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## A House Whose Décor Pays Homage To the Natural World

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOSEPH ST. PIERRE

An award-winning home is a comfortable lakeside retreat for a busy executive and his family.

**D**oris Sullivan is a patient but determined woman — it took her 10 years to find the right weekend house on New Hampshire's Squam Lake. "I saw every property for sale," she says, breathing a sigh of relief as she remembers all the time she spent. "I'd get a call about a house coming on the market and be up here to look at it the next day. We got to know the area because our children went to camps nearby, and we've always liked Squam Lake because it's so quiet."

In 1998 Doris's hard work paid off, and she and her husband Paul bought a small lakeside camp built in the mid-1950s. The

panorama is spectacular — Squam Lake in the foreground, the Sandwich Mountains beyond, year-round views of sunsets — and, best of all, because of how the house was sited, the location is very private.

### Getting a plan for the site

While Doris and Paul fell in love with the camp and the natural beauty of the site, the house was not big enough for their family. "The kitchen was too small for a family who all love to cook," she says. But before they set off on their first homebuilding journey together, Doris and Paul wanted to leave the camp alone for a

**Above:** The Sullivan house, as seen from Squam Lake.

**Facing page:** To hide the large-screen television in the living room, Doris Sullivan commissioned Ray Wisner in Hebron, New Hampshire, to re-create a view of the lake in marquetry. In the montage are an eagle, chipmunks, a squirrel, lady's slippers, pine needles, jumping fish, a moose, a bear and even a canoeist—all painstakingly made from thin slivers of wood veneer.









**Above:** Ron Viger of Twin Oaks Construction installed the birch bark panels on the foyer's ceiling, which he trimmed with Eastern white pine. Instead of balusters for the stairway leading to the second floor, Ken Chatterton, also one of Twin Oaks Construction's crew, created the evergreen cutouts. The Lakewood Moose sconce is available from Avalanche Ranch. On the walls is Tenaya Green paint, from Ralph Lauren's Naturals collection.

**Right:** The handmade tiles for the bathrooms and kitchen are from Pratt & Larson Ceramics in Portland, Oregon, and all feature reliefs of either plants or animals. The powder room backsplash tiles have pine cones and pine boughs.



few years. "We wanted to learn when and where the sun sets, what animals live here and all about the area," Doris says.

After several years of getting to know their property, and realizing that they wanted to spend time there in every season, Doris and Paul were ready to begin the process of its transformation. Doris remembers Paul, whose work as a management consultant takes him to all corners of the world, asking, "Would you mind building the house?" "That was music to my ears," Doris says with a big smile and in 2002 she hired Ward D'Elia of Samyn-D'Elia Architects in Ashland, New Hampshire. Doris had heard about Ward from friends in Massachusetts for whom he had designed a new house on Squam Lake.

"I started by visiting the site several times and got to know Doris and her family," Ward says, "so I could get a sense of her vision. We met many times over a three-month period because I wanted to be clear about what she wanted to achieve and design a home that realized her dream. I remember walking the site, admiring the view, and realizing that the lake view should be visible from every major living space. I gave this design information to John Otte, one of our architects, and he worked on the project from here. The final plan we came up with reflected my feeling that the view should dominate the house."

While Doris knew what she wanted for the house, she says she didn't know quite how to achieve it. "After many meetings at his office, John knew what this house would look like," Doris says, "and I had come to trust him to produce something that I wanted. I had confidence in him."

### Deciding on the Arts and Crafts décor

For his design, John was inspired by the Craftsman style of architecture, which grew out of the Arts and Crafts movement in England in the late nineteenth century and became popular in the U.S. in the early part of the twentieth century. Eschewing the Industrial Age aesthetic for machine-made things, the Arts and Crafts style favored simplicity of design and the handcrafting of decorative objects from natural materials.

This approach struck a chord for Doris, whose love of the natural world runs deep. "I grew up near a farm in upstate New York," she says. "There were animals, and my siblings and I were always in the barn at milking time. We spent hours in the woods. Even now, I love the woods."





**Top:** Separating the dining room from the living room is a custom buffet built by Doug Campbell of Twin Oaks Construction, with birch-bark doors and drawers and "hardware" made from meticulously matched twigs found in the surrounding woods. Oak leaves are part of the design of both the drapery rods, which were forged by David Little in Meredith, and the drapery fabric, which is from Home Comforts in Center Harbor. **Bottom:** Lots of people can be working at once in the kitchen, which Doris Sullivan calls "a command center" because of its views of both the road and the lake. On the counters is black, green and gold-flecked Uba Tuba granite. The knotty alder kitchen cabinets are from Meredith Bay and their sand-blasted glass panels were created by Native Sun Studio in Belmont, New Hampshire.

Dale's crew also found perfectly matched twigs that they used as drawer pulls on a buffet they built for the dining room, and pine cones that they split in half and installed as a decorative border on the powder room's ceiling.





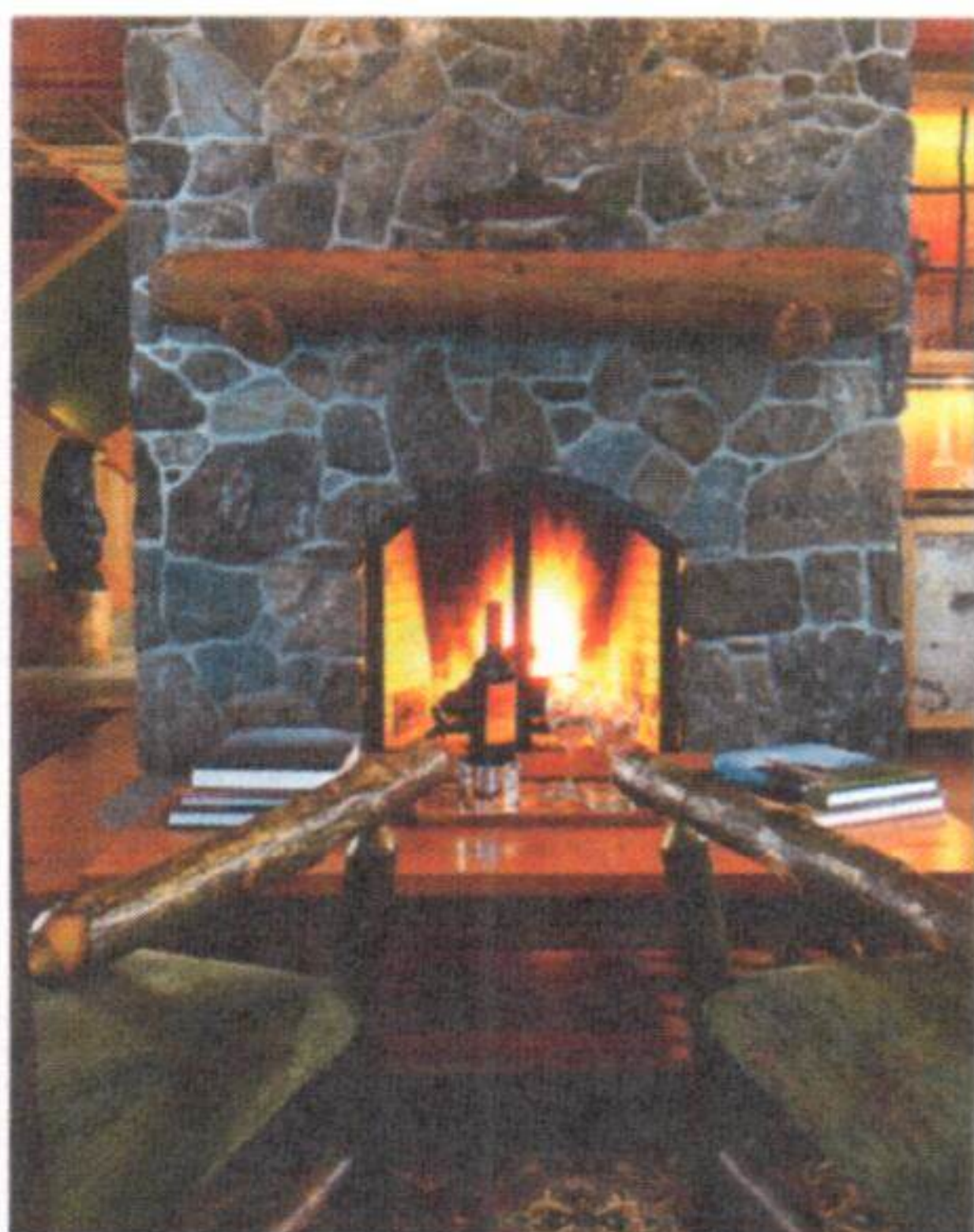
*The second-floor landing, which also functions as a sitting area, is flooded with light and offers a bird's-eye view of the lake.*

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Every room has a view of the lake. The house is such a beauty that it won the New Hampshire chapter of the American Institute of Architects' People's Choice Award earlier this year for excellence in residential architecture.

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*Walter Jeanson of W.A. Jeanson & Sons Masonry in Meredith, New Hampshire, used native stone for the Sullivan's living room chimney. The fire screen and fireplace tools were made by David Court of Bay Hill Forge in Northfield, New Hampshire. Chilean pine was chosen for the ceiling and cinnamon-colored Russian larch for the floor.*

After Labor Day in 2002, Doris and her family said goodbye to the old camp, which was taken down to make way for the new house. Samyn-D'Elia hired Dale Blackey of Twin Oaks Construction in Plymouth, New Hampshire, as general contractor; they had successfully worked together on nearly 30 projects. "We did the site work in September and October," says Dale, "and the foundation in November." Framing began in that frigid January of 2003, when Doris remembers the temperature rarely getting above zero. "It was an extremely windy job site," says Dale, "but this is winter in New Hampshire. We're used to it because a majority of our projects are homes on Squam Lake and [Lake] Winnepesaukee. People want to use their homes in the summer, which means we do a lot of foundations in the fall and frame in the winter."

Framing took until April and then the interior work began. "The finish work took longer than originally planned," says John, "because Doris said yes to everything that I suggested. She loved all the organic details of the house's Craftsman-inspired design."

Among them is the birch bark used on some cabinet doors and on ceilings in the entrance foyer and powder room. "Dale's

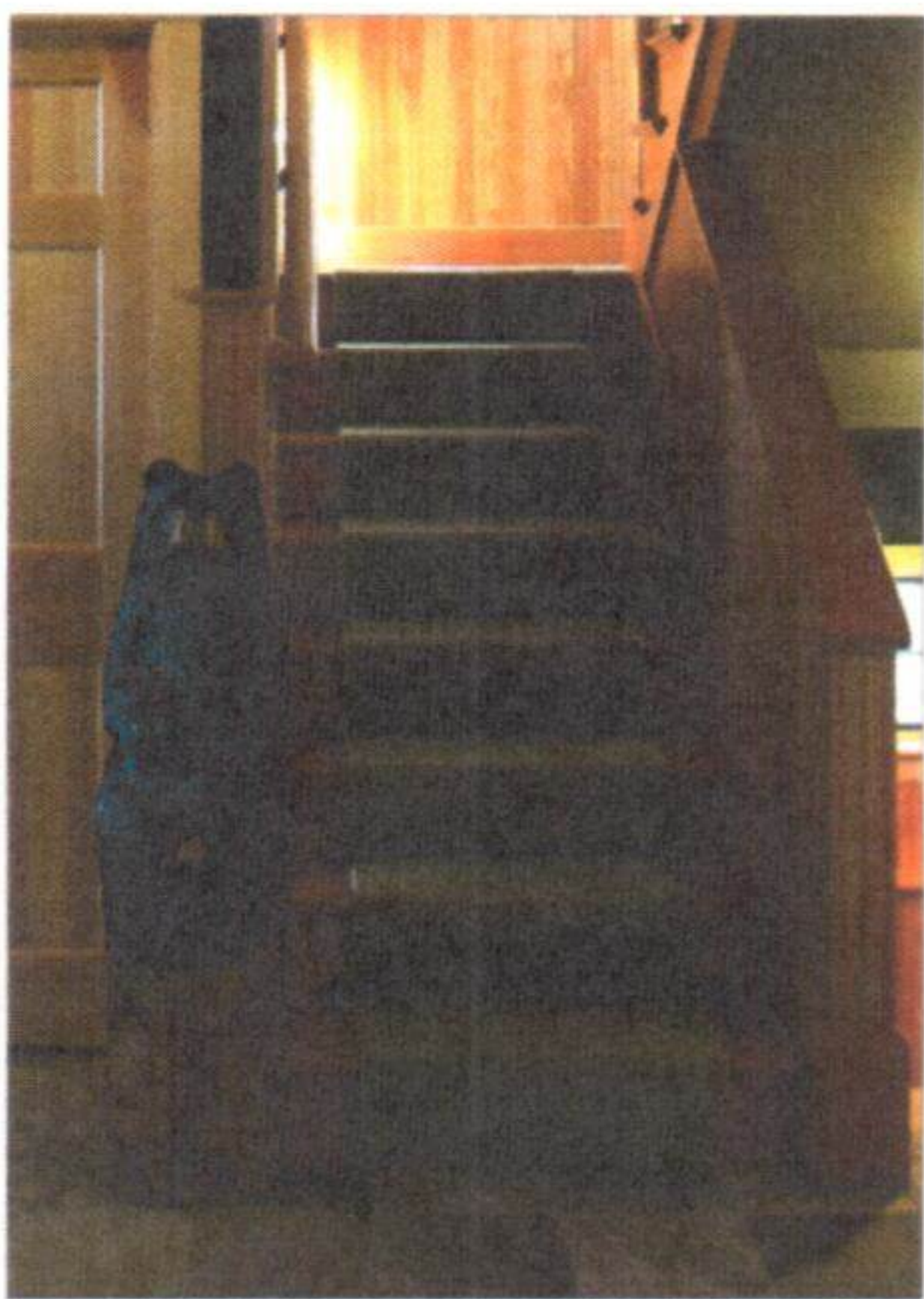
crew actually went into the woods to find birch bark," says John, "and get an idea of how to use the material. But the pieces were too small and they curled up. Fortunately, we were able to get big sheets of birch bark via the Internet and those worked fine."

Dale's crew also found perfectly matched twigs that they used as drawer pulls on a buffet they built for the dining room, and pine cones that they split in half and installed as a decorative border on the powder room's ceiling. "This was a very detailed job," Dale says. "All of the built-in pieces of furniture and stairway panels were figured out to the nth degree. It takes a lot of time and concentration to get something to look this good." John adds, "It was so much fun working with Dale's crew—they really got a chance to show off their skills."

One of the most artistic touches Doris chose for the house is a set of panels that hides the large living room television. On them, Ray Wisner of Hebron, New Hampshire, recreated a view of the lake in marquetry based on a sketch that John provided. Ray's work is painstakingly detailed in various woods, depicting the lake, the surrounding mountains and the creatures who live there, including an eagle, a chipmunk, squirrel, two moose, a bear and jumping fish. There are even two people in a canoe, lady's slippers and tiny slivers of pine needles. "I kept this project a secret from my family," Doris says. "I wanted to surprise them and when they saw the finished piece, they were delighted. They didn't have a clue what I had up my sleeve, although they did wonder why there were no birch bark doors made to cover the television."

Other reminders of the natural world just outside the front door are the fireplace tools, which, except for their elongated shape, look exactly like little bears, right down to all the details of their faces and their forepaws. They hang on a stand made to look like a tree whose hole probably hides bees and their honey. These tools and the fireplace screen, with





*Instead of a traditional newel post at the foot of the hallway stairs, the Sullivans have a bear cub made by John Connors, a chainsaw artist who works outdoors in Weirs Beach, New Hampshire.*

its fern-leaf design, were made by blacksmith David Court in Northfield, New Hampshire. David Little, another blacksmith in nearby Meredith, forged curtain rods with an oak-leaf motif and tree-like lamps. Native Sun Studio in Belmont provided the sandblasted glass with John's pine-bough design for the kitchen cabinet doors. A wooden bear cub, carved by John Connors of Weirs Beach, greets visitors as they enter the foyer and serves as the stairway newel post. "We wanted to keep the craftsmen as local as possible," John explains. An out-of-state exception is Christopher Hawver of Coventry, Rhode Island, who used birch twigs, birch bark, pinecones and acorns to decorate mirrors throughout the house.

John adds that Doris was his "go-to person" for many of the finishing touches. "We'd talk about room color and material patterns, and she'd hunt things down for us to review. Through her wanderings and Internet searches, Doris was able to find cabinet hardware in the shapes of twigs, fishing creels, bears, pinecones and acorns." John found Pratt and Larson, a company that made ceramic tiles with animals and plants sculpted in relief for the kitchen and bathrooms. Doris says, "I learned a lot during this process. This was like Construction 101 for me. Although I

built an addition on an older home when my children were young, I was not so involved in that project."

The finished house is set back from the lakeshore 75 feet, just as the old camp was. "We tend to blend our houses into nature," John says, "and leave as many trees as possible." Only three large trees were taken down to make room for the new house, which has more square footage than its single-story predecessor. There are a guest suite and rec room on the lower level, master bedroom, kitchen, and living/dining room on the main level, and three bedrooms and a sitting room upstairs. Outside is a fire pit and stone steps leading to the dock. Every room has a view of the lake. The house is such a beauty that it won the New Hampshire chapter of the American Institute of Architects' People's Choice Award earlier this year for excellence in residential architecture.

While exquisitely designed and finished, the house is warm and comfortable, and the whole family — often including great-grandmother, aunts, uncles and cousins — love being there. "It is such a wonderful house," Doris says, adding that she and her family spend as much time as possible at the house. In her opinion, John did a great job achieving her objective. "I wanted to create a casual, not pretentious, house," he explains. "Doris wanted a house where her husband would be able to relax."

Doris says the proof is in the pudding. "My husband loves this house — in fact, we all love this house!" ■

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