

# readers' choice

BY MAUREEN FRIEDMAN

The six award-winning projects in this issue were selected by the staff of *Fine Homebuilding*. We also gave our readers an opportunity to select their favorites from our runners-up. Below are the 10 projects nominated for our readers' choice awards. The following pages feature the three winners. For more on each project, visit [FineHomebuilding.com/houses](http://FineHomebuilding.com/houses).

## Fontana Lake House

**Architect**

Samsel Architects

**Photograph**

Todd Crawford,  
courtesy of Samsel  
Architects



## Cottage Street

**Architect**

Patrick Ahearn  
Architect

**Photograph**

Greg Premru

## Whimsy on the Creek

**Design**

Steve Kuhl

**Photograph**

Troy Gustafson



## Ben's Barn

**Architect**

Caleb Johnson  
Architects & Builders

**Photograph**

Trent Bell

## Vine Hill Residence

**Architect**

Arkin Tilt Architects

**Photograph**

Edward Caldwell



## Westport River House

**Architect**

Ruhl Walker  
Architects

**Photograph**

Nat Rea

## Millcreek House

**Design**

Lloyd  
Architects and Susan  
Taggart Design

**Photograph**

Mark Weinberg



## Their Final House

**Architect** South  
Mountain Company

**Photograph** South  
Mountain Company

## American Revival

**Architect**

Lococo Architects

**Photograph**

John Cole  
Photography



## House in Town

**Architect**  
Elliott & Elliott  
Architecture

**Photograph**

Trent Bell





1 READERS' CHOICE FIRST PLACE

# Fontana Lake House

**T**his 3500-sq.-ft. LEED-Gold-certified house designed by Nathan Bryant of Samsel Architects and Traci Kearns of Alchemy Design Studio sits lightly on the edge of Fontana Lake in the southwestern corner of North Carolina. High-performance windows and doors, low-VOC or no-VOC finishes, a high-performance envelope, energy-recovery ventilators, and geothermal heating were all important aspects of the project. Because the roof overhang is only about 6 in. from the lake setback line, runoff management was a key issue of its design and construction as well. The steep topography of the site required a series of retaining walls above and below the



**SLIDE SHOW** For more photos of the Fontana Lake House, visit [FineHomebuilding.com/houses](http://FineHomebuilding.com/houses).

house. Locally sourced Tennessee fieldstone was used to create the boulder steps. Cut stone pavers of Pennsylvania bluestone with a heat-treated finish were used for the patios and in the glass-enclosed breezeway that divides the house into two distinct zones.

The kitchen, dining area, and living room are located at the south end of the upper level, and a media and game room with a wet bar are on the lower level. The north end of the house has two bedrooms on each level. Painted steel awnings over the lower bedroom windows help shade the rooms from sun, yet still allow for ambient daylight.

The Fontana trestle of the Great Smoky Mountains Railroad influenced the design of the walnut trellis above the kitchen, which allows dappled daylight from the clerestory windows to bathe the space. To complement the home's rustic exterior but bring a more contemporary look to the interior, a combination of stainless-steel-faced upper cabinets and dark-stained rift-cut walnut cabinets was used in the kitchen. Silestone's Capri Limestone was selected for the countertops, Stone Island Glass Series beach tile in mist was installed behind the cooktop, and white-oak shiplap with a gray wash and matte polyurethane was used on the walls and ceiling. The floors are white oak with a thinned light-gray wash and a matte polyurethane.

Sited to minimize visibility from the lake, the western-red-cedar shingles with Sherwin-Williams' semitransparent Hill Country stain and the Sheffield steel roof in low-sheen Seal Brown help to blend the house into the wooded hillside. The house only truly exposes its form at twilight when the expansive glass glows lanternlike, providing a homeward beacon upon return from a sunset boat ride.

**Architect** Nathan Bryant, Samsel Architects, Asheville, N.C.; [samselarchitects.com](http://samselarchitects.com)

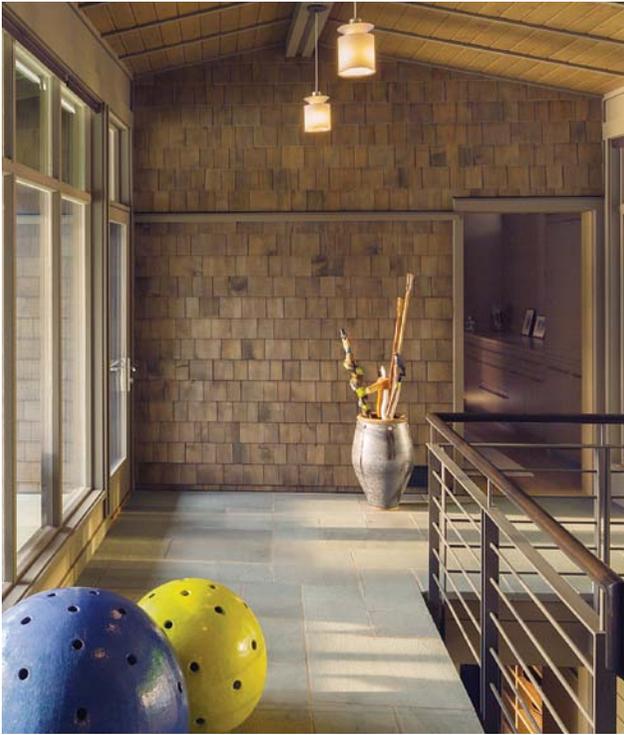
**Interior designer** Traci Kearns, Alchemy Design Studio, Asheville, N.C.; [alchemy-interiors.com](http://alchemy-interiors.com)

**Builder** Bill Baxter, The William Baxter Company, Almond, N.C.

**Photographs**

Todd Crawford, courtesy of Samsel Architects (except where noted)







## 2 READERS' CHOICE SECOND PLACE Cottage Street

Located in a historic village on the Massachusetts coast, this new house reads as a more modest piece of architecture from a previous time. In order to blend with the character and scale of the historic homes adjacent to the property, the facade recalls the Greek-revival cottage style, and the streetscape mimics the scale and character of its surroundings. The brick sidewalks and driveway, white picket fence, window boxes, green shutters, and cedar roof complete the look.

What made the project especially challenging was the client's wish for a main house with a covered porch and attached garage, a large carriage house, a pool and cabana, and a detached guest house on little more than a quarter acre. He also wanted to incorporate his love of fishing and all things nautical. The foyer has a teak and holly floor recalling the old Hinckley wooden yachts, and "Hinckley blue" is used as an accent color throughout the house. Hardware resembling cleats, gloss-white finishes, custom tiles, and custom cabinetry make the kitchen look like a galley in a luxury motor yacht. The wide cased opening that resembles a window found in the captain's stateroom of a pirate ship separates the kitchen and family room. A NanaWall opens to create an indoor/outdoor experience between the family room and the covered bluestone porch. The porch has a brick fireplace, and a custom copper skylight bathes the room in natural light while still providing a retreat from the summer sun. The cased beams are repeated on the ceiling of the covered porch to create a seamless transition between the two spaces.

**Architect** Patrick Ahearn Architect, Boston, [patrickahearn.com](http://patrickahearn.com)

**Interior designer** Lynn Morgan, Lynn Morgan Design, Norwalk, Conn.; [lynnmorgandesign.com](http://lynnmorgandesign.com)

**Builder** Rosbeck Builders, Edgartown, Mass.; [rosbeckbuilders.com](http://rosbeckbuilders.com)

**Photographs** Greg Premru, [gregpremru.com](http://gregpremru.com)







### 3 READERS' CHOICE THIRD PLACE

## Whimsy on the Creek

Believing that there's not enough fun in design these days, Steve Kuhl designed this home (which he shares with his children) to show that it is possible to have a "grownup" space infused with whimsy and wonder. Alcoves, niches, and nodes abound in this French-inspired cottage, yet the main floor is open and inviting for gracious entertaining of large gatherings. Using SketchUp software, Kuhl created detailed 3D renderings of all aspects of the project. This allowed him to catch potential problems and conflicts during the design process, which in turn saved him time, money, and headaches during construction.

Situated on an acre and a half of creekfront property, the four-bedroom house features two large porches and many generous windows that connect the indoor and outdoor spaces. A single high-efficiency furnace and radiant-floor heating provide comfort throughout the long Minnesota winters. Marvin Ultimate Clad windows and 5½ in. of closed-cell spray foam in all walls make the energy bills of the 6680-sq.-ft. house the envy of homes one-third its size. Kuhl made many other environmentally conscious decisions but believes that the most important was to design an attractive house. "We can use all of the recycled milk cartons and repurposed flooring we want in making homes," he says, "but if that home is not pretty, it will be torn down or significantly remodeled in the not-so-distant future. The most environmentally conscious designs are ones that incorporate the lasting principles of quality, form, and function. That is what I tried to do on this project, to design something that many families after my own will appreciate and modify as little as possible."

**Principle designer** Steve Kuhl, Kuhl Design & Build, Hopkins, Minn.; kuhldesignbuild.com

**Interior designer** Shauna O'Brien, Kuhl Design & Build

**Builder** Kuhl Design & Build

**Photographs** Troy Gustafson, courtesy of Kuhl Design & Build

