



The great camps of the Adirondacks are in a world to themselves. Built as summer retreats during the last half of the 19th century, they appear to sprout from their sites, which often are the shores of remote lakes in deep woods. These camps are built of materials found on site: logs, branches and twigs twisted into everything from roof trusses to stair treads to bedsteads (hence the expression “twig work”). Most of these camps feature lofts and balconies, great stone fireplaces, huge doors that slide away to reveal the open air, covered walkways and wrap-around porches.

This picture-book image was about all my brother Garrett and I knew of the area before

our clients introduced us to the Adirondacks on a wet November weekend two years ago. At the end of a long dirt driveway lay their clearing, tucked into the edge of a ridge that dropped steeply to a stream. Standing at the edge of the site, they gestured enthusiastically at the view. Although we saw only fog, our clients assured us the view was there and insisted that their future house take full advantage of it. The house also should capture the essence of the famous camps by maintaining a flirting familiarity with tradition yet display a character of its own.

Our clients wanted us to design a house that would have three bedrooms and high ceilings, and be equally comfortable for a crowd of 20

or for a single couple. Above all, the house was to take advantage of its location, embrace the view and nestle into the ridge while remaining warm in the extreme cold, light on the darkest day, open to breezes and impervious to bugs.

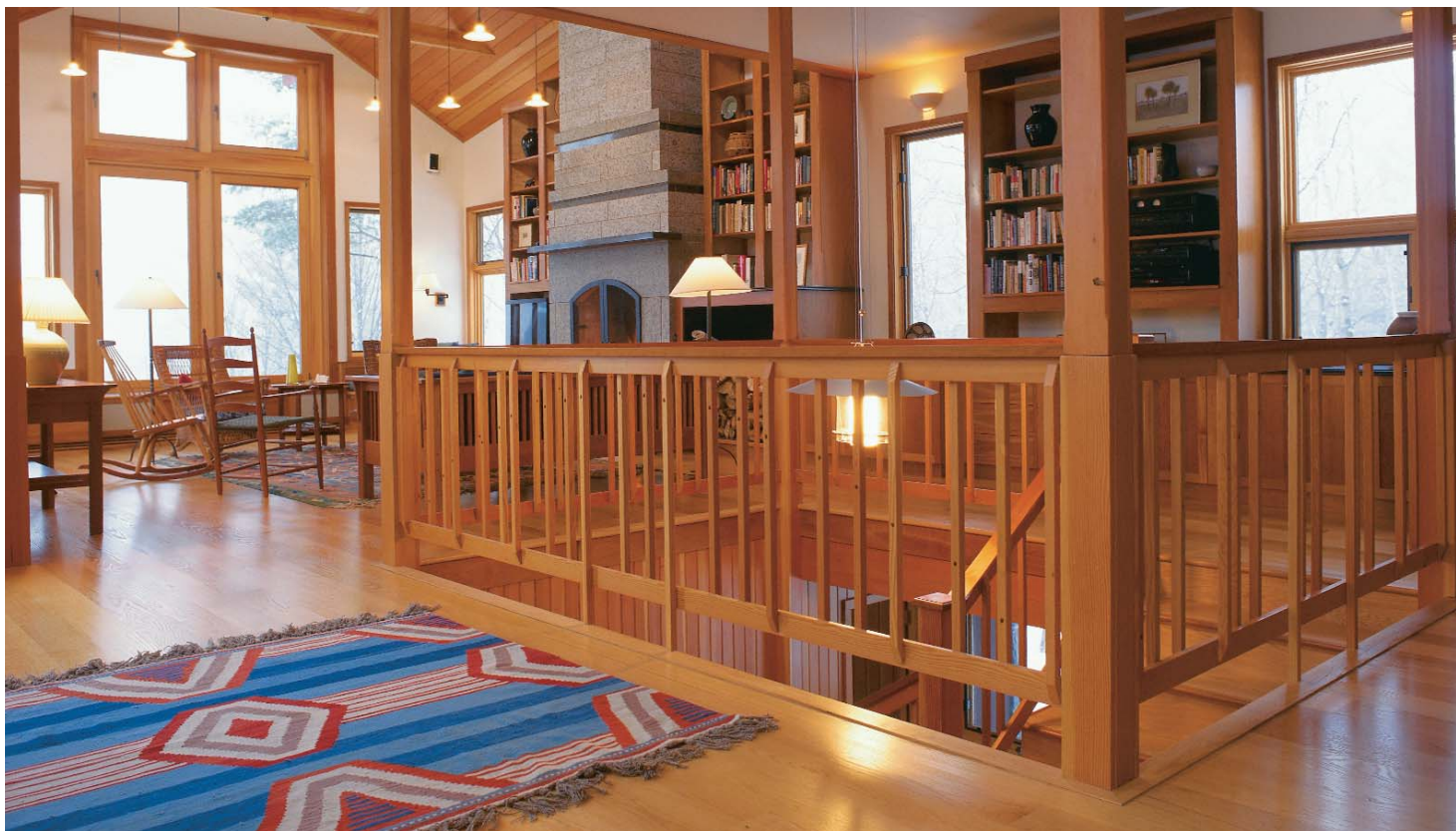
An L-shaped design takes best advantage of the site—

Siting a house to maximize light and views while protecting it and its occupants against an extreme climate is a delicate operation. This job was complicated because the prevailing winds and the harshest weather came from the southwest, which is where the winter sun shines brightest and where the view is the most spectacular.

An Adirondack Farmhouse

Like the great camps that inspired it, this house endures harsh winters while maintaining a character all its own

by Martha B. Finney



Sharing views of the outside.

The open floor plan makes transitions between rooms as visually important as the rooms themselves. The lack of barriers also brings the view deep inside. Photo taken at A on floor plan.

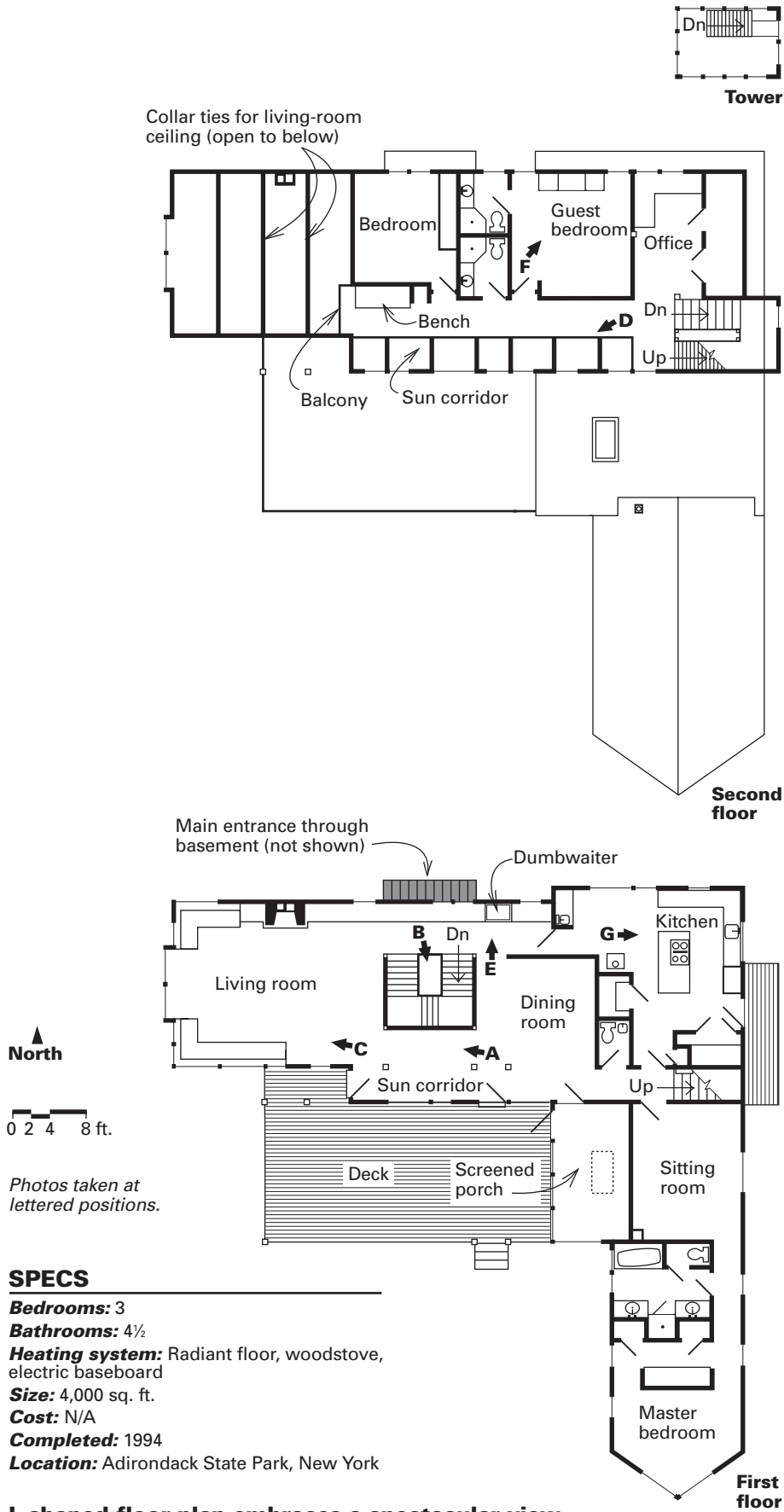
The stairway acts as a funnel for light.

The main stairwell draws the light from the open dining-room/living-room area down to the darker main entrance at the basement of the house. Photo taken at B on floor plan.

From the beginning, an L-shaped floor plan seemed the most logical. With the L we were able to match the house to the different slopes of the ridge. Shifting the length of the L just off the north-south axis and the short leg to the east-west would create a bowl to catch the warmth of the sun and deflect the worst of the weather. The two ends of the L would allow public and private realms to be separate (floor plan, p. 100).

The house takes shape as a series of volumes—In our study of the Adirondack camps, we noticed that the space between the cabins was as important as the space within each cabin. This realization strengthened our conviction





L-shaped floor plan embraces a spectacular view

From the prow-shaped master bedroom to the two-story living room, the shape of the house turns the most important windows toward a grand southwest view of the Adirondacks. Views in the living room and dining room are maximized by the elimination of walls and other tall barriers.



that the transition spaces inside might become more than corridors and stairs defined by walls, ceilings and windows; that rooms might be defined by more than what went on within them.

When we fit the pieces of the house together, we arrived at what our clients referred to as their “wacky farmhouse” (photo p. 98). As in the Adirondack camps, we kept the spaces open and visually and physically interconnected from room to room, floor to floor and inside to outside (photo p. 98).

From the exterior the house is composed of five distinct volumes. A series of roofs is in keeping with the notion of a series of connected outdoor rooms. To heighten the sense of individuality, ceilings follow the roof planes.

Three dormers set at varying heights on the north side of the main gable define and light the



The ceiling lowers to enfold the living room. The gable roof tips down to the northwest and rises into the house to frame the living room. These angles have a counterpoint in the gentle fireplace arch. Photo taken at C on floor plan.

The sun corridor is a big, sunlit balcony. The sunny southern wall throws light deep into the first and second floors of the house. Photo taken at D on floor plan.



office, a guest room and a bath. The kitchen, screened porch and sitting room, which gets light through a skylight from the screened porch (floor plan, facing page), are united under a single sloping shed whose nose carries through on the north wall of the kitchen (photo pp. 102-103). The living room is a story and a half tall and sits under the tipped gabled roof (photo above) to give it the look—inside and out—of a separate space. The roof of the master-bedroom wing rises above the roof of the screened porch to a low gable. Upstairs, in the main guest room, two small windows form the sides of a triptych with the warm wood hues of a built-in cabinet and shelves (photo left, p. 102). Finally, the tower, which holds the main staircase and a small room in its peak, sits under a shed roof, kept simple so that it doesn't dominate the roofline.

Windows and open space transmit views and light throughout the house—Inside, the house is a series of interlocking and overlapping volumes loosely defined by walls, columns and windows. It is united vertically by two staircases and a double-height “sun corridor” (photo above right). What we call the sun corridor is really just a two-story wall with a southern exposure, which lets light come into the first and second floors.

The main entrance to the house is on the basement level in the shadows of the north side. The entry is there because the site slopes and the main house was kept high to capture the view. Immediately inside the glass door to the slated foyer is a stair that draws the eye to the light from the first floor (photos p. 99) and out the windows.

At the top of the stairs is one large, open space grounded to the north by a long wall of cabinetry (complete with a dumbwaiter to transport groceries to the kitchen, which is one floor above the garage, photo center, p. 102). This area is lighted from the south by the two-story wall of windows of the sun corridor. To the right is the dining room, marked off by the columns of the stair and two contrasting white walls. The clients wanted the dining room to be separate from the living room but also share views of the mountains. The staircase divides the two rooms yet leaves the view open. Just beyond the other side of the stair, the ceiling steps up to frame the living room and, on a clear day, a gorgeous view.

The sun-flooded southern wall, which looks out over the deck, leads to the second-floor stair and the tower beyond. The second-floor hall is a

balcony, along whose length are visible the corridor below (photo right, p. 101) and the mountains in the distance.

Our clients were adamant that the house's windows have no divisions (vertical or horizontal) to interrupt the view. Working within these parameters, we grouped four basic windows—in combinations of casement, awning and fixed—to frame particular views from particular vantage points.

We grouped windows to reduce the scale of the house and to frame particular views. For instance, in the main space of the first floor, the windows are often grouped so that three windows appear to be one. Windows along corridors are undivided at eye level. Where there are built-in benches, small square windows are set as if to contain the view for a solitary reader. A

long horizontal window is placed at eye level across from the dining room. Smaller windows are operable and have screens. Larger windows are fixed and don't have screens.

Surfaces reflect a variety of materials and textures—In a typical Adirondack camp, a huge fireplace with a raised hearth of large, locally found rocks and a log mantel is the focus of almost every room. In the traditional twig-work camps, the rustic details unify the overall design while lending a low-maintenance, woody warmth to interiors. Our intent was to effect the same unity, warmth and low maintenance with simple and refined lines. Instead of rocks, we used local blue and green granite, which was carefully cut and polished, for the living-room fireplace.

Beaded fir paneling, which is hung horizontally or vertically, is in every room of the house. The width of the beaded boards varies from 2 in. to 4 in. to 6 in., depending on the scale of the room. However, where a room in a typical camp would be finished from floor to ceiling in wood, we brightened and animated our interiors with flat white ceilings and walls (more in keeping with the walls and ceilings of a farmhouse). For instance, in the staircases and in the second-floor hall, the walls are all beaded board, while the ceilings are white. In the living room, the opposite is true. To contrast the built-in living-room cabinets, which are made of cherry, the countertops are slabs of black Fireslate (sidebar facing page).

The exterior takes its lead from local farmhouses. One nearby house in particular stands



An easy way to get the groceries upstairs. A dumbwaiter is an object of visual interest when it's encased in cherry and its iron pulley is showcased behind glass. Photo taken at E on floor plan.

An intimate, well-lit guest bedroom. It's not large, but this spare second-floor bedroom is furnished with window seats and a classic built-in cabinet with shelves. Photo taken at F on floor plan.

Simple lines and lots of appeal. There's nothing fancy about the kitchen, but its rich beaded fir paneling and clean cabinet and countertop lines offer visual appeal. Photo taken at G on floor plan.



out. It has a tall foundation made of large, rough fieldstone. Similarly, we set the house above a basement whose walls are poured concrete with a granite veneer. Our clients' house is finished in cedar siding stained barn red. To reinforce visually the intersection of the public and private realms, we used 8-in. boards on the main body of the house and 6-in. boards on the master-bedroom wing. The exterior soffits and fascia are stained brown. Window trim is a factory-applied black finish.

Heat for all seasons—Finally, the details that you don't see are as important as those that you do. By superinsulating walls to R-25 and employing diverse heating technologies throughout, the house is efficiently heated for all seasons. The fireplace, which is ideal for cool

summer evenings, is supplemented by a radiant-floor system when the temperature drops below freezing in the winter.

In the fall and in the spring, the house is warmed through a combination of the sun corridor's solar gain by day and by the fireplace at night. The second floor of the house, which is not occupied as often as the first floor, has built-in electric baseboard heaters, which are ready when they're needed. In a climate where power failures are not uncommon and heat is a necessity, a woodstove in the kitchen and a woodstove in the basement provide warmth when all else fails. □

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Fireslate is a durable alternative to solid surface



Photo: Martha B. Finney

Fireslate was originally a fiber-cement board made at a New Hampshire Johns Manville plant that manufactured laboratory countertops made of portland cement, asbestos and carbon black. A mineral-composite slurry was poured into a 4-ft. by 8-ft. form in a filter press and then subjected to 800,000 psi of hydraulic pressure for 10 to 15 minutes. When this process was complete, the boards were stacked and cured in a steam-pressure tank for 24 hours. The end product was a synthetic, monolithic slate.

Cheaper and more durable than soapstone, this slate was ideal for lab applications. In 1980, the brother-in-law of a plant employee noticed great scrap piles of these panels behind the plant. He asked if the scrap was available and, on finding that it was, negotiated access to the plant's seconds. From those seconds, he began cutting stove boards. In 1983, he moved his cutting business to Maine.

In 1986, Manville replaced the asbestos in its countertops with wollastonite. In July 1987, Tom Worthen bought Fireslate's nonasbestos inventory and cutting operation and started Fireslate-2 (800-523-5902). According to Worthen, Fireslate can withstand heat up to 500°F, but beyond this, the board becomes brittle. It can be cut, buffed, sawn, drilled and routed. Fireslate is easier to work than stone. And at \$26 per sq. ft., it's cheaper than Corian or Avonite. Fireslate is most readily available in gray, neutral and charcoal. Long runs of color (pistachio, terra-cotta—you name it) can be custom-ordered.

After it's sealed, Fireslate repels most common spills, including water and grease. As with many materials, Fireslate has a break-in period over which the slate gains a worked patina. Scratches can be sanded smooth with steel wool or a Scotch-Brite pad.—*M. B. F.*

