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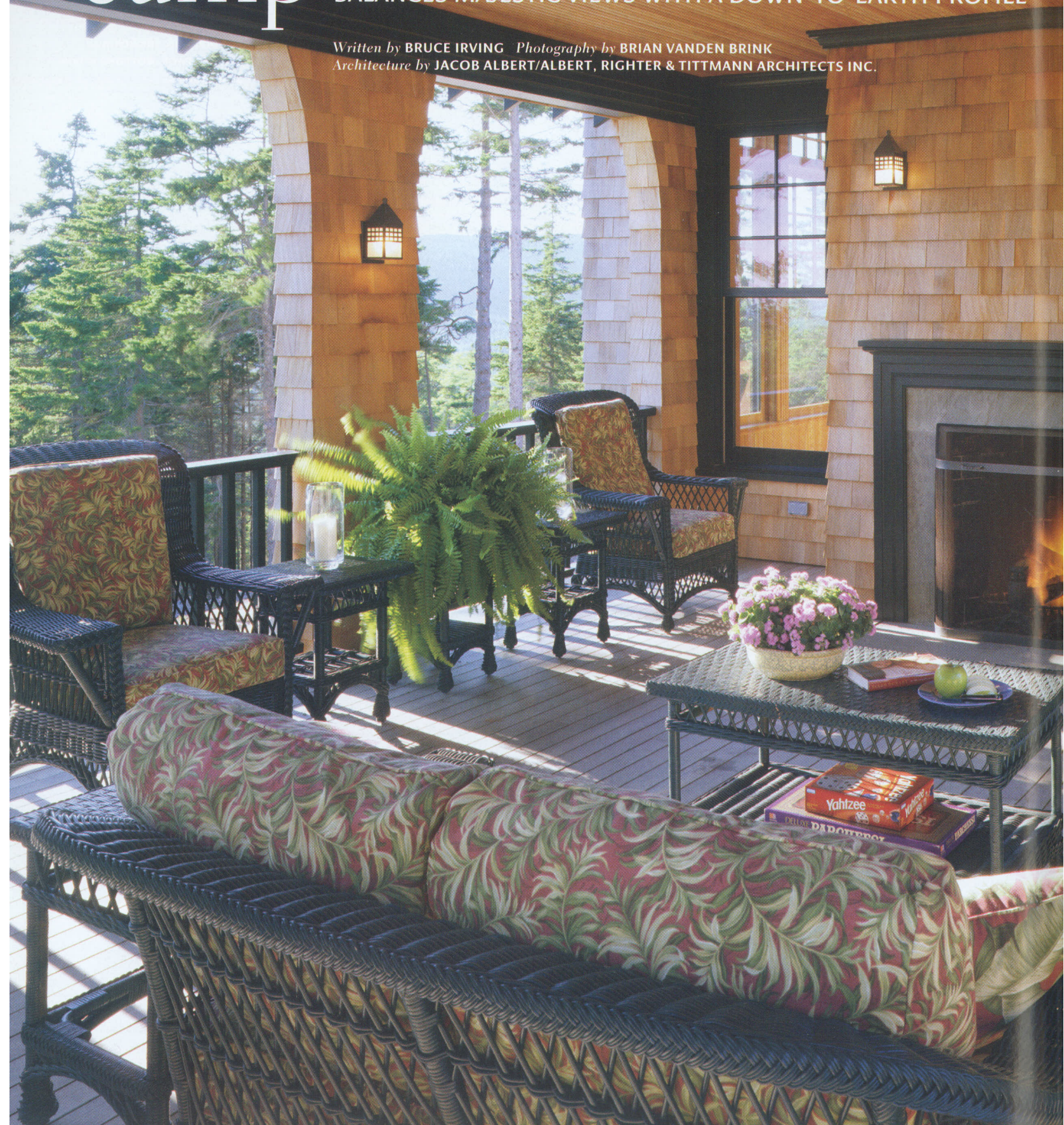


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summer camp

A VACATION HOUSE NEAR NORTHEAST HARBOR, MAINE,
BALANCES MAJESTIC VIEWS WITH A DOWN-TO-EARTH PROFILE

Written by **BRUCE IRVING** Photography by **BRIAN VANDEN BRINK**
Architecture by **JACOB ALBERT/ALBERT, RIGHTER & TITTMANN ARCHITECTS INC.**



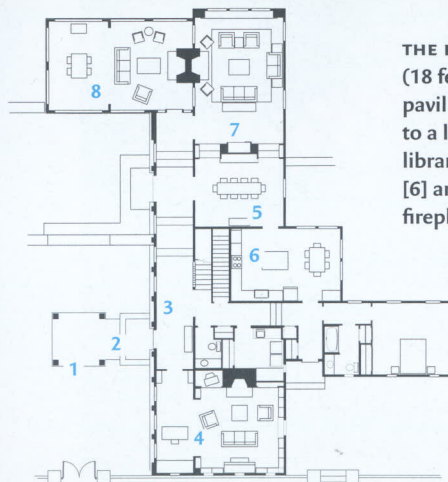
ORSON WELLES ONCE SAID, "THE ENEMY OF ART is the absence of limitations." On his way to designing a summer home overlooking the natural splendors of Mount Desert Island, Maine, architect Jacob Albert faced two very distinct limitations — and the result shows how right Welles was.

The first obstacle was the property, 70 mountaintop acres just outside the village of Northeast Harbor that were covered by "a nearly impenetrable pine forest — you couldn't see a thing," recalls Albert, principal at Albert, Righter, & Tittmann Architects Inc. in Boston. After a half-hour hike from the nearest road to the top of the lot, he and his client continued on to the nearby summit of Eliot Mountain, where a vista gave them an approximation (they hoped) of what they might see if enough of the woodlands at the site could be cleared. But that work would take time, so Albert, referencing a photograph of the future view taken by an arborist who climbed the highest tree on the site, began to design.

His first schemes showed the house laid out on the site in two different ways: one full-on parallel to the prospects he hoped would open up, and one perpendicular. It was then that his clients, a book editor and an investment manager from New York, set the second limitation. They instructed him to eschew the Shingle-style oceanside cottage look to which most new houses in the area aspire and to create something more along the lines of a mountain camp. And they surprised him by opting for the perpendicular plan, which was by no means the sure bet for the site. "I liked the idea that every room would have a different view," recalls the husband, "and I liked how the house would hug the land and follow it as it sloped down."



A TRUE OUTDOOR ROOM, Maine-style, the deck (LEFT) features shingles, beadboard, deep green trim, and wicker furniture and overlooks pines and ocean. Stone pillars (ABOVE) mark the entrance to the house, where the first of two pavilions leads to the front door, while the second is an entree to the porch at left.



THE FLOOR PLAN SHOWS a relatively narrow (18 feet wide) building core. A protective pavilion [1] marks the entry [2], which opens to a long hallway [3] that descends from the library [4] to the dining room [5] and kitchen [6] and finally to the living room [7] and the fireplaced porch [8].

Builder Al Jensen, Dixmont, Maine
Interior Design Judith Swartwood, Cambridge, Massachusetts
Landscape Design Patrick Chasse, Somerville, Massachusetts



"They were adamant, right from the start," says Albert, "that this was not going to be palatial or looming, that it would be modest in its imagery."

The unassuming impression begins at the end of the half-mile gravel road (built before construction could start) that leads to the house. Here visitors are presented with the narrow end of the house, slightly dressed up with a bracketed window. Two stone pillars frame a pathway that leads to the first of two shingled pavilions, where a right turn brings a visitor to the entrance to

FORMERLY IMPENETRABLE PINE FOREST, the site (FACING PAGE) has been opened up to let in the sun. Now, low-bush blueberries thrive. Along the front of the building (ABOVE) runs "the cloister," the wood-lined hallway that connects all the rooms of the first floor.

the house or, continuing straight ahead, to steppingstones and a second pavilion, this one with a porch, a fireplace, and the view Albert and his clients dreamed about.

Guests with manners, however, first use the front door and enter into a long hall, dubbed "the cloister," which runs the length of the house. Following the slope of the lot, the hall descends in a series of graceful steps, starting at the library, passing the dining room, and ending at the living room. The ceiling level of each room is constant, while the floors drop away with the land. "Each successive room's height reflects its increasing importance," Albert says.

The dining and living rooms are compositions of pure Douglas fir — floors, walls, and ceilings — their decoration com-

A LIGHT-FILLED HALLWAY leads to the master suite. It features a simple but effective wall treatment of wood battens on drywall. The alcove on the right holds everything for a lazy afternoon — a daybed, bookshelves, and a view of the Maine woods.





UPSTAIRS, THE SERENE MASTER BEDROOM (ABOVE) has simple painted drywall and batten ceiling. In contrast, downstairs rooms are finished in a symphony of fir floors, walls, and ceilings. An example of the decorative wood finishes is the X-patterned frieze (TOP RIGHT) that unites the living room and the purposely cozy dining room (BOTTOM RIGHT).

ing not from paint or paper, but from applied moldings, simple shapes a carpenter might have cut from flat stock on the job site. Uniting the two rooms is a wide band of wooden X's that ring the upper walls like a frieze, a variation on the home's recurring theme of zigzags.

It's a subtle touch that reflects the sophistication and unpretentiousness of the house, which in turn reflects its owners. Albert describes the wife as "engaging, positive, and fun." The husband, who has a degree in architecture, even working in the field briefly before moving to finance, "has a very developed understanding of space," says Albert.

This modesty of detail and space continues into the adjacent dining room. "Part of the fun of being in Maine," says the husband, "is that when everyone's over for dinner, you're packed in, cheek to jowl. It feels like a camp, tight and cozy."

Upstairs, the fir finishes give way to thrifty painted drywall, dressed up with batten strips. Where downstairs the cloister runs along the front of the building, here a hallway connects bedrooms along the back. The master suite (his and her closets and baths, plus an office) unrolls along the hall and culminates in a bedroom overlooking the woods, the sea, and the islands. But Albert's favorite spot — the homeowners love it, too — is the daybed alcove perched inside an oriel window. With built-in drawers, a little bookshelf, decorative screen, and four windows surveying the mountaintop, the alcove is an artful microcosm of the house it graces: simple, elegant, and very, very comfortable. ■

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