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A HOUSE FOR ALL SEASONS

THIS ADIRONDACK HOME WAS THOUGHTFULLY DESIGNED FOR THE WHOLE GANG—SIBLINGS AND COUSINS—AND FOR THE LAKE AND THEIR SHARED FUTURE.

By Carrie Sherman | Photography courtesy of MossCreek

WHEN STEPHEN AND NICOLE ST. MARY FIRST canoed on Lake Sunapee twenty-five years ago, they immediately began to dream about spending time there. “We thought maybe we could buy a small lot and pitch a tent,” recalls Stephen. “My wife and I grew up in the Adirondacks of Upstate New York. Lake Sunapee brought back all of those memories.”

A few years ago, a lot became available and the time was right. “Our kids and their cousins were all at just the right ages to enjoy life on the lake,” Stephan says.

After an extensive search, the St. Marys contacted MossCreek, a renowned design firm of luxurious, rustic homes, located in Knoxville, Tennessee. The couple began an inspiring conversation with Allen Halcomb, the firm’s president. That conversation led to travels to North Carolina and other locations as they refined their vision for a new home.

Halcomb started MossCreek in 1983 and learned the craft of log-home design while consulting with a Finnish firm that specialized in log homes. Halcomb traveled extensively, researching rustic design in America, and continues his exploration.

“Our designs incorporate elements from around the country,” he says. “It’s an architecture that pays homage to America’s rustic past.” Although MossCreek employs in-house designers, the design firm works with local contractors. “This kind of

After a long search, the owners of this Lake Sunapee home chose MossCreek of Knoxville, Tennessee, a design firm known for its luxurious, rustic homes.

architecture doesn't happen in concentrated areas," Halcomb says. "It is spread throughout the USA and all over Canada. We work at a national level."

Remarkably, MossCreek turns out designs for two or three houses a week. "We streamline the design process and get people what they need," Halcomb says. After extensive conversations with a client, MossCreek sends a team to the site, where they assess unique considerations—for example, a house to the left or a slope to the right. "A house has to respond to those variables," Halcomb says.

The Lake Sunapee site was challenging for many reasons, including—as Halcomb says—"It was just a bowl of boulders." Nonetheless, the team was able to draw up a detailed design by the end of their daylong visit.

The plan was further developed on the ground by Sudbury Design Group's landscape architect Matt Sullivan. Previously, he worked with the homeowners to develop a master landscape plan for their home in Massachusetts. His knowledge of environmental regulations and permitting along with his skill as a landscape architect were instrumental in creating a flat plane for the Lake Sunapee house to be built on.

"When you drive up the street," Sullivan says, "the house blends right into the woods. We tried to be very strategic about moving any trees. It looks

Left: The overall look is an innovative and stylish take on a traditional New England home. The great room's fireplace, made with New Hampshire fieldstone, is a work of art.

Above, from left to right: Erwin Loveland, Allen Halcomb, Brian Sawyer and John Wallace of MossCreek

Reclaimed wood is used throughout the house. Every rail, inside and out, is adorned with twig balusters in keeping with the authentic Adirondack ethic. All the materials were carefully chosen with an eye toward this classic style.

like the house has always been there, which is what the St. Marys wanted."

Sullivan's summary is understated. But, for starters, the plan called for an old house to be removed. Storm-water drainage also needed to be redirected; the team designed a wetland swale for proper drainage to prevent road waste from contaminating the lake.

After multiple site-line studies, Sullivan achieved an angle that had the main views out of the house facing due east. "The sunrises viewed from that angle are amazing," he says. "It's a very active lake and to see the 'glass' first thing in the morning is free art!"

Then he designed a series of retaining walls and terraces connected by walkways and steps going down to the lake. The walls were structural and veneered to support mosses and ledge plantings. "The St. Marys wanted the landscaping to have a woodland character. So we kept it loose and natural," Sullivan says. "We also used weeping evergreens, specimen paperback maples, wild blueberry mixes and lush fern groundcovers."

The Sudbury Design Group's construction team did the entire landscape implementation as well. The masonry division carefully placed and fitted New England fieldstone. Sudbury Design Group even built a naturalistic spa, creating a people-friendly circle.

"With a natural design like this, we can design a concept on paper that is really a guideline," Sullivan says. "But it truly takes the collaboration and craftsmanship of the masons—who work with the actual stones, chiseling and snapping—to create the best placements."

After interviewing a handful of builders, MossCreek chose to work with McGray & Nichols, a venerable, award-winning company in the Lake Sunapee region. "They really wanted to build and make things happen," Halcomb says. "They apply pressure in a positive way, and were ready to do some training and pick up with it. Also we wanted

a builder that employed exceptional craftspeople."

Louise Bonfiglio, owner and president of McGray and Nichols, efficiently and enthusiastically summarizes the construction process on the house: The materials are innovative and stylish, introducing a new look to a very traditional New England place. These materials include lots of reclaimed wood, incorporating materials such as poplar bark shingles, black locust railings, and classic, mountain-laurel crooked balusters for inside and out. There is deep swamp cypress for the decking and hand-peeled locust for the logs on the porch.

"The interior is all reclaimed mixed hardwood. The stone used in the house is New Hampshire fieldstone," Bonfiglio says. "We used Joe Rolfe and his crew from Stone Mountain Masonry throughout the house to have continuity."

The artistry of Rolfe and his team is especially evident in the fieldstone fireplace in the great room. Fitted in the intricate, old-fashioned style of dry-laid stone, this majestic chimney and surround is "wet

Interior design was handled by William Peace of Peace Design. The concept, Peace says, was to create an "inside/outside" look. "By maintaining a neutral palette, the expansive windows frame the views and they become the 'artwork' of the home," he says. The chandelier in the great room gives a human scale to the room, and a loft provides a cozy spot to gather.

One of the challenges with lodge homes, Peace says, is "creating intimate spaces." Peace uses both primitive European and American antiques with comfortable modern upholstery. This mix creates warm and inviting areas where the family can spend time together.

set" against a concrete wall. The soft shades of the stone meld well with the muted tones of the reclaimed oak. The large gray granite hearthstones are reclaimed from when the Longfellow Bridge in Boston was redone.

Chris St. Onge, senior project manager for McGray & Nichols, underscores with well-earned pride that "It's really cozy inside that house." He should know, having overseen the installation of the spray-foam insulation—four inches on the outside walls, hence the deep windowsills. The roof took seven or so inches of spray-foam insulation. A full thermal heating and cooling system with an energy-recovery ventilation (ERV) system was also installed. "There's no sound to the system," St. Onge says. "To test it, you hold up a piece a of paper to see if it trembles."

The radiant-heated flooring is circle-sawn red and white oak, hand selected through Appalachian Antique Hardwoods. "We skipped the heavy sanding on the circle-sawn oak to keep that look," St. Onge says.

The house is framed with steel beams that are then wrapped in veneers of old beams. The walls have a black-painted plywood with a reclaimed hardwood siding.

St. Onge describes it as a "great piece of theater."

Making the home blend with its surroundings was a main goal. Throughout, as seen here, views of the outdoors are a prominent part of the design.

From top down: William Peace, of Peace Design; Louise Bonfiglio, owner and president of McGray & Nichols; Chris St. Onge, senior project manager for McGray & Nichols

The home was built to host a large family of up to twenty-four people. When the extended family gets together, a shared bath easily accommodates everyone. In addition to the bedrooms, there are two bunkrooms (opposite page). With the porch, downstairs bar, game room and various nooks, there's plenty of space for all.

Others describe the process as putting on "the clothes."

For the interior design, the St. Marys engaged William Peace, of Peace Design with offices in Atlanta and Bozeman, Georgia. Known for both urban and rustic interiors, Peace's work has created award-winning residences for many families throughout the country.

In the great room, Peace Design placed a very large, elegant antler chandelier that lights up the house. The chandelier is so large that the installation necessitated the use of a crane to hoist it through the unfinished, screened-in porch. The stately fixture was handcrafted by Dartbrook of upstate New York.

"One of the challenges of lodge homes," Peace says, "is creating intimate spaces where family groups can gather."

In the great room, the chandelier creates a sort of ceiling and gives a human scale to the room. A cozy loft provides a warm place for adults to gather with a cup of coffee or a glass of wine, and also keep an eye on kids as they roam about.

"When we create interiors, the neutrality of our spaces is very intentional," Peace says. "We look at the natural surroundings and carry those materials to the inside, developing a more fluid sense of the house. We look at the materials we're going to use—a heavy velvet or even a fur. They all have some strength and feel appropriate in balance with the architecture."

"By maintaining a neutral palette, the expansive windows frame the views and they become the 'artwork' of the home," Peace says. This inside/outside concept Peace describes sounds simple, but takes real discernment to pull off.

Peace layers in primitive European and American antiques alongside comfortable, structured, modern upholstery. The mix creates a great atmosphere where people can relax, chat and take in the beautiful lake views.

Nicole St. Mary especially enjoyed shopping locally with the crew from Peace Design for key artisan pieces. "We found wonderful pieces both old and new—together they seemed to settle in to create the look and feel we were after," she says.

The home has accommodated as many as twenty-four people during family gatherings. Both Stephen and Nicole come from large families, and it's not uncommon for them to host large groups at the lake for weekends and holidays. The cousins take over the two downstairs bunkrooms—one for boys and one for girls. A shared bath easily accommodates all of them. There's always a nook on a porch, loft, downstairs bar or game room for folks to gather or read a book. "This house if filled with cozy spots and great views, so there is plenty of room to get together or spread out," Stephen says.

Additionally, the St. Marys added their own subtle design touches to bring everyone together. The downstairs bar seats people on both sides, and the requisite sinks were moved to the wall. The result is the feel of an intimate pub. For the big porch dining table, they had a custom table made, narrowing the width to encourage closer, more intimate seating.

The dream of Lake Sunapee that the St. Marys originally envisioned on that now legendary canoe trip has become a reality. "We love the house," Nicole says. "It brings us all closer together."

"When we're here," Stephen adds, "everyone sets aside their busy lives and we fall into the natural rhythm of the seasons, be it sitting by the lake, skiing or climbing the nearby mountains." NHH

RESOURCES

McGray & Nichols • (603) 526-2877 • mcgray-nichols.com
MossCreek • (800) 737-2166 • mosscreek.net
Peace Design • (404) 237-8681 • peacedesign.com
Stone Mountain Masonry • (603) 528-4456 • josephlrolfe@msn.com
Sudbury Design Group • (978) 443-3638 • landscapearchitectureboston.com