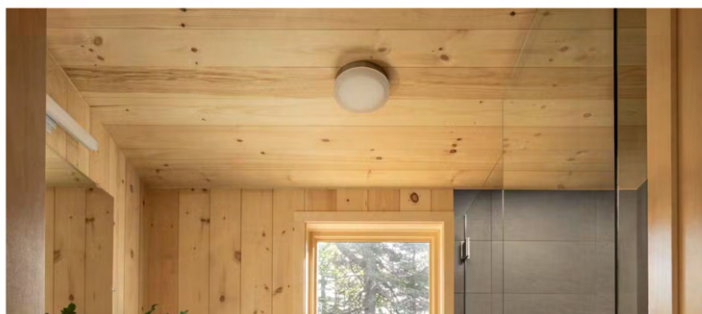
Photo: Trent Bell



A narrow corridor connects a row of bedrooms, bathrooms, and laundry.

Photo: Trent Bell

Interior designer Krista Stokes took her cues from the architecture and furnished sparsely, using a neutral palette with occasional jewel tones (as for the bed linens). She sourced modern furniture from Design Within Reach and added signature contemporary pieces like a steel chair covered in sheepskin for the living room. "I learned so much about restraint from the clients," says Stokes. "Everyone has a basket on my desk. For these clients, I had a postcard with a quote from Thoreau on their basket that read, 'My greatest skill has been to want but little.'"





Trust Titanium porcelain tiles by AKDO partially clad the master bathroom.

Photo: Trent Bell

Project architect Tom Lane thinks not of a metaphor but of architectural history when he describes the house, which quite consciously references Le Corbusier's famed Villa Savoye, itself an exemplar of the "five points" of Le Corbusier's architecture manifesto: supporting columns, a free internal plan, a free facade, a roof garden, and horizontal windows, all of which the Englishman Bay house has, although its roof is for star-gazing rather than vegetation. Paths cut around but also below the house, where Atlantic Landscaping placed round river stones, as well as moss, ferns, lowbush blueberry, and other native plants.



"The homeowner describing that he loved the mossy, fern understory brought the idea to my mind to be up in the trees," says architect Russ Tyson.

Photo: Trent Bell

Now, even when the weather doesn't cooperate, vacations are fun. "There are numerous little nooks for reading, and everyone has their own bedroom to retreat to if they wish," says the musician. "Whether playing guitar, doing puzzles, playing imaginary games, or just watching the ocean crash on the rocks outside through the many bright windows, the whole family has plenty of space."



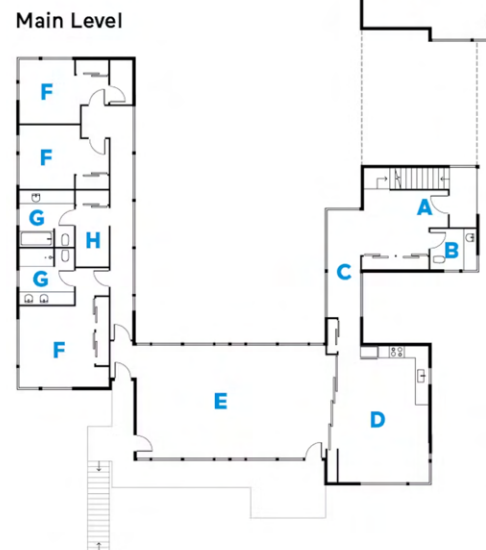
Over time, the landscape will fill in, becoming a seamless blend running underneath the house.

Photo: Trent Bell

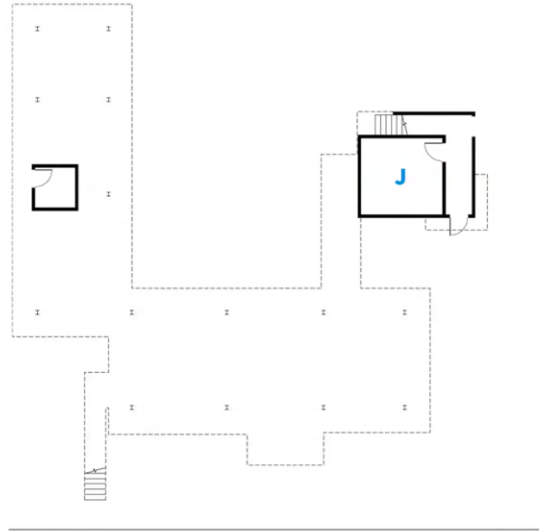
Englishman Bay Retreat N ↗

ARCHITECT **Whitten Architects** LOCATION **Downeast Maine**

- A Entrance
- B Powder Room
- C Bridge
- D Kitchen
- E Porch
- F Bedroom
- G Bathroom
- H Laundry
- I Office
- J Mechanical Room



Lower Level



Related Reading: [A Shingled Forest Retreat Is Fit For the Changing Seasons](#)

Project Credits:

Architect: [Whitten Architects / @whittenarchitects](#)

Builder: [Nate Holyoke Builders](#)

Structural Engineer: [Albert Putnam Associates](#)

Landscape Design: [Atlantic Landscape Construction](#)

Lighting Design: [Whitten Architects](#)

Interior Design: [Krista Stokes](#)

Published
August 6, 2019

Topics
[Home Tours](#) [Dwell+ Exclusive](#)



Save

Responses (3)

More Exclusives



Construction Diary: The Founder of a Cabin Rental Company Builds a Fire Island Retreat of His Own



She Grew Up in a Spot-On Replica of a Maryland Lighthouse. Now, She's Giving It Her Own Shine



Before & After: Elegant Arches and Curves Shape Up a Fusty Paris Flat



Nobody Does a Beach House Quite Like the Danes



This Leafy-Green Bangalore Home Is Made From Construction Debris

Latest Articles



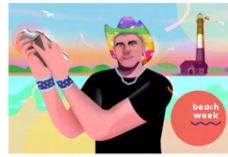
A Home Tied to L.A. History Could Be Demolished—and People Are Upset



Near Vancouver, an Island Home Packed With Scandinavian Charm Asks \$1.6M



She Grew Up in a Spot-On Replica of a Maryland Lighthouse. Now, She's Giving It Her Own Shine



A Summer in Fire Island—Spent Working, Not Shacking Up



Sunny Yellow Doors at This Spanish Retreat Match the Flowers That Surround It

dwell



The Dwell House Is a Modern Prefab ADU Delivered to Your Backyard

[Learn More ↗](#)

ABOUT

- [About](#)
- [Contact Us](#)
- [FAQ](#)
- [Careers](#)
- [Advertise](#)
- [Media Kit](#)

SUBSCRIPTIONS

- [Subscribe to Dwell](#)
- [Gift Dwell Magazine](#)
- [Dwell+ Subscription Help](#)
- [Magazine Subscription Help](#)
- [Dwell Wine Club](#)

PROFESSIONALS

- [Post a Project](#)
- [Sell Your Products](#)
- [Contribute to Dwell](#)
- [Promote Your Work](#)

FOLLOW

- [@dwellmagazine on Instagram](#)
- [@dwellmagazine on Pinterest](#)
- [@dwell on Facebook](#)
- [@dwell on Twitter](#)
- [@dwell on Flipboard](#)
- [Dwell RSS](#)