

New England Home

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Third Anniversary Issue

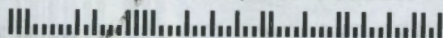
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WHIMSY AND FUNCTION JOIN FORCES TO TRANSFORM A
RAMSHACKLE GARAGE INTO AN INVITING GUESTHOUSE NESTLED
DEEP IN THE WOODS OF NEW HAMPSHIRE'S WHITE MOUNTAINS.

LITTLE BIG HOUSE

TEXT BY ERIN MARVIN | PHOTOGRAPHY BY GREG PREMUR | ARCHITECTURE: JACOB ALBERT,
ALBERT, RIGHTER & TITTMANN ARCHITECTS | CONTRACTOR: GARRETT ROWE

With its castle-like facade, this small lakeside retreat fits beautifully into its fairytale setting amid the enchanted woodlands of New Hampshire's White Mountains. But don't be fooled by its diminutive stature—the tiny building has grand ambitions, serving as one family's guesthouse, library, tennis-viewing pavilion and boathouse. | It's not magic, though some might very



Both cozy and grand, the living room accounts for more than half the volume of the guesthouse's interior. FACING PAGE: Cedar shingle walls and dark-green exterior trim are consistent with the main house and the area's historic resort architecture.



well call Jacob Albert a wizard for fitting all these functions into a mere 900 square feet of space (with an additional 650 square feet underneath to house the owner's boat, an exercise room and more storage). "There were lots of things going into this little space," says Albert, adding that the entire process "probably took two years from start to finish, which is what a house might take."

A feat like this isn't accomplished without facing a few challenges, the most difficult of which was adhering to strict zoning laws. "You wouldn't think zoning would be a factor because you don't have any sense of houses around you," says Albert, noting that the property sits off by itself with a sweeping view of the lake. "But in fact, this little building is right



near a property line, so it couldn't get any bigger than the existing footprint."

The existing footprint happened to belong to a ramshackle garage. No matter that there isn't another house in sight, the proximity of the invisible property line meant the architect couldn't just tear down the garage and start fresh. Instead, he let the small existing footprint inspire the design of the new building.

While the main house—a cross between Shingle *Continued on page 122*

FACING PAGE: Albert and his team designed the large fireplace using stones found in the area. The surrounding unfinished pine walls will darken over time, enhancing the rustic, "camp" feel of the guesthouse.



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The second-floor bedroom has low eaves and a horizontal band of small windows wrapping around the east and south sides. **BELOW:** The circular stair was built without a center post.



Continued from page 119 style and Arts and Crafts—sprawls horizontally on the property, the guesthouse stands tall and slender. A conical roof and tall slot windows reinforce the castle imagery. “It’s different in proportions, but similar in materials,” explains Albert, who took care to incorporate features from the main house, such as the dark-green exterior trim and natural pine interior, into its miniature counterpart.

“I think another reason for the verticality is that it backs right up to the woods,” adds Albert. “It echoes the tall old trees behind it.”

Albert got lucky with site orientation: though the woods hug the back of the guesthouse, a generous lawn, the family’s tennis courts and a large lake spread out in front. “We had an ideal orientation,” he says. “The view toward the tennis courts and the lake faces south, which gave us the views that we wanted

and the sunlight.” A large deck overlooks the tennis courts and lake beyond.

To capture as much of the light and lake view as possible inside, Albert installed a large south-facing window that projects out from the main volume of the house. “That was partly the result of the zoning restriction,” explains Albert. “We couldn’t enlarge the building, so to get more space we let the bay window hang out beyond the foundation and designed some fun brackets for it to be supported on. It gives more space to the room and more light because it has three sides.”

The window looks out from the double-height living room, which boasts a rooftop monitor that lets in additional light. The room feels much larger than it is, Albert says, because the two-story window and high ceiling “give grandeur to what might otherwise be small.”

The owners’ love of reading is reflected in the living room, which doubles as a library with walls of books wrapping the room on three sides. But there’s more to this room than meets the eye: cabinets within the bookshelves conceal a kitchenette. “This place really is a tiny, self-contained house,” says Albert. “It has all the necessary functions.”

A massive stone fireplace occupies the living room’s fourth wall. Exposed beams are both structural and decorative. The wood detailing, unfinished pine walls and colorful tribal rugs, along with the owner’s collection of wooden ducks and model boats, imbue the interior of the house with a rustic camp atmosphere. “The casings and trim and other decorative details are angular in the way a backwoods carpenter a hundred years ago might have done things,” says Albert.

A spiraling staircase connects the three levels of the house. Upstairs, the bedroom is tucked behind a screen wall of turned-wood spoolwork colonnettes that affords some privacy. A Craftsman-style bed takes up much of the space.

The best stories are all about transformation. In this tale, a derelict old garage becomes a whimsical, yet functional, haven for the homeowners and their family, friends and guests. It may be small in size, but there’s plenty of room for a happy ending. **NEH**

RESOURCES For more information about this project see page 297.