

DESIGN

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SITE SPECIFIC

IN DESIGNING A HOUSE
ON MAINE'S SEBAGO LAKE,
ARCHITECT JEREMIAH ECK
GOT TO PRACTICE EXACTLY
WHAT HE PREACHES

WRITTEN BY EDGAR ALLEN BEEM • PHOTOGRAPHED BY BRIAN VANDEN BRINK

THE HOUSE IS designed to make the most of its natural setting. There is a visual progression from lake to trees, lawn, stone wall, open deck, covered deck, and glass box. The trellised porch plays to the rustic yet modernist approach.

STYLING BY TRACY DAVIS|URBAN DWELLINGS + CAITLIN MUSHIAL|ALWAYS PIPER



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aymond Neck on Maine's Sebago Lake is a 5-mile-long wooded peninsula that is home to large waterside seasonal houses as well as traditional youth summer camps such as Wohelo and Wawenock, both of which have been around for more than 100 years. One of the newest "camps" on the neck is a 4,000-square-foot contemporary

glass-and-cedar house that takes the form of a pair of buildings connected by covered porches and unified by green standing-seam metal roofing.

Architect Jeremiah Eck of Eck | MacNeely Architects in Boston designed the expansive waterfront retreat for a couple and their three young children whose year-round home is in a Boston suburb. His clients came to Maine looking for oceanfront property, but after a family vacation in a cabin on a lake, they fell in love with the relaxed summer life of freshwater canoeing, kayaking, fishing, swimming, and just generally taking it easy.

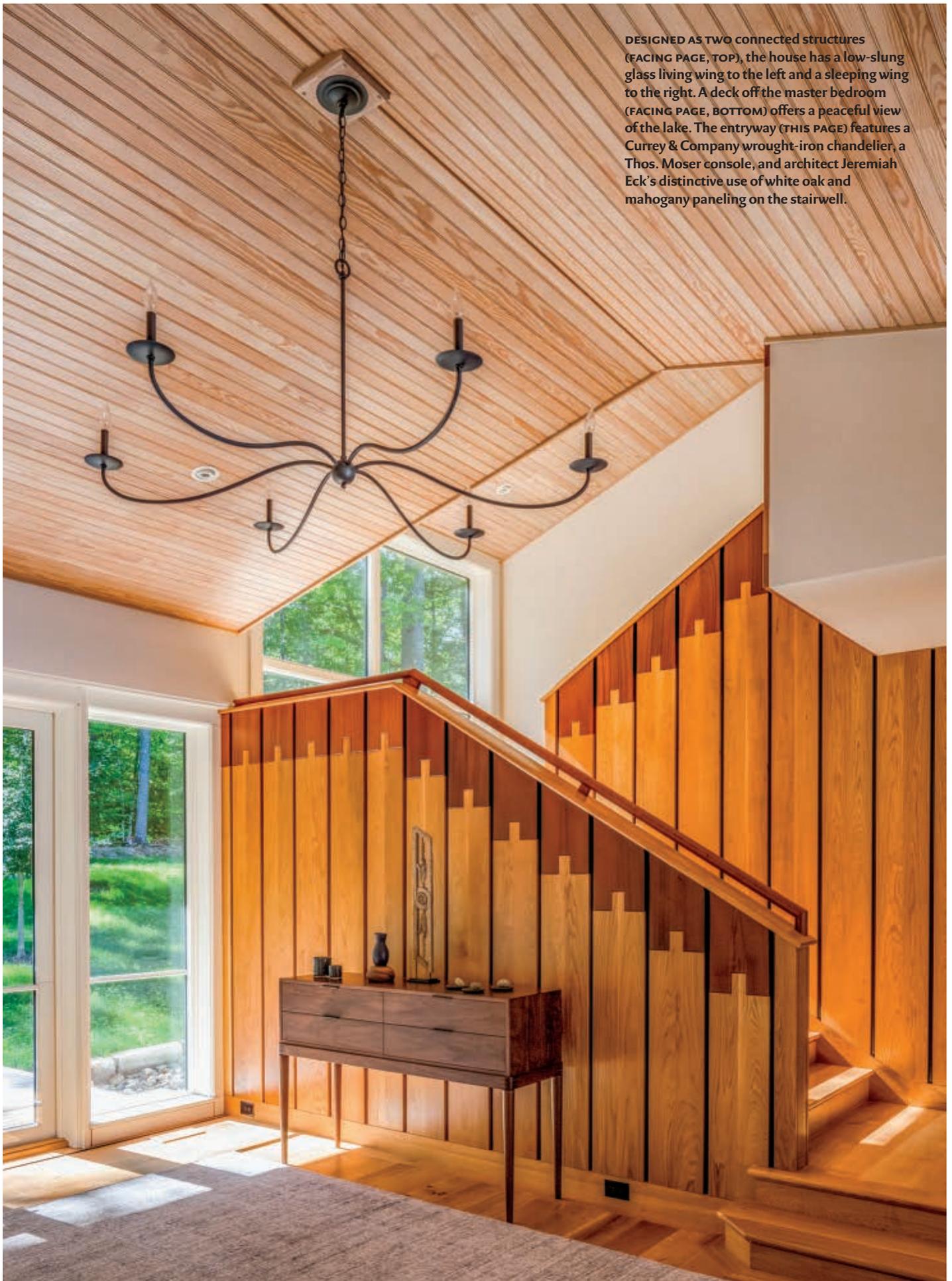
"We wanted our kids to be able to beat on this place and be comfortable," says the husband, an investment broker. "And we have two crazy dogs. The space is awesome and perfect for what we do — grill, hang out, play games."

The couple commissioned Eck to design "a modern farmhouse." What he created was more than that — a vacation house inspired by the New England tradition of connected buildings and covered porches but with casual and functional elegance.

"Siting is the most important thing of all," says the architect, the author of *House in the Landscape: Siting Your Home Naturally* (Prince-



DESIGNED AS TWO connected structures (FACING PAGE, TOP), the house has a low-slung glass living wing to the left and a sleeping wing to the right. A deck off the master bedroom (FACING PAGE, BOTTOM) offers a peaceful view of the lake. The entryway (THIS PAGE) features a Currey & Company wrought-iron chandelier, a Thos. Moser console, and architect Jeremiah Eck's distinctive use of white oak and mahogany paneling on the stairwell.





DESIGN DECISION *Lightly Trussed*

The main living area of the Sebago Lake house is essentially a glass box that achieves some of its utilitarian openness courtesy of a cable-and-pole truss system that is a modification of a traditional king-post truss. The exposed steel rods that hold the house together and support the roof were designed by Brunswick, Maine, engineer Albert Putnam and were dictated in part by architect Jeremiah Eck's penchant for designing light and lofty spaces.

"Glazed gable ends are kind of a Jeremiah Eck signature feature," says Putnam, "so he often needs some sort of truss system, but he didn't want heavy timber. So we came up with a system of slender steel rods that are a play on old mill structures."

Maine textile and shoe factories often used metal truss systems beneath the eaves to allow more open space for machinery. The shiny metal trusses above the vaulted living room allow more open space for family gatherings. The effect is not so much industrial as it is playful, evoking tents rather than mills.



ton Architectural Press, 2010). He set the house back from the tree-lined lakeshore, facing gorgeous sunsets across a cove dotted with islands.

"This site has nice, subtle topography — good sun, breezes, good views, and a really nice entry road so you discover the site as you arrive," says Eck.

On the approach, the view is straight through the house to the lake as a procession of spaces leads into and out of the building. The primary living areas are in an open-concept glass box, while sleeping quarters are in an adjacent wing.

"The living space became a kind of pavilion with a number of options — the glass box, the screened porch, the exposed deck, the section of deck covered by the trellised roof," says Eck. "So there are four or five ways to enjoy the environment. It's not just inside and outside, but a series of zones."

The architecture defers to the outdoors, engaging the environment with ample windows whose jambs echo the verticals of the trees. The indoor/outdoor line is further blurred by a pass-through window between the kitchen and the covered porch. In fact, it was a similar window Eck designed for a house on Block Island in Rhode Island ("Point of Views," *Design New England*, July/August 2013) that the couple say sold them on the architect.

The kitchen features a stove with a zinc hood as well

AN ISLAND OF zinc and walnut and a zinc range hood are focal points in the kitchen (LEFT TOP). The serving window (LEFT BOTTOM), which opens to the deck, is a detail from another house Eck designed. The living area (FACING PAGE, TOP) has an impressive fireplace and custom cable trusses. The dining and living areas (FACING PAGE, BOTTOM) are oriented to the lake view.





THE VIEW FROM the front door is straight through the house to the deck and the lake. A screened porch (FACING PAGE) at the front corner of the house is simply furnished with Havana Modular woven furniture by Gloster.



as a large zinc-and-walnut island that would be the envy of most restaurants. “Zinc is an interesting material I had never worked with before on the inside of a house,” says Andy Seymour, project manager for Wright-Ryan Homes of Portland, Maine, the contractors who built the house. “It’s like copper. It has a living finish, it patinas, changes colors, and because it’s not sealed, it shows fingerprints and drink rings. It will age gracefully with the house.”

The living-room area has a floor-to-ceiling granite Rumford fireplace capable of heating the entire first floor. The high, open interior is made possible by a custom truss system of slender steel rods that

eliminate the need for heavy timber posts and beams.

Much of the family’s summer life is lived on the screened porch and on the generous Ipe deck whose trellised-edge roof gives a hand-crafted look to an otherwise high-style house.

The bedroom wing features a laundry room, playroom, three bedrooms, and two bathrooms on the ground floor and a balconied master bedroom suite with studio office above. A natural palette of stone, wood, and neutral colors is used throughout, giving the house a restful, airy feel. Triple-glazed windows insulate and supply ample sunlight.

“You can be inside when it’s 32 degrees and windy or 90 degrees,” says the husband, “but it’s so tight, you can’t feel the elements.”

Traditional Maine lake cottages tend to be dark, drafty lodges as closed and intimate as the northern landscape, but Eck’s take on the genre is fashionable yet functional, a series of thoughtful spaces that spill down toward the water. The entire complex, serene and still, is anchored to the site by low granite walls and stairs.

“This is our first full summer at the lake,” the wife tells a visitor one lazy afternoon last August as her children play on the screened porch watched over by their grandmother and a pair of protective Dobermans. “One day, I saw the three kids sitting on the stone wall munching peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and just gazing out over the lake. I took a snapshot and sent it to Jeremiah with a note that said, ‘This is just what I wanted. You got it.’” ▲

🏠 | TIMELESS DESIGN | *Jeremiah Eck*

This house meets the four criteria Eck laid out in his book *The Distinctive Home: A Vision of Timeless Design* (Taunton Press, 2003). “First, it is well sited, taking full advantage of the views, the position of the sun, and the subtle topography. Second, the plan responds to contemporary family needs of public and private. Third, the exterior elevations directly reflect the plan with masses proportioned in a site-sensitive way. Finally, all the details reinforce the first three principles.”

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