

THE MAGAZINE *of* SPLENDID HOMES *and* GARDENS • MARCH/APRIL 2014

# DESIGN

NEW ENGLAND



LOCATION, LOCATION

# features



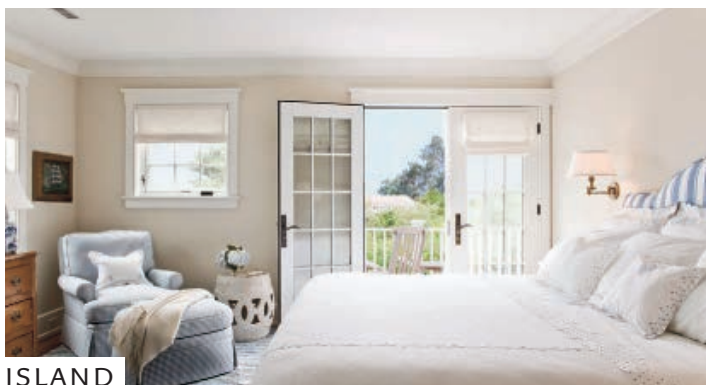
OCEAN



CITY



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ISLAND



LAKE

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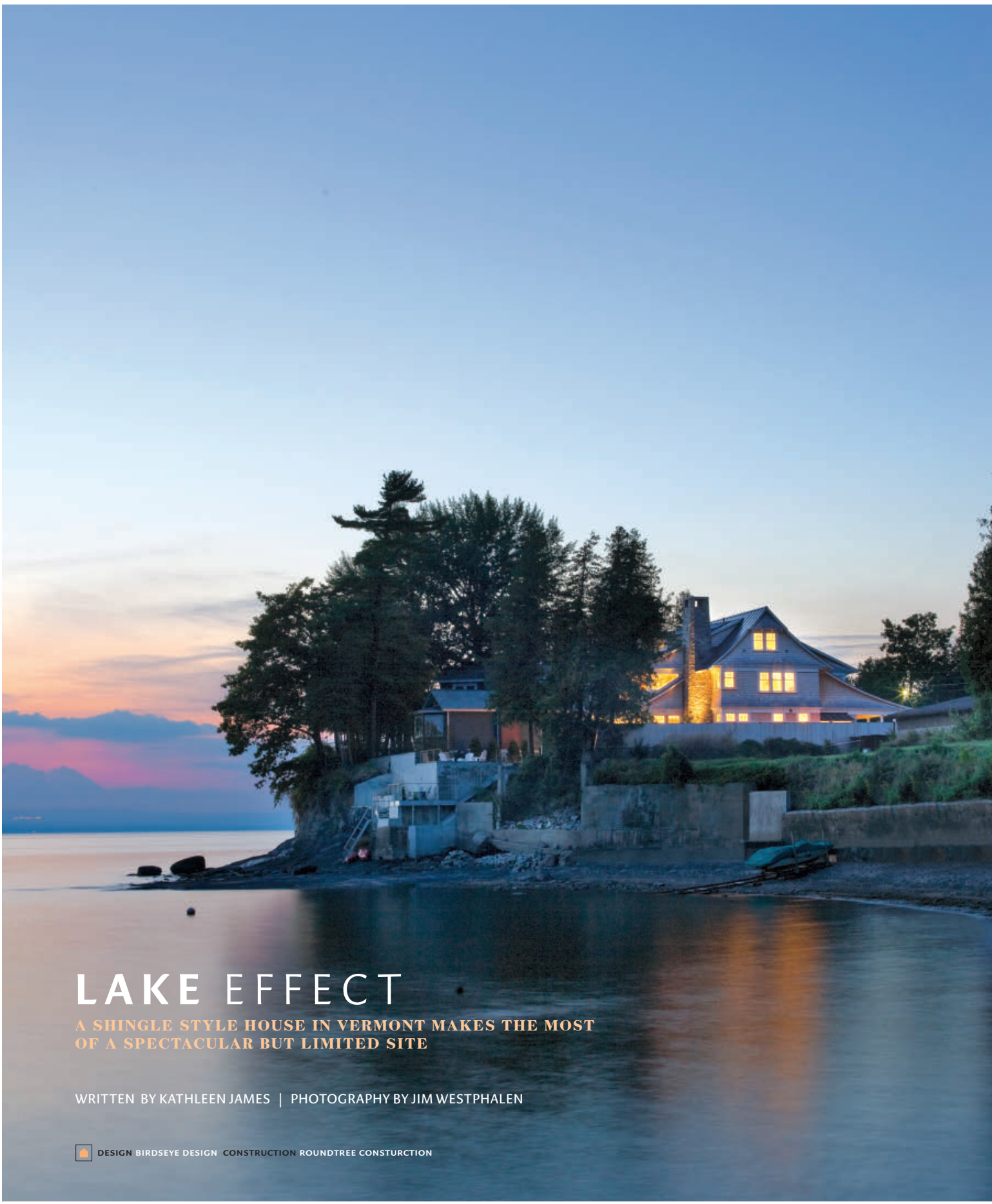
## SLIDE SHOW

**FIND OUT HOW** mentors make a difference. Click through pictures and bios of our past Mentors in Design. Then nominate a mentor (Page 162) for the 2014 Mentor of the Year.



## SLIDE SHOW

**CLICK THROUGH THE** stunning restaurants, country clubs, and private residences that interior designer Judd Brown, this issue's House Guest (Page 112), has designed around the country.



# LAKE EFFECT

A SHINGLE STYLE HOUSE IN VERMONT MAKES THE MOST OF A SPECTACULAR BUT LIMITED SITE

WRITTEN BY KATHLEEN JAMES | PHOTOGRAPHY BY JIM WESTPHALEN

 DESIGN BIRDSEYE DESIGN CONSTRUCTION ROUNDTREE CONSTRUCTION

IN THE LIVING room, floor-to-ceiling windows frame the westward view across Lake Champlain to the Adirondack Mountains. The house is carefully sited (FACING PAGE) on a long, narrow lot to take maximum advantage of its lakeside location. A retaining wall stabilizes the steep slope.



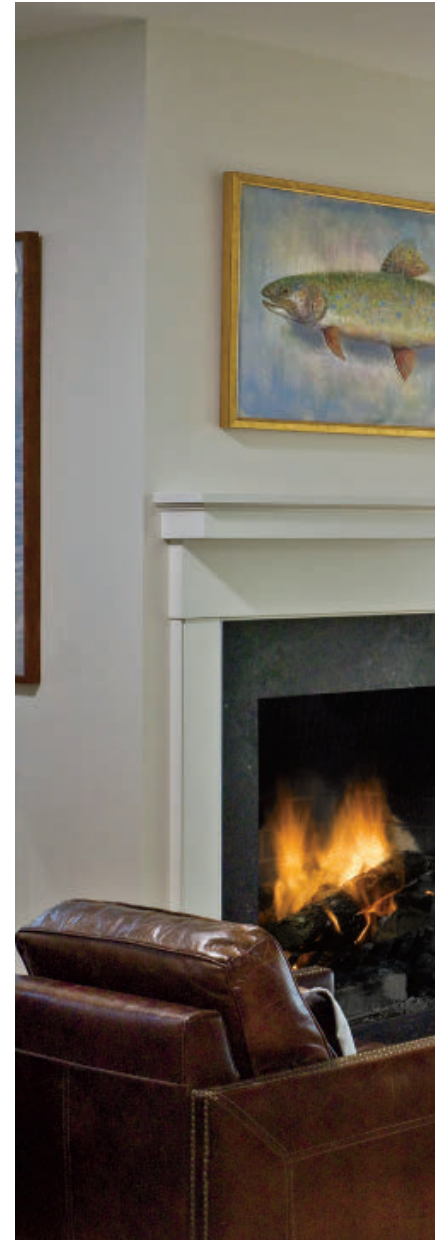
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his project was like a Rubik’s cube,” says Dan Morris of Roundtree Construction, a custom-home building firm in New Haven, Vermont. “It’s a skinny lot in a dense neighborhood, with houses close by on either side. Yet Bonnie wanted to create a space that felt private, with wide-open views across the lake.”

Bonnie is Bonnie Ferro, who in 2009 hired the Roundtree team to build a Shingle Style house on Lake Champlain. Several years earlier, she and her partner, John Draper, had purchased a seasonal cottage perched on a 20-foot cliff on the lake’s eastern shore. Located just five miles north of their year-round house in Burlington, the couple eventually decided to relocate and replace the little weekend house with one that met their full-time needs. “My biggest goal was to keep the feeling of the original summer cottage,” says Ferro. “I wanted to see the lake from almost every room.” She also wanted plenty of space — four bedrooms to accommodate weekend guests and her two grown children. This posed a siting challenge, because the lot is long (260 feet) but very narrow (54 feet).

Ferro, who grew up on Long Island, is a self-proclaimed “water person.” So when she hired Birdseye Design in Richmond, Vermont, to design her new home, she knew exactly what she wanted: a classic New England-style beach house. She also had a folder crammed with photos ripped from shelter magazines that expressed her architectural vision.

Birdseye’s solution was a building that’s a bit of an optical illusion. Seen from the road, the profile looks



THE GABLE ROOF (LEFT) has curved 35-foot rafters and spacious shed dormers on two sides, creating 3,500 square feet of living space inside “a house that doesn’t look that big,” says Ric SantaMaria of Roundtree Construction.



**THE LIVING ROOM (ABOVE)** is airy and expansive, with artwork that advances the lakeside theme. The fireplace hearth and surround are Champlain Black marble, embedded with the intricate swirls of fossilized prehistoric sea life.

low and square. But the house is actually a rectangle that stretches toward the lake, with 3,500 square feet of living space under a gable roof, with 35-foot curved rafters and shed dormers on two sides. “The roof system is massive,” says Ric SantaMaria, a partner at Roundtree. “Because the rafters are so long, you’ve got a lot of space inside a house that doesn’t look that big.” The finished structure is 57 feet deep and 42 feet wide leaving about 6 feet of space — just enough room for a walkway — between the house and the lot line on either side.

Clad in cedar shingles with turn-of-the-century details, the exterior evokes the New England seashore. Three covered porches and an outdoor shower advance the beach-cottage theme, as does

the landscape plan developed by Jeffrey Hodgson, a partner at Wagner Hodgson Landscape Architecture in Burlington. After Roundtree’s building team stabilized the eroded cliff with a new retaining wall, Hodgson designed a multilevel lakeside space with a low stone wall and cable railing, a sunken blue-stone terrace, and a small deck halfway down the cliff. From the deck, a removable stepladder provides access to the rocky shoreline. “We took great care not to create anything that would distract from the amazing view,” says Hodgson. “And it worked: Your eyes go straight to the lake.”

Inside, the first floor feels airy, light, and expansive. A foyer leads from the front door to the open kitchen, dining area, and living room, where floor-



THE OPEN KITCHEN and dining area (ABOVE) are ideal for entertaining. For the island countertop, the owners selected a durable Atlantic black granite that matches the Champlain Black fireplace hearth. Roundtree Construction designed a Shaker-style stair railing (BELOW, LEFT) with tapered painted balusters, cherry-wood rails, and custom-turned newel posts. At the top of the staircase (BELOW, RIGHT), the second floor offers a cozy seating area with built-in bookshelves. The soaking tub in the master bathroom (FACING PAGE) is set under windows with lake views.





DESIGN DECISION ***Classic Rock***

In keeping with Bonnie Ferro's beachside theme, she and partner John Draper gathered smooth rocks from the Lake Champlain shoreline to use for the bathroom shower floor and as knobs for the bathroom cabinets and drawers. Ferro took the rocks, which are dark slate with bands of white quartz, to Close to Home, a decorative bath and hardware showroom in South Burlington, Vermont, to have them attached to hardware for the cabinetry. The showroom shipped the rocks to Marie Locke, an artist in South Portland, Maine, who affixed each rock with industrial epoxy to a custom-designed, nickel-plated

aluminum base. (Locke has a decorative-painting business, Ralff & Sons, and she also produces her own line of handmade beach-rock cabinet knobs.)



Ferro worked closely with Roundtree Construction's project manager Ric SantaMaria to select blocks of Champlain Black marble for the fireplace hearth and facing. This local marble is a sedimentary limestone that contains swirls of fossilized sea life. Formed 450 million years ago as the bed of an inland sea, it is also nicknamed Radio Black, since it was used to build the lobby of New York City's Radio City Music Hall.





to-ceiling windows showcase the view of Lake Champlain and the Adirondack Mountains beyond. Walls painted linen white are punctuated with art — watercolors, oils, and pastels depicting seaside scenes. Even the fireplace is thematic, with a hearth made of local Champlain Black marble.

Tucked into the back corners of the first floor are a mudroom, a walk-in pantry, and an office nook for Ferro, who works as the executive director of a Montpelier-based nonprofit. Stairs off the pantry lead to a full basement that’s used for much-needed storage. Because the house occupies every square inch of the property’s permitted building space, Ferro and Draper had to forgo a garage, so kayaks, bikes, and lawn furniture are all stacked neatly in the cellar.

The second floor is intimate, with a bookshelf-lined seating area at the top of the stairs and two small bedrooms for kids or guests. Beyond the seating area is the master suite, which is efficient and functional while offering some luxuries that Ferro had requested, including a walk-in closet, a sitting area with a gas fireplace, a bathroom with a big soaking tub, and a covered porch off the bedroom.

The third floor, what the builders call a “found space” created by the steep upward curve of the roof rafters, is an open room that has a

double bed, a flat-screen TV, and a couch. While the upper levels are cozy and appealing, “from the beginning, this house has been more about the ‘awake’ spaces than the sleeping spaces,” says Ferro. “It was helpful that we’d spent weekends and summers here, at the old cottage. I could see how everyone moved around, how we used the space. It’s all about hanging out; it’s all about connecting with the lake.”

As a bonus (an intentional one), the house received the Energy Star 5+ rating, the highest possible, from the state of Vermont. “In our old house, a drafty Victorian, we’d wear coats at dinner and candles would flicker when the wind was blowing outside,” says Draper, an attorney with a large Burlington law firm. “In our new home, the wind can be blasting at 25 miles per hour, straight across the lake, and we’re warm and comfortable inside.”

In the end, the limitations of the lot didn’t hamper the plan to take full advantage of the lake. “We have a ridiculously small sliver of land, with houses right on top of us,” says Draper. “You’d think we’d feel closed-in and claustrophobic, but all we see is water and mountains. We made the most of what we had. The house may feel clean and simple, but it’s definitely not simplistic.” 🏡

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RESOURCES

THE SIDE OF the house that faces the lake is filled with windows. The second-floor master bedroom opens to a covered porch, and a third-floor guest room is tucked under the curved rafters. A short, low roof (FACING PAGE, FAR LEFT) encloses a mahogany outdoor shower. From the welcoming front porch (FACING PAGE, NEAR LEFT), the view is straight through the house to the lake and mountains.

