

# Maine Home

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## + DESIGN



Warming Up  
to Winter

A MODERN FAMILY FARMHOUSE  
FIT FOR ALL SEASONS

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# A House in Its Place

A modern yet timeless Brunswick farmhouse fit for the whole family

by Jen DeRose  
Photography by Trent Bell



One of two ponds on the property of a Brunswick house designed by Whitten Architects and built by Benjamin and Company on which the family plays hockey. Beyond the pond is the south-facing yard. The main house is on the left, and the barn—a garage with an elevated playroom—is on the right. The Marvin windows and doors were supplied by Marvin Design Gallery by Eldredge Lumber.

While most of the home is white, interior designer Krista Stokes introduced color "in one broad stroke" via the kitchen backsplash tile, Dandelions, from Distinctive Tile and Design in Portland. The millwork is by Koehler Woodworks. The countertop is Heritage Valley granite, while the raised breakfast bar countertop is cherry.





# If

you've ever arrived at a home with two front doors, you know the confusion that can arise. Which do you go to? At Katie and Nick Ryan's\* Brunswick home, I am faced with quite the opposite dilemma. After winding down a dirt driveway, I park at the first structure I come to: a barn clad in white spruce. But when I get out of the car, I realize that there's no front door in sight. Instead, I am drawn to the next closest thing: a covered opening in the center of the barn that's large enough for a car—an updated take on a porte cochere. Wandering through and passing underneath the building, a white farmhouse punctuated by a dark-brown modern entryway reveals itself on the other side. The vertical, dark-stained Douglas fir boards on the front door enhance its height, and contrast with the horizontal lines of the spruce clapboard. The door is flanked by floor-to-ceiling glass, through which I can see the opposite side of the entry, where an antique bench and more glass look out onto a small yard.

I have arrived a little after three o'clock in the afternoon, and the house is quiet. But when I ring the bell, a tiny dot of white against the dark door, the chime seems to cause a chain reaction of happy commotion. First, a golden retriever puppy—Sluice, named for the ski trail at Sugarloaf—announces my arrival. Next, a trio of children and their afternoon babysitter appear in the barn's pass-through with swinging backpacks and talk of playing outside, then the father emerges from the home office. Shortly thereafter, the mother arrives home from work, and we all converge inside the welcoming glass entryway, the children flinging Bean boots off in the adjacent mudroom, snow melting off them and onto the radiant concrete floor. And then, disappearing nearly as quickly as they arrived, the kids are off and flying up a staircase to their light-filled playground.

This is life in the home of the Ryans. Moments of quiet are fleeting; favored instead are days filled with activity, play, and plenty of joy. Those three principles seem to sum up much of the design directive: create a home for a busy family of five with a floor plan that provides ample space

*\*Names changed at homeowners' request.*



for kids to be kids as well as for family togetherness, all while being on a relatively tight budget and taking advantage of the site's wooded location. And, unlike their last house that had two doors, this one should have a single designated entrance. The resulting home, designed by project architect Jessie Carroll of Whitten Architects, built by Benjamin and Company, and featuring interior design by Krista Stokes, checks all of those boxes—and is an obvious success, as evidenced by the enthusiasm of the Ryans' youngest, a happy four-year-old eager to give a visitor a tour.

The modern glass entryway links the home's two main structures. The first is the northern-facing, story-and-a-half barn that serves as the garage and storage, with an elevated playroom (so that it gets plenty of sun) that's directly above the porte cochère. The rest of the home, a rectangle, contains the south-facing living spaces. The first floor is almost wholly composed of an open-concept kitchen/dining/living area and powder room, with a screened porch and home office on the western-facing edge. The second floor, which is slightly cantilevered over the first to provide a sunscreen, has three nearly identically sized kids' bedrooms, as well as a full bathroom, laundry area, and, in the back where it is quieter, the owners' suite.

On the exterior, the main house feels almost colonial thanks to neatly stacked windows, but inside it is decidedly modern. The buildings' iconic silhouettes speak to the modern farmhouse style to which the Ryans were drawn, while also keeping the overall aesthetic simple and straightforward. "Exterior porches and dormers are charming," Carroll notes, "but they tend to add up to a lot of cost and not a lot of usable interior space. Instead, we decided to be really bold with the forms." Crisp details abound, with a notable absence of trim work and, in its place, clean lines skillfully executed thanks to Benjamin and Company's meticulous finish work. "We worked very carefully to make those lines resolve themselves really beautifully," says Ben Hemberger of Benjamin and Company.

A hallmark of farmhouse style is a connection to the land, how the buildings "reach into the landscape," says Carroll. By keeping the home at almost ground level, without multiple steps to go up and down, there is a sense of ease and of feeling grounded, in addition to easy outdoor access. This is perhaps most apparent in the dining area, where floor-to-ceiling windows and doors lead directly to the backyard. A large south-facing lawn—perfect for soccer games or snowball fights—is



The entryway was designed to fit the antique settle bench (above), which unfolds into a bed, a gift from Nick's parents. The pillow is by Erin Flett, and the rug is Angela Adams.

The barn and main house are connected by a glass entryway (opposite). The screened porch wraps the main house's western edge.

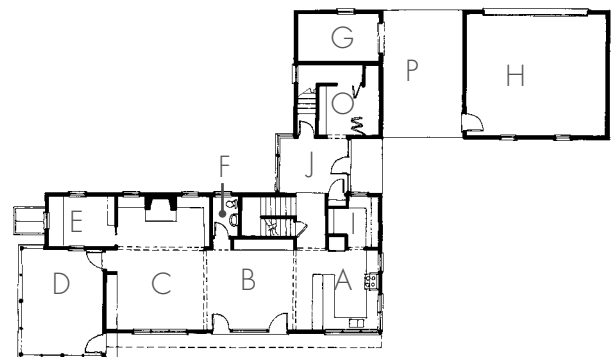
“In every season you have views of this beautiful orchestration of nature...We didn't need to compete with that.”



While all the kids' rooms are equal size, the son's (above) features two exposures. The art and bedding are from L.L.Bean; the walrus is from Snug Harbor Farm.

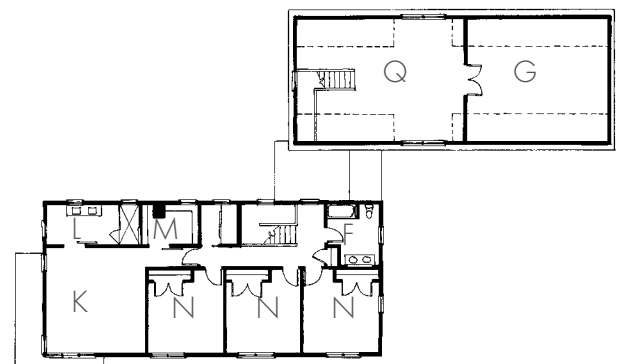
The fireplace (opposite) was outfitted with a wood-burning insert, which was more cost effective than building a standard wood-burning fireplace. The surround is the same Heritage Valley stone as on the countertops but has a thermal finish and isn't sealed, so it appears lighter in color. Nick helped to design the shelving and the cherry benches with integrated firewood storage built by Seth Helie Designs. The skirted chairs from Youngs Furniture swivel to face the fireplace or the living area.

## MAIN LEVEL



- A Kitchen
- B Dining Room
- C Living Room
- D Screened Porch
- E Office
- F Bathrooms
- G Storage
- H Garage
- I Pantry
- J Entryway
- K Owners' Bedroom
- L Owners' Bathroom
- M Owners' Closet
- N Bedrooms
- O Mudroom
- P Porte Cochere
- Q Playroom

## UPPER LEVEL





bordered by a tight grouping of fir trees (part of a former nursery) to the east as well as by two small ponds (formerly used for irrigation) where the kids play hockey to the south. The whole effect is one of seamless indoor/outdoor living, in every season. "It's so easy to access it all whether there's snow or rain," says Nick. Indeed, Katie notes, it is especially suited for entertaining. "It's a great party house," she says. "The kids all race around."

Child-friendly design is everywhere. The laundry area is in a central location upstairs so that the children are able to pitch in, while downstairs, shelving in a nook near the fireplace means that toys and games are tucked out of sight. The playroom has cork flooring, chosen because it's eco-friendly, soft underfoot, and less expensive than wood. In the kitchen, five stools—one for each family member—pull up to a long breakfast counter, and the location of the sink means that whoever is doing the dishes can look out to the open living area as well to the backyard. Angela Adams rugs and Erin Flett pillows add softness and playfulness, and make a subtle enough impression, hopes Stokes, to imprint future memories.

While Stokes did add some color in order to keep the design lighthearted, the home is done mostly in a white palette, a decision that was threefold. The first reason was because of the home's location. "In every season you have views of this beautiful orchestration of nature," says Stokes. "We didn't need to compete with that." But the palette works also for more practical reasons: scuffs are easy to touch up with white paint, and it also serves as a clean backdrop to all the color that the kids bring in through toys, games, and art projects.

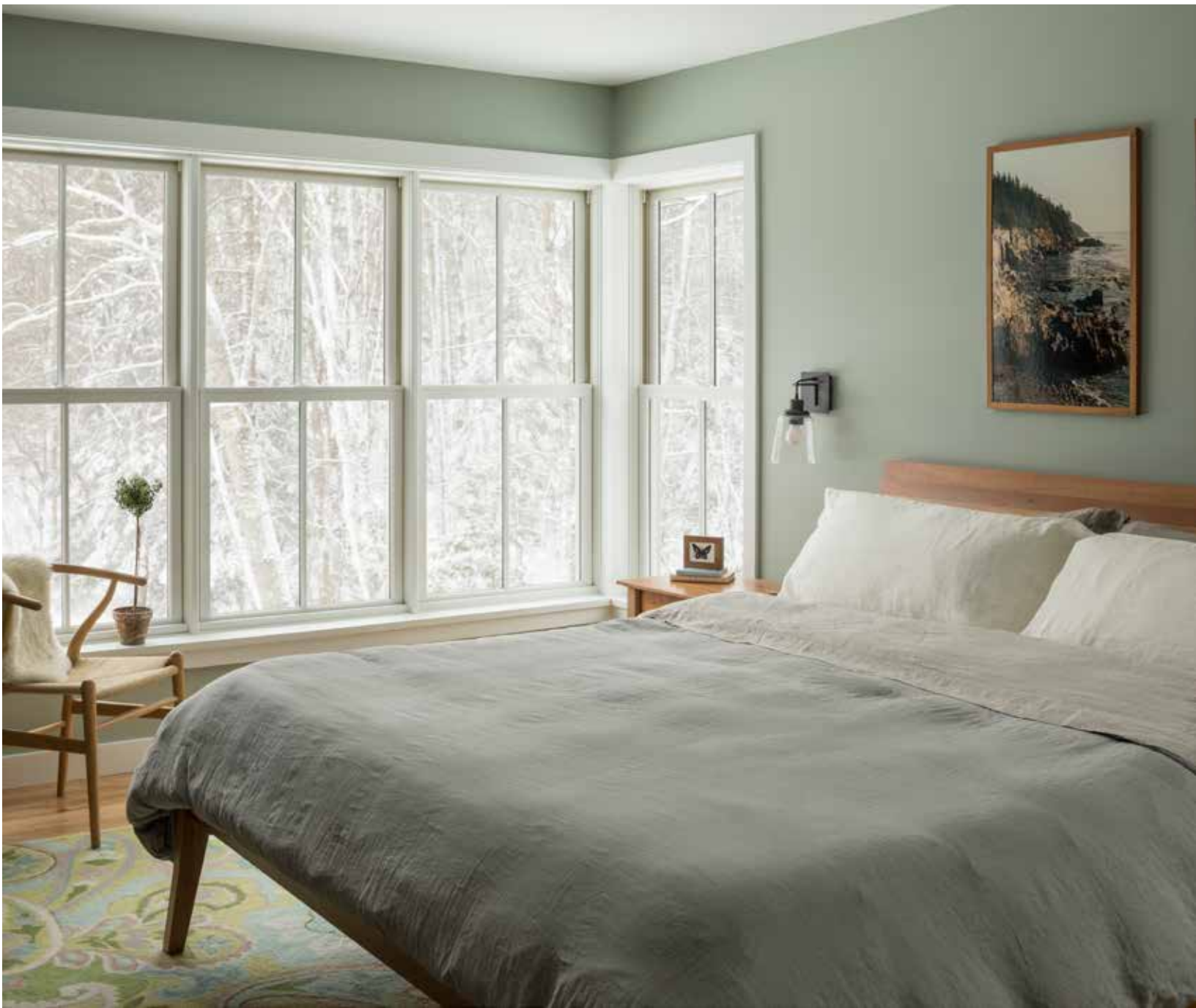
It's a place that the Ryans immediately felt at home in. "I wanted a house that we could just be a family in," says Katie.



Decorative ceiling beams help to visually break up the open living/dining/kitchen area. Marvin Design Gallery by Eldredge Lumber supplied the Marvin windows and doors. The floors here and throughout the home are red birch.







Cream 3" x 6" tile in the shower niche contrasts with dark 12" x 24" porcelain tile on the floor and walls of the owners' bathroom (opposite). All the tile in the home is from Distinctive Tile and Design. "The homeowners liked these modern, spa-like Scandinavian bathrooms," says Stokes. "So we took some traditional, simple elements and turned them on their side a little bit."

Photos of Casco Bay hang above the bed in the owners' bedroom (above). The rug is from Company C.





A custom-built stained pine door (above) by Benjamin and Company leads to the garage. The ceiling is also pine, stained dark. "There typically might be a piece of trim here where the ceiling meets the siding in a more traditional home," says builder Ben Hemberger. "But we spent some time working with Jessie to come up with a good, clean, crisp detail that could get built, give a modern farmhouse feel, and also be durable enough for the weather."

As the Ryans' previous home had two front doors, architect Jessie Carroll wanted to give the family a single, more protected entry and came up with this idea of an updated take on the porte cochere (opposite). "We tried to make the most of each design move," she says. "The portal with the dormer above is doing multiple things: it's your entry sequence, it's your cover to unload the groceries, and it's a place to park the kids' bikes."

"That whoever was cooking dinner and whatever the kids were doing, we could all be a part of it and that you knew everyone was together. When we are all on the sofa, and even Sluice is curled up, too, it is just the most loving place. There's nowhere else I want to be." She recalls how friends attending their youngest daughter's recent birthday party were surprised to learn the house was new. "They didn't know we had just built it," Katie says. "I took that as a compliment."

Carroll agrees. "It feels like a home that's appropriate here in Maine," she says. "It's not an in-your-face, design-forward, look-at-me type of house. It just feels right, in the setting. It's just a house that's in its place."

The same thing, it could be said, is true for the family who lives there. **MH+D**

*For more information, see Resources on page 104.*