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NEW CLASSICS



Adirondack Architecture

Albert Righter & Tittmann designs a whimsical cabin based on the Great Camps of the 19th century.

BY NANCY A. RUHLING

OPPOSITE: The tower and cabin are connected by a greenhouse-like glass hyphen. All photography by Robert Benson

BELOW: The top floor of the tower, which houses the master suite, features a balcony that overlooks the lake.



In the 19th century, it was the Great Camps in the Adirondack Mountains of New York State that set the style for summer.

Based principally on the architecture of Swiss chalets, these well-heeled twiggy tree-houses, rustic yet refined, paid homage to the great outdoors as well as to the opulence of the era.

The Adirondacks style, which was advocated by radical Victorian tastemakers like Charles Eastlake, has never gone out of style. Indeed, so ubiquitous is it that it has become not only a synonym but also a

cliché for the little log cabin in the woods.

Sally Berk, a historical preservationist based in Washington, D.C., set out to break the branches of conventional Adirondacks style while still keeping it wonderfully—and whimsically—rooted in the past.

The lakeside summer cabin she and her husband, Sandy Berk, bought was so small that they named it No Vacancy.

A fixer-upper, it was virtually uninhabitable. Several years after they renovated it with architect

John Thompson of Washington, D.C., they decided to expand the space so their two children and two grandchildren could visit.

Berk, Associate AIA, collaborated with Jacob D. Albert, AIA, and J.B. Clancy, AIA, of Boston-based Albert, Righter & Tittmann Architects or ART Architects, to give the twigs a contemporary twist.

“Many of the ideas for this project, including the bright color scheme, came from her,” Albert says. “We invented things that make you think of backwoods carpentry and give the feeling of being rustic



In the living room, the original fieldstone fireplace dominates. Windows open out to the screened-in porch facing the lake.

BELOW: The antique newel post and stained-glass windows in the tower's staircase are from Sally Berk's collection.

OPPOSITE: The cabin's original and only bedroom was converted into a library whose book shelves are the studs of the wall.



and old. We didn't copy any designs from the past, we reimagined them."

The property, which is positioned close to the lake, is set off a paved road not far from the highway.

"You can see other houses through the trees and across the lake," Albert says. "But most are shielded by trees so there's a feeling of privacy."

For her outdoors oasis, Berk envisioned a three-story tree-topping tower with a bedroom and bathroom on each floor and a separate color scheme to distinguish each.

"The fire towers of the forests in the area were the inspiration," Albert says, adding that the tower proved perfect for the property's petite footprint. "We had a height limit of 35 feet set by zoning, and we used every bit of it."

The siting of the tower was done after careful study of the surroundings.

"It is slightly angled to the cabin to get the best view of the lake from the top floor, where the master bedroom and balcony are. Cabin and tower are

connected with a glass-enclosed hyphen that showcases the view of the lake from each side."

Berk also wanted to incorporate her collection of antique stained-glass windows and architectural elements and artifacts, which included a newel post and vintage bathroom fixtures, in the design.

"The windows climb upward along the tower's stairway," Albert says. "We made them operable. They open like awnings, bringing in light, air and color."

With its elaborately patterned fish-scale cedar shingles and bright colored brackets and window frames and sashes, the tower looks as though it could be a fairy-tale abode.

"We wanted to make it fun but not corny," Albert says. "It's light-hearted."

He mentions the dramatic wooden rafter tails on the roof, which look like flying lightning bolts thrown to Mother Earth by Zeus from Mount Olympus, and the red and blue primary-color scheme of the new windows.







"There was no particular great challenge to the project," he says. "Contractors, however, were scarce and came from fairly far away; some of them had to drive over an hour to get to the property. The Adirondacks have severe winters, so that slowed the building."

No Vacancy's architectural adventure starts at the yellow-brick road, which leads not to Oz but to a plain wooden front door of the same hue.

Open it, and like Alice in Wonderland, you're transported to another world.

Step off the yellow path to tour the cabin, where there's a library whose books are shelved casually in the open studs of the wall. Before the renovation, it

was the only bedroom.

In the dining room, wooden cutouts of the Seven Dwarfs march up the stairs. They're showing the way to the loft in the eyebrow gable where guests stay.

The living room is defined by the massive field-stone fireplace, which was original to the cabin and has a matching semicircular stone overmantel that reaches nearly to the ceiling.

The kitchen, which features pine-slab countertops and a pass-through window to the screened-in lakeside porch, is big enough—almost—for two cooks as long as they don't turn around. It's also a space for a couple to sit and sup.

1: The small kitchen has a pass-through window so the cook can serve food to those on the screened-in porch. The countertops are slabs of pine, and the wooden cabinets are in a traditional 19th-century style.

2: A window seat creates a cozy corner in the master bedroom.

3: A balcony in the tower's master suite brings the outdoors in, and an old-fashioned gas-fired stove provides heat on cool nights.

4 In the dining room, the Seven Dwarfs march up the stairs to the loft, which is a guest room.



LEFT: The window brackets on the connector are defined by their traditional-inspired design and bright color.

RIGHT: Each floor in the tower has its own bathroom and vintage fixtures. Arts and Crafts-style tiles add color and interest.

BELOW: The living room, dining room and kitchen pass-through window open to the screened-in porch, which wraps around two sides of the cabin.

FAR RIGHT: The first room inside the connector is the entry, which serves as a secondary dining room and a games/entertainment space.



RESOURCES

Architect: **Albert, Righter & Tittmann Architects,**
Boston, Massachusetts, artarchitects.com

Design Collaborator: **Sally Berk, Associate AIA,**
Washington, D.C., 202-328-7283

Structural Engineer: **Steve Siegel, Siegel Associates,**
Newton, Massachusetts, siegelassociates.com

Contractor: **Northern Design & Building Associates,**
Hudson Falls, New York, northerndesign.com



The route to the tower is across the yellow-brick road and through the greenhouse-like connector, whose colorful floor-to-ceiling windows look at the lake.

The tower's first floor, also known as the red level, leads to the green level and finally the purple penthouse, where a balcony surveys the water and a coffee bar is fitted cleverly into the staircase.

"Three floors is a long way to walk in the morning for a cup of coffee," Albert says, adding that the Berks usually drink theirs on the balcony so they can admire the scenery.

Each bedroom is heated by an old-fashioned-style gas-fired stove set atop a platform of multi-colored Arts and Crafts-style tiles. And each bathroom is

appointed with vintage fixtures and Arts and Crafts-style tiles.

Each floor is decorated to suit its occupants. The grandchildren's green level, for instance, is outfitted with new bunk beds. An electric train set that belonged to Sandy chugs in circles around the top of the room.

The rooms, furnished by Berk, are a mix of antiques and new pieces. It was she, for instance, who designed the headboard in the master suite. It's made of twigs that are painted in the same colors as the windows and trim on the tower and cabin.

Since the completion of the tower, No Vacancy has more than lived up to its name: It's full all summer long. ■