

# Period Homes

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*New Design & Construction — more than 5,000 sq.ft.*

Winner: **Albert, Righter & Tittman Architects, Inc.**



**Project:** vacation house, Northeast Harbor, ME

**Architect:** Albert, Righter & Tittmann Architects, Inc., Boston, MA; Jacob Albert, AIA, principal in charge

**Interior Decorator:** Judith Swartwood, Cambridge, MA

**Landscape Architect:** Patrick Chasse, Somerville, MA

**General Contractor:** Albert Jensen, Dixmont, ME

## Rooms with a View

**O**n a hilltop above Northeast Harbor, ME, is a wooded tract with views of Somes Sound and the mountains of Acadia National Park to the west and, to the southeast, the Atlantic Ocean. In 2004, a New York family approached Boston, MA-based Albert, Righter & Tittmann Architects (AR&T) to design a summer house that would take advantage of the site, but not necessarily conform to the predominant Shingle and Revival styles of Mt. Desert Island. Owing in large part to architects such as Fred L. Savage and William Ralph Emerson, the Shingle Style flourished on the island in the late-19th century, becoming the signature response to the region's jagged, rockbound coastline. Yet it is a response that the client found ill-suited to the unique hilltop site. "Because it would be up on a mountain and in the woods, they didn't think that their house should be a typical seaside cottage," says Jacob Albert, AIA, principal in charge. "Instead, they wanted it to have more of the rustic feeling of a mountain camp."

To present the client a range of design approaches, Albert and the project team — including principal Jim Righter and associate August Ventimiglia — developed three schemes for the site, which is approached from the east and slopes markedly downward to the west. The first scheme was a village compound of connected buildings surrounding a courtyard; the second was a linear plan oriented parallel to the slope with all rooms overlooking the view to the west; and the third combined aspects of the first two — a linear plan oriented perpendicular to the slope with outbuildings defining an arrival court. Finding it more interesting and less obvious, the client opted for the third scheme, also appreciating that it would minimize the impression of a large structure. "By orienting the house perpendicular to the slope and approaching it from its narrow end," says Albert, "it doesn't seem really big — it seems more modest and less imposing. The guest house and garage are fairly small, so it seems like a collection of modest camp buildings. The axis [which runs east-west along the driveway and through stone gate posts and two pavilions beyond] is a formal organizing feature, but the buildings are grouped around it in an informal fashion."

Along with creating an entrance court, the 625-sq.ft. garage and 1,100-sq.ft. guest house complement the 4,600-sq.ft. main house with the same materials palette and details. The outbuildings were completed first, enabling the contractor, Dixmont, ME-based Albert Jensen, to perfect the elements that lend the design its



On a hilltop above Northeast Harbor, ME, Albert, Righter & Tittmann Architects, Inc., of Boston, MA, designed a house that was inspired both by informal rustic camps and the Shingle and Revival styles characteristic of Mt. Desert Island. All photos: © Brian Vanden Brink



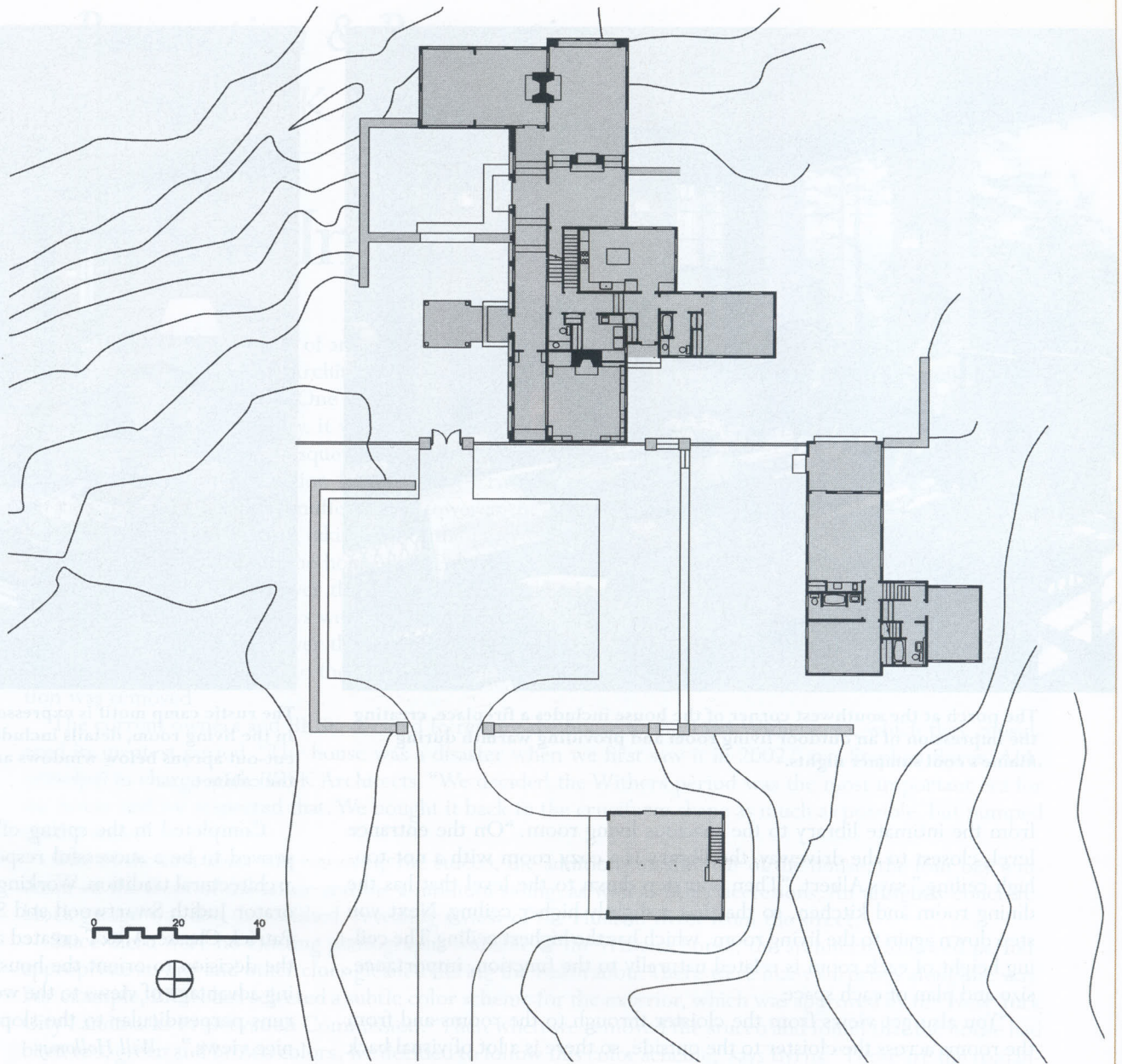
The garage, guest house and main house are arranged around the east-west axis, which runs perpendicular to the slope of the site, to create an entrance court. A cloister-like hall that runs parallel to the axis along the south side of the house connects, from east to west, the library, kitchen, dining room and living room. Plan: courtesy of Albert, Richter & Tittmann Architects, Inc.

rustic feel. More upcountry camp than coastal summer cottage, the entire first floor of the house is finished in unpainted fir. Details that establish the informal, not-too-polished camp motif include a recurring zig-zag pattern on exposed rafter ends, front door, mantels, cabinets and newel posts; a frieze of criss-cross boards in the living and dining rooms; and diamond cut-outs in the aprons below windows. Reclaimed barn wood was used for the dining-room sideboard and kitchen island.

On the other hand, the house also possesses characteristics drawn from local shorefront traditions. The façade and roof are finished in red-cedar shingles and the trim is painted a dark green typical of the region. A cloister-like hallway that runs along the south side of the house, both reducing the scale of the south façade and connecting the main spaces of the first floor, is shingled in the interior. Albert says that while a shingled interior is not common, it is a feature that finds precedent in several local structures. "One particularly wonderful example is the apse of St. Jude's Chapel [in nearby Seal Harbor, ME], which was

designed by Emerson. John Calvin Stevens was another Shingle Style architect who we like, and he did a few shingled interiors. It is something that we have seen before and always liked, so we decided to try it here."

Approximately 70 ft. in length, the cloister links the library, kitchen area, dining room and living room, which are arranged in a linear pattern from east to west. Because the first floor steps down with the slope of the site, the ceiling height of the first-floor spaces increases from east to west,



Seen from the northwest, the house seems much larger than it appears on initial approach. While its exposed rafter ends evoke rustic camps, its red-cedar shingles and dark-green trim are characteristic of many classic Mt. Desert Island homes.



Stepping down with the slope from east to west, the cloister connects the first-floor spaces and leads to the porch. Its shingled interior, a feature of some local historic structures, lends an outdoor feel to the space.





The porch at the southwest corner of the house includes a fireplace, creating the impression of an outdoor living room and providing warmth during Maine's cool summer nights.

from the intimate library to the spacious living room. "On the entrance level, closest to the driveway, the library is a cozy room with a not-too-high ceiling," says Albert. "Then you step down to the level that has the dining room and kitchen, so that has a slightly higher ceiling. Next you step down again to the living room, which has the highest ceiling. The ceiling height of each room is related naturally to the function, importance, size and plan of each space.

"You also get views from the cloister through to the rooms and from the rooms across the cloister to the outside, so there is a lot of visual back and forth – and light and air also move all the way through the house."

While the plan is mainly linear along the east-west axis, a one-level wing on the north side of the house serves as a guest bedroom. This wing is balanced on the south side by the two pavilions – an entrance pavilion and a second pavilion that houses an outdoor living room, complete with a fireplace. In contrast to the rustic first floor, painted finishes on the second floor create a more refined, airy feel. The master bedroom is connected to the children's bedrooms by a hallway that runs the length of north side of the house; the hallway includes an oriel window with a window seat and views of the woods to the north.



The rustic camp motif is expressed throughout the unpainted-fir first floor. In the living room, details include a frieze of criss-cross boards, diamond cut-out aprons below windows and zig-zag patterns on the mantel and above the cabinet.

Completed in the spring of 2006, the camp-inspired summer house proved to be a successful response to a unique site on an island rich in architectural tradition. Working with Cambridge, MA-based interior decorator Judith Swartwood and Somerville, MA-based landscape architect Patrick Chasse, AR&T created an unexpected experience that began with the decision to orient the house perpendicular to the slope – while taking advantage of views to the west and southwest. "Even though the house runs perpendicular to the slope," says Albert, "all of the rooms do have nice views." – Will Holloway



Painted finishes create a more refined feel on the second floor. The hallway connecting the children's bedrooms with the master bedroom includes a window seat in an oriel window.



Completed in 2006, the Harborview House combines details of inland mountain camps with the local seaside vernacular, resulting in a house that both suits its unique site and gives a nod to regional traditions.