

On Golden Lake

An active family builds a legacy in the serene lakes region of New Hampshire.

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PHOTOGRAPHY

Bob and Leslie Dahl admit that they've never had much need for a travel agent. Since their marriage 16 years ago, the couple has spent almost all of their vacation time in central New Hampshire, treasuring the pristine waters and peaceful splendor of Lake Winnepesaukee and nearby Squam Lake. The arrival of what would eventually be four children only increased their enthusiasm for snow skiing, hiking, swimming, kayaking, water skiing, and other outdoor

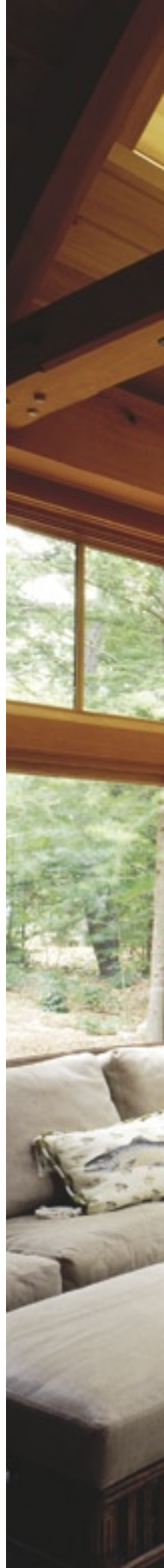
activities found in abundance at or near their favorite destination.

Still, finding a lakeside rental property for summer and winter breaks that could accommodate their growing brood—not to mention their ability to pack everything in a timely manner—became increasingly challenging. “It was quite a logistical feat to load up and transport all the belongings we needed to take, like water-skis, bikes, hiking boots, and other things,” admits Leslie. “It seemed pretty clear that we needed



ABOVE: The “L”-shaped design of the home enables 270-degree views of Squam Lake, made famous by its background role in the movie *On Golden Pond*.

OPPOSITE: The sunroom, with its skylights, floor-to-ceiling windows and pocket doors, can be both an extension of the great room or a private retreat.







a place of our own.”

Their requirements for a permanent getaway, however, involved more than just an above-average number of bedrooms and water frontage. They wanted a vacation home that would eventually serve as a family legacy for their children. “It was important to us that we create something of long-lasting timeless, something that could be enjoyed by generations of family to come,” says Leslie. “That was truly an objective.”

Bob, a private equity investor in New

York City, and Leslie, who works in the asset management business, routinely made the five-hour trip from their home in Greenwich, Connecticut, to central New Hampshire to look first at existing houses and then land. Initially, they looked for opportunities on Lake Winnepesaukee but eventually focused their attention on Squam Lake, a quieter, less commercial, unspoiled area that is closer to the Sandwich and White Mountains and once served as the stunning location for filming the beloved movie *On Golden Pond*.

The search took years but finally culminated in success when the Dahls chanced upon what they immediately recognized as the perfect spot to build their dream house: a 14-acre lot located on a point that juts into Center Harbor Neck on Squam Lake.

The couple was standing in the middle of the still-heavily wooded lot when Bob took out a pen and a napkin and sketched out a rudimentary home plan: an L-shaped, two-story house that looked out onto the lake as much as possible. “It gave us 270-degree

RIGHT: The Dahls asked Bensonwood Homes to build a dining room table that was intimate enough for family game nights but could also accommodate as many as 15 people for dinner.

BELOW: Atlantic white cedar shingles highlight the tower on the second-floor balcony, providing an interesting contrast to the tower's dramatic stone veneer on the first floor.

OPPOSITE: Leslie designed the great room to be elegant, warm, inviting, and hardy, "a place where anybody of any age can spend time."

views," Bob says. They bought the property and dubbed it Loon Point.

After hiring Bensonwood Homes and Moran Construction to turn their vision into reality, Bob and Leslie collaborated closely with Bensonwood architect Bill Holtz and the in-house design team to work out the minute details and come up with a blueprint.

The result is a 5,800-square-foot timber frame home that celebrates understated elegance, nature, family, and fun. With its lofty ceilings, banks of windows and eclectic mix of stone, wood, and natural shingles as both functional and decorative elements, "it is quite striking visually," says Bob. "When you're inside the house, it feels like a piece of artwork. It's an enjoyable place to be."

Leslie is just as enthusiastic. "It's everything we ever hoped for—and more," she states. "Everyone just loves it, especially the kids. They only wish that it was closer or that we could get there more often."

Highlights of the home include five bedrooms, all with optimal views of the lake; a large but warm living space comprised of a great room, kitchen, and dining area; a sun-room where family members can retreat for private time on the first floor; a mudroom that's perfect for storing boots and skis; and a large bunkroom over the garage that is connected to the main house by a "bridge of books."

The most impressive feature, however, is the first thing that visitors see when they arrive: a circular stone-and-shingle tower. Adding this architectural element was necessary, Holtz explains, to bring the two parts of the "L" together. In so doing, it provided a dramatic entryway into the house.

The tower soon proved the most challeng-





The first-floor guest bedroom has a quiet view of the lake and—like the home's other four bedrooms—is simple in its décor and amenities. "They are truly places for sleeping," says Leslie. "We don't spend much time in them."

ing task in the 18-month-long building process. Holtz and his team had to figure out how to fit a round structure inside of a rectangular structure. "There were plenty of technical and construction difficulties associated with it," he admits. "But it also gave us a chance to celebrate the contrast of the two forms and to show appreciation for it, because it really is the focal point of the house when you pull up to it."

Inside the home, the tower engenders just as much visual interest, with a little bit of influence and identity in each of the spaces it touches. The entryway, for example, is highlighted by a stone archway. In the kitchen, the range is niched into the backside of the stone curve of the tower. Meanwhile, the inside of the tower hosts Bob's office on the second

floor and a wine cellar in the basement.

The biggest hurdle at that point was making furniture and functional pieces that would fit into place, such as a rounded, built-in console for the office and curved wine racks.

A major goal driving the overall design of the home was the desire to create a place that would both complement and support the Dahls' active lifestyle and their appreciation for water and waterside activities. "We wanted to create something that would encourage interaction between indoors and outdoors," explains Bob.

The family and their design team achieved this goal in a number of ways. The screened-in porch, for example, offers a protected go-between that's perfect for drip-drying after a swim, parking shoes and floatable rafts, and

enjoying the soft breezes rolling in off the lake. With a fireplace inside the screen along with dining and sitting furniture, the space is perfect for an evening meal or a quiet chat with friends, says Bob. "The fireplace is great on cool summer nights," he explains.

The sunroom is another area where the natural environment is easily accessible. The space was not part of the original vision, but Holtz suggested that the one-story bump-out on the southwestern side of the house—with its window banks, skylights, and pocket doors—would be ideal for enjoying the sun and the lake on cooler days or for getting away from the family hubbub to read a book or watch a football game.

Still, the most popular use of the room has nothing to do with its original intent. The



The screened-in porch is a favorite spot for summer dining, drip-drying after a day of swimming in the lake, and enjoying cool evenings snuggled up next to an outdoor fireplace.

children employ the sunroom as a launching point for their rock-climbing activities, which take place just outside the exterior door. Leslie explains that during construction Dennis Moran and his son were building the chimney for the great room fireplace when Bob recognized that the rock structure had some real potential as a climbing prop. They fashioned it with handholds and footholds and a ring-nose at the top and outfitted it with some all-weather roping. “The kids climb to the top and belay each other,” Leslie says, noting that she can keep an eye on them from the comfort of the sunroom. “They will spend hours and hours out there, and they just have the best time.”

The bunkroom is another part of the house that’s perfect for child’s play. Situated over

the garage and accessible to the main part of the house via a walkway that doubles as the protective cover for a porte-cochere, the space has plenty of room for throwing a sleepover for a dozen kids. It features a full bath, bunk beds and shipmate beds, a sitting room, ceiling fans, skylights, and double French doors leading out to a sleeping porch. “It’s a wonderful space where the kids can spend time with their friends,” says Leslie. “They feel like they’re camping out.”

To retain the sense of timelessness that was important for the Dahls, Holtz also designed the home such that it would accommodate passing years and changing functions. The timber frame structure, in and of itself, provides an easy way to update or repair electric and plumbing lines. On the exterior, Atlantic

white cedar shingles, green window frames, and a stone foundation already provide the home with a charming weathered look but promise to allow it to age just as gracefully over the coming decades. And the interior is flexible enough to deal with life’s transitions. A first-floor guest suite could morph into someone’s bedroom if stair-climbing is made difficult by time or a ski injury, for example, and the house has plenty of room to absorb the activity and sounds of future grandchildren.

With such scenarios well-planned for, the Dahls are free to enjoy the present. The family was able to begin using their home fully in the summer of 2004 and now enjoy it several times a year, including during summer vacations, on long weekends, over the Thanksgiv-



ing and Christmas holidays, and through the winter ski season.

Both Leslie and Bob note that while they love their house, what they really appreciate about it most is the freedom and peaceful solitude it offers. The children have ample opportunity to spend time discovering the two sides of independence and responsibility while they're out and about swimming, riding their bikes, playing whiffleball in the courtyard, or gathering with friends on the docks. "They are very keen on building some

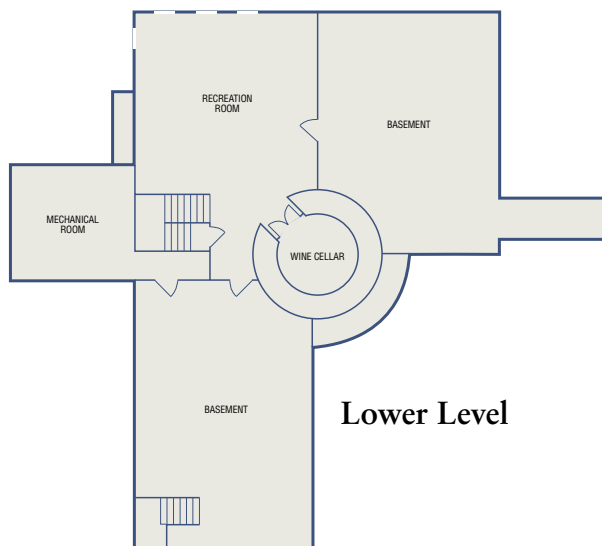
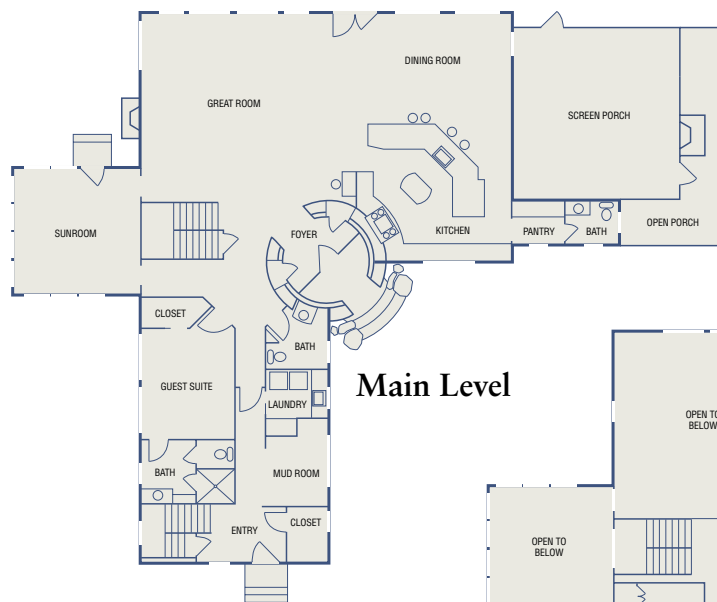
memories—all the things they may confess to in 10 or 15 years," Leslie laughs.

And for their parents, the home is like a supportive family member, one that enables them to spend quality time with their children and watch them grow, escape the pressures of demanding careers and truly immerse themselves in nature. For Leslie, one of her favorite aspects of the house isn't a room but the top of the back staircase. Just standing there, she can take in an incredible sightline "that shoots you straight out to the lake. It's

just breathtaking."

Bob has a favorite view, too, but the vantage point is a little bit different. "What I like is looking at the house when I'm sitting in a kayak on the lake," he says. "To me, that's when I'm having the most fun and enjoying it the most." 🏡

DESIGNER/TIMBER FRAMER: Bensonwood Homes, Walpole, New Hampshire; **BUILDER:** T.F. Moran, Inc., Bedford New Hampshire.



ABOVE: The tower provides a dramatic entryway into the home, while the courtyard is frequently transformed into a venue for the children's whiffleball games.

ABOVE RIGHT: Atlantic white cedar shingles, green window frames, and a stone foundation give the Dahl home a charming, weathered look.