

TEXT BY MEGAN FULWEILER  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JIM WESTPHALEN  
PRODUCED BY KARIN LIDBECK BRENT



In addition to ever-changing water views, the home's breathtaking location captures vistas of the Adirondack Mountains to the west. "It was thrilling to be on this site and a privilege to work on such a special house," says designer Milford Cushman.

Exquisite craftsmanship and casual, yet polished, decor make a Vermont house as special as its glorious lakefront location.



# CHAMPPLAIN TASTES



The California-based owners hadn't anticipated purchasing a retreat in Vermont, particularly one on the tip of a peninsula that points, like the toe of a swimmer testing the water, into majestic Lake Champlain. It was a phone call from dear friends—pals they'd spent many a happy hour visiting on the very same peninsula—that changed everything. "Out of nowhere, they rang to tell us the property next to theirs was available," remembers Jon Ralph.

He and his wife, Patty Gibson, already loved the Vergennes area. They had family in the state whom they yearned to be more involved with and two children who attended a Vermont college. In addition, the tree-studded land was spectacular, with an old camp (the region's term for a summer haven) and a boathouse poised right at the water's edge. The purchase, all agreed, made perfect sense.

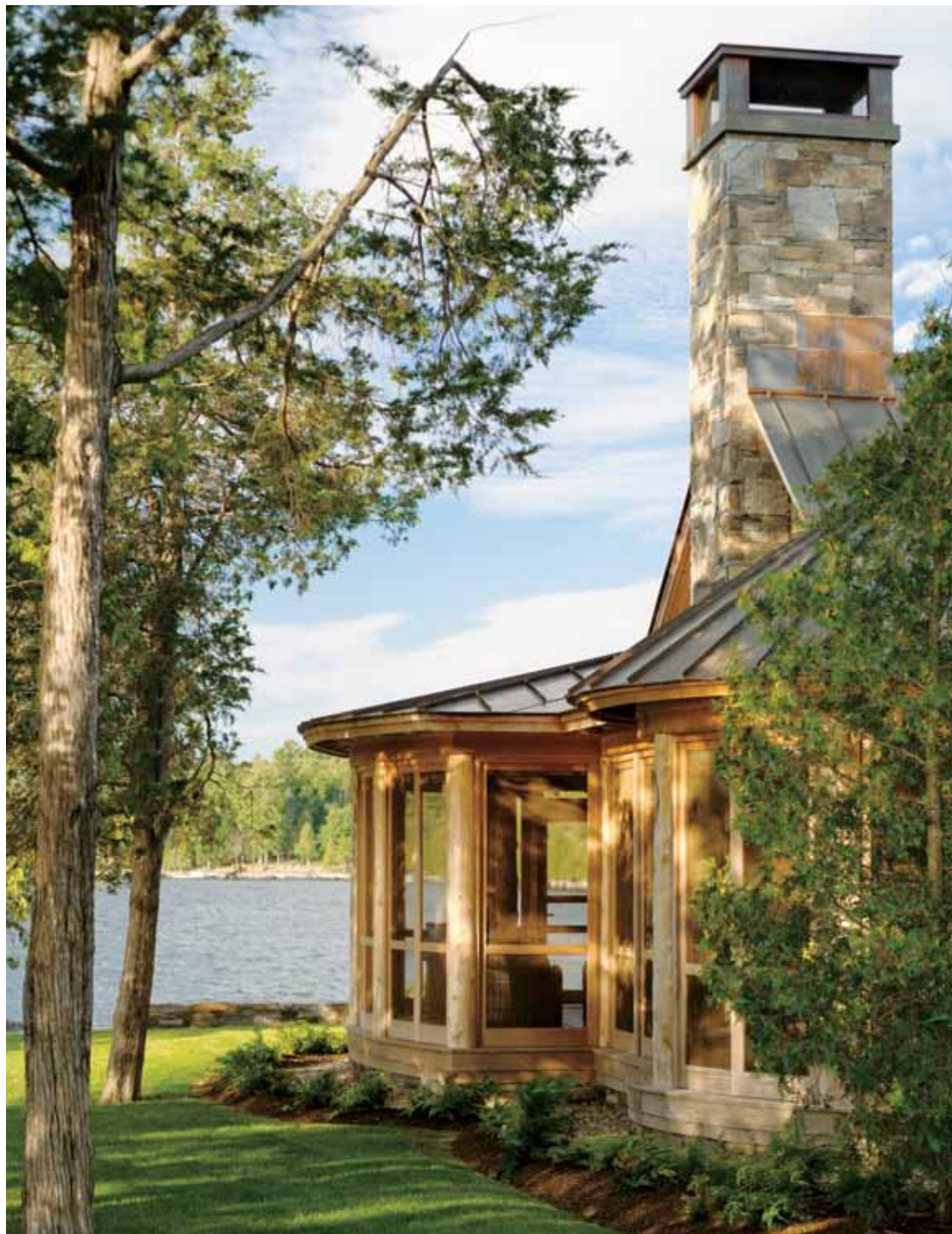
As luck would have it, though, a year later the lake experienced one of the worst floods in 150 years and the structures were swamped. Once again, the couple faced an unforeseen decision: remodel, or erect new buildings in tune with twenty-first-century living.

The couple opted for the latter, recruiting Cushman Design Group, in nearby Stowe. They pictured a well-crafted, comfortable camp with a simple barn-like look. "We wanted the carefree, summer cottage feel but in a fully functional, year-round package," says Ralph. "Cushman helped us develop and crystallize our vision."

Keep in mind, all this had to be accomplished on a tight, sensitive

**ABOVE:** A sky-blue ceiling reinforces the dining area's connection to the outdoors. **RIGHT:** The summery blue of the Moroccan tile backsplash was the starting point for the kitchen's design. The coffered ceiling is an illustration of the home's high-quality craftsmanship. **FACING PAGE:** Milford Cushman designed the two-tiered chandelier made of antique mason jars that hangs from the living room's soaring ceiling.





site in accordance with local ordinances and within the footprints of the preexisting buildings. It was a tall, painstaking order, but builder Peter Welch and designer Milford Cushman, along with project manager Chad Forcier, were spurred on, not stymied, by the challenges. Up rose two handsome structures—an open-plan main house and a multipurpose

boathouse—linked (as yesterday’s buildings had been) by a breezeway. Clad in cedar shingles and topped with copper roofs, the structures harmonize with nature. “The colors blend with the trees

and shoreline and will continue to get better as they age,” explains Welch.

The sunlit main house holds the connected kitchen, living, and dining spaces along with the master suite. There’s also a heavenly screened porch with a fireplace. In fact, the owners have everything they need on the first floor. When the kids arrive, they claim bedrooms on the second level. Cinematic views unfold in several directions wherever you are.

The boathouse is what Cushman calls, “the spot where you can hang out in a wet bathing suit.” There’s a bath, a laundry, a Ping-Pong table, and a wood stove to take the chill off. There’s also a sleeping loft where, if the nearby guest cottage is full, kids can crash for

The home’s handsome stonework speaks to the rocky shore and helps connect the house to its surroundings. Cedar shingles and copper roofs further harmonize with nature. **FACING PAGE:** The generous screened porch, a favorite spot for dining, also holds sitting areas, a fireplace, and a built-in grill.

#### PROJECT TEAM

**ARCHITECTURAL AND LANDSCAPE DESIGN:** Milford Cushman and Chad Forcier, Cushman Design Group  
**INTERIOR DESIGN:** Monica Conroy Bodell, MCID  
**GENERAL CONTRACTOR:** Peter Welch, P J Welch Corporation



 Clad in cedar shingles and topped with copper roofs, the structures harmonize with nature. “The colors blend with the trees and shoreline and will continue to get better as they age,” says Welch.



the night. As intended, the interior looks barn-like with its exposed framing, but in reality it's a completely finished, winterized space. Built to withstand the elements, both structures exceed the state's high standards for energy efficiency.

Of course, the decor had to complement the architecture, and Manhattan Beach, California, interior designer Monica Conroy Bodell knew the couple's tastes better than anyone. Bodell had worked with

the owners before and is also a trusted friend. Still, she is quick to insist that the home's appeal really stems from Gibson, who from the beginning knew what direction they should take. “Patty wanted a clean but not modern aesthetic,” Bodell says. The focus was on the home's high-quality craftsmanship, which, according to the designer and her clients, is what every Vermonter who worked on the house brought to bear. From millwork to masonry,

“everyone took care in the execution, and it shows,” agrees Ralph.

Using Gibson's inspiration file as their jumping-off point, the designer and her clients selected for the kitchen's backsplash a hand-glazed Moroccan tile in a rich blue that evokes the summer sky. Equally blue ceilings in the kitchen and dining area brilliantly define the spaces, showcasing the changes in ceiling heights and drawing attention to the architectural detailing.



A sturdy new dock with steel railings furthers the homeowners' bond with the lake and often welcomes friends who arrive by boat. Its low-key utilitarian look ties in with the home's shingles and copper roof, too. “All these materials will organically do what they do. We're looking forward to it,” says owner Jon Ralph.



 The boathouse is “the spot where you can hang out in a wet bathing suit,” says Cushman.

The color blue flows throughout the house, in fabrics, rugs, paintings (Gibson discovered the beguiling cow that hangs above the fireplace), and even in the lighting. Much to everyone’s delight, Cushman volunteered to design the home’s fixtures and delivered two remarkable indoor creations. “I imagined lighting the living space with something a little transparent that would speak to the airy quality of the vertical room,” he says. “Something with a little sparkle.”

The tony two-tiered chandelier he devised of antique blue mason jars does just that. The dining area’s stunning fixture (another of his designs, this one forged from two fifty-gallon drums cut vertically to expand the dimensions) is also dramatic. “It’s a bit of a surprise,” Cushman admits modestly.

In the couple’s sleeping quarters, Schumacher’s French-blue toile wallpaper is the unexpected element. “It was an afterthought,” says Gibson. “The room needed some pizzazz and I

love wallpaper.” Indeed, the pretty pattern’s contrast with the rusticity of the outdoors steps up interest and enhances the feeling of refuge. Creamy-hued roman shades, another unanticipated note of lakeside elegance, provide nighttime privacy and cozy up the nest when temperatures plunge and the lake ices over.

For the younger crowd, the boathouse, with its array of bright colors, is the most popular destination. There’s plenty of seating to go around and all of it—playful Union Jack chairs by Timothy Oulton included—is long-wearing. Doors open wide, linking the fun space to the surroundings without sacrificing any comfort-giving amenities. Thanks to the forgiving cement floor, however, cars or boats can park here, too. It’s a lesson in smart planning and foresight, but then that could be said of this entire project.

Ever mindful of the glorious setting, the sensitive owners and their talented team have forged a beautiful, family-accommodating home. Like the great camps of a century ago, it does the lake proud. •

**RESOURCES** For more information about this home, see page 180.



**TOP, LEFT:** The boathouse wears classic dark-green trim. **TOP, RIGHT:** Kayaks are left on the beach for impromptu voyages. **FACING PAGE:** Timber and stick framing gives the boathouse its barn-like look and feel. The reproduction trunk serving as a coffee table references the sort of luggage summer people toted to the lake in days of old.