



## Stunning Simplicity

*A collaborative effort creates an escape by the lake.*

The land surrounding the tiny village of Freedom has history, and Charlie Watts and Holly Haynes share in those deep roots. Charlie's grandfather Charles H. Watts owned Farm by the River next door in Effingham. Charlie's mother and father, Patricia and Charles H. Watts II, opened High Meadow Farm in Freedom, where Charlie and Haynes, his wife of 36 years, now live.

Growing up, Charlie split his time between Lewisburg, Pennsylvania—his parents worked at Bucknell University—and the family farm in Freedom. "I spent most of my professional career working as a communication and employee research consultant," he says. "Now I'm working on being a fiction writer."

Meanwhile, Haynes—a Rhode Island native who worked as a chaplain at a

Boston hospital—is no stranger to Freedom either. "My siblings and I went to Cragged Mountain Farm, a summer camp our pediatrician owned in Freedom," she says. "These places are beloved and formative places to me, to Charlie, and to our three adult children who grew up swimming and playing here during the summer."

Over the years, the couple has offered their family farm "to support people who wish to come together for spiritual retreats of various kinds and traditions from places far and near," Haynes says.

According to Charlie, his family has owned a number of lots on Loon Lake, in the southeast corner of Freedom, since the 1960s. "It's a small, beautiful

lake, with an active pair of breeding loons at one end, who—so far—have managed to outsmart the eagle living at the other end," he says. "There are about eight to 10 year-round houses on the lake, and the rest are summer cottages."

In the back of their minds, the couple yearned for a place of their own. In 2016, they bought a wooded, 2.2-acre parcel on Loon Lake from "someone whose family we've known forever," Charlie says.

"In addition to [continuing to use] the shared farm, we enjoy using the lake house as a more intimate and private retreat for short stays when we enjoy a bit of relative solitude, as well as



Small but stunning, this secluded cabin on Loon Lake is situated on a 2.2-acre wooded parcel. This unique getaway home combines a sense of place with outstanding modern design and building techniques by Whitten Architects of Portland, Maine.



time to gather with family and friends,” Haynes says. “With enormous trees overhead, a sparkling lake and an upward view to the mountains, this house offers an energetic and esthetic alternative to the high meadows, far horizon and sunset views of the farm on the hill.”

In short, Haynes says she and her husband wanted “to build a very simple but elegant space designed for short stays—two weeks or less—for us, our kids and our friends.” For this, the couple turned to Tom Lane, Rob Whitten and Russ Tyson of Whitten Architects in Portland, Maine, as well as contractor Kenneth Hood of K.P. Hood Construction in Meredith. The team was assisted by Tim Green of StandFast Works Forge in Parsonsfield, Maine; designer Heidi Lachapelle of Heidi Lachapelle Interiors in Portland, Maine; and landscape architect Soren deNiord of Soren deNiord Design Studio in Portland.

“This was the first and only house we’ve built from scratch,” Charlie says. “So, in that sense, it was a great experience working with Whitten to determine exactly what we wanted, versus having to live within an existing footprint.”

The experience resulted in a truly unique escape, a stunning, albeit small cabin that resembles two tethered shoeboxes, and combines the parcel’s special sense of place with modern design and building techniques.

“We built the house farther back from the lake than the original, so we have a generous amount of open space between the house and the water,” Charlie says. “Otherwise, the lot is wooded, and features a good number of fairly old and tall white pines and hemlocks.”

Given its unruffled, secluded setting, the lake house boasts an unmistakable “hidden gem” quality. It offers roughly 1,300 square feet of living space, with open-concept living, kitchen and dining areas, two bedrooms, and 1.5 bathrooms (plus an outdoor shower, which is one

of Charlie’s favorite features). An impressive, two-sided fireplace is integrated with a polished cement bench that anchors the sitting area and provides wood storage. All the floors are polished cement with radiant heat, keeping the structure warm during the winter and cool in summer. The plaster walls are unpainted, giving the living space a textured feel.

“We also built a separate screen porch that’s about 30 yards from the house, closer to the lake,” Charlie says. “That structure is anchored by having one cement wall, against which is a small, iron wood stove that provides very nice warmth in the fall. We now also have a small dock and a raft, so we can access the lake more easily for swimming and kayaking.

“The idea was to have very little ‘stuff’ at the house, so while there are built-in drawers in both bedrooms, there are no closets and no mudroom,” he says. “The concept was ‘you come, you throw your bag on your bed, and you just enjoy the lake or cooking a meal, or sitting out by the fire.’”

For Rob Whitten, founder of Whitten Architects, the chief goal of the project was “to have the whole be greater than the sum of the parts.” The challenge, he says, was to “to meet the spatial needs of the owners and have the design respond to the specific conditions of the site,” including the natural sunlight, views, lake, slopes and topography, natural features, and existing trees and ground cover.

“The lake house is a materially rich but simple environment,” Haynes says. “Interior and exterior elements are not painted, but instead offer natural, subtle variations of color and surface that become a family of textures that come together in a sense of serenity and depth.

“There’s also a comforting solidity and weight to the structure, balanced with plenty of glass that invites pine-filtered displays of shifting daylight and moonlight to continually pass over raw plaster



A separate screen porch is located about 30 yards from the cabin.

Careful choices in materials, stone and landscaping create a sense that the cabin belongs exactly where it is.



About 1,300 square feet of living space includes a two-sided fireplace with a bench that doubles as wood storage, and open-concept kitchen, living and dining areas.

walls, natural wood surfaces, shining polished stone-like cement floors, rough cement elements, and soft wool, linen and velvet cushions and comforting furnishings and blankets in muted rich tones," she says. "This is a place to be still and surrounded by quiet comfort."

The finished product highlights the collaborative effort of the project.

"Our goal was to help our clients achieve their vision in a way that brought to bear our expertise in site-

specific design," says Lane, the project architect. "We wanted to deliver a design that had the architectural qualities they were looking for as well as the durability and performance qualities that aren't seen."

Lane says Charlie and Haynes "challenged and invited us to design a home of modest size that was wabi-sabi meets Shaker in sensibility." Wabi-sabi is a Japanese design philosophy that emphasizes finding beauty in nature's

imperfection, while traditional Shaker architecture is characterized by clean lines and minimalist design.

"An example of wabi-sabi in the Loon Lake [home's] landscape would be the granite boulder 'outcrops' that intentionally interrupt the poured-in-place concrete slabs at the entry terrace," deNiord says.

deNiord says he was pleased with "the way the house and terrace spaces flow together," including the sight lines

through the house, the integrated materials that connect interior and exterior spaces, the transition to meadow and forest ecotypes, and the strategically placed granite boulders that anchor the house and form a bridge to the surrounding landscape.

Hood also reserved special praise for deNiord, saying he "appreciated the care that was put into bringing the landscape and surroundings into the house design."

"When you're in the house, you don't feel as if you're inside, but rather a part of the property," Hood says. "The house looks like it belongs there. The stones, landscaping, ferns and screen porch fit the scale of the landscape to create a sense of coziness and belonging. It's a much more sophisticated interpretation of a lake house than what you typically see."

Whitten agrees, adding: "We wanted to use several species of wood and clearly express the man-made materials, like brick, concrete, glass, steel and plaster. The [home's] small size meant that each part of the design achieved more

than one purpose to make the most of the limited space."

That limited space was a crucial factor for the builders. "The footprint and overall design in the house are, at first glance, quite simplistic," Hood says. "When you have a design like that, perfection is key."

"Each and every square inch must be seamless, since there's nothing to distract you from the long, clean lines and subtle details," he says. "I'm lucky to have a crew who understands the necessity of taking the time required to get the details right."

To create a hideaway that would withstand the elements, the lake house utilizes high-performance insulation; prefinished, high-performance windows; an air-sealing, exterior rain-screen design; and an insulated radiant-floor slab to minimize energy use, Whitten says. The large windows were carefully placed to provide balanced, natural light.

"The plan has a central core of utilities, and the bedrooms and living spaces are separated for privacy," he



A connection between interior and exterior spaces is a key concept, and the bedroom is no exception with its large doors that lead to an outdoor sitting area.

says. "The interior living spaces open to a landscaped courtyard, which is a protected sun pocket that extends the outside living beyond the summer months. The small wood-burning fireplace provides an interior focus and is a



cozy source of heat on cold nights.”

Although she came to the project later, interior designer Lachapelle emphasizes that the project’s collaborative effort never skipped a beat. “We wanted to ensure that the interior furnishings and fixtures matched the artful nature of the architecture,” Lachapelle says. “When we joined the project, there was a strong aesthetic path that the team was headed down, so it came together very effortlessly on our end. With the smaller footprint, we had to be very selective with what pieces were absolutely necessary to articulate the aesthetic.”

Outside, deNiord says he was tasked with creating “a beautiful—and beautifully crafted—lakeside retreat with a strong indoor-outdoor connection that could be used throughout the seasons.” That meant a low-maintenance landscape with a “native plant palette,” with a flowing traffic pattern and strong sight lines to the lake, he says.

Mission accomplished, say Charlie and Haynes.

“We’re extremely happy with how it came out,” Charlie says. “One of our goals was to create a space that not only

blended with the landscape, which we think it does, but also created a kind of integration between the inside environment and the natural world outside.

“That central hallway, the overhanging roofline and the huge windows—especially in the kitchen, living area and main bedroom—all helped to give the space that kind of flow-through feeling,” he says. “Now that we are using the space more as it was originally designed, we feel like it functions just as we’d hoped.”

Although the property was purchased with the previous owner’s older home on-site, the structure couldn’t be salvaged. Undeterred, and with an appreciation for the property’s history, Charlie and Haynes preserved several large chunks of granite from the house’s hearth as the backstop for their new fire pit.

“We had a lot of affection for the old house that was there when we bought the place,” Charlie says. “Being able to use one of the key components of that house—the granite hearthstones—in such a visible way was important to us, as a sign of respect for what came be-

fore us. I love seeing the stone there each time we arrive at the house.”

The couple’s sense of accomplishment was shared by their team of talented professionals who came together, listened attentively and employed their own expertise to create a memorable place.

“I’ve built many houses in my life, but this one will really stand out for its artistic value,” Hood says. “Building this house went beyond numbers, measurements and figures—it’s a work of art.

“It’s not about marble countertops, square footage or an in-home theater,” he says. “Charlie and Holly set out to do something special, and it was incredibly rewarding to be a part of making something so unique.” **NHH**

#### RESOURCES

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