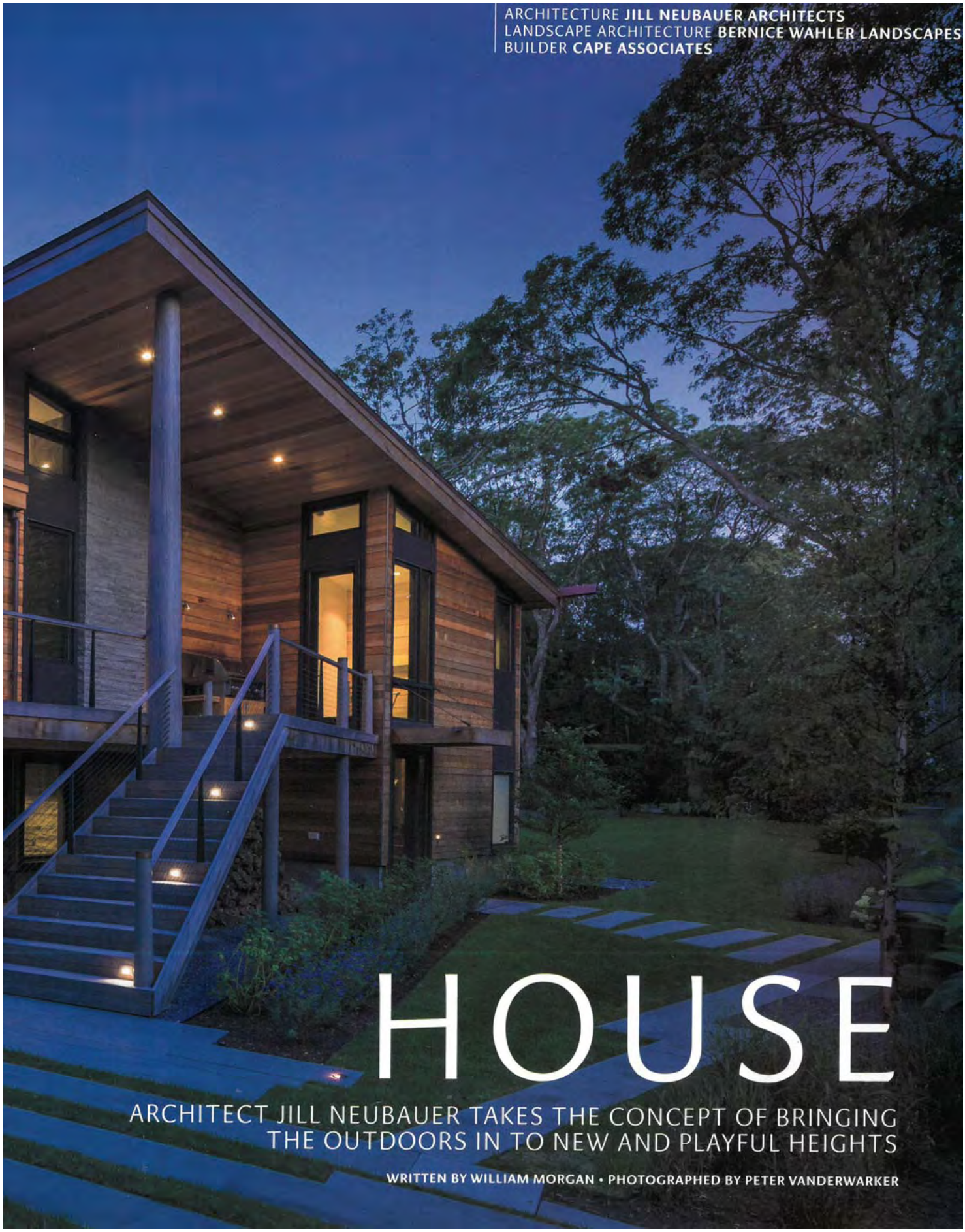
JULY/AUGUST 2018
DESIGN
NEW ENGLAND
LUSCIOUS
summer
THE
MAGAZINE
OF SPLENDID
HOMES
AND GARDENS

THIS RESIDENCE ON Buzzards Bay has "a tree house–like responsiveness to the surrounding native oak woodland," says landscape architect Bernice Wahler. Backlit by a water view, the house "sits on trunklike columns that mimic the trees outside," she adds. The screened porch extends family living outside and creates a beach house ambiance.

TREE



ARCHITECTURE **JILL NEUBAUER ARCHITECTS**
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE **BERNICE WAHLER LANDSCAPES**
BUILDER **CAPE ASSOCIATES**

HOUSE

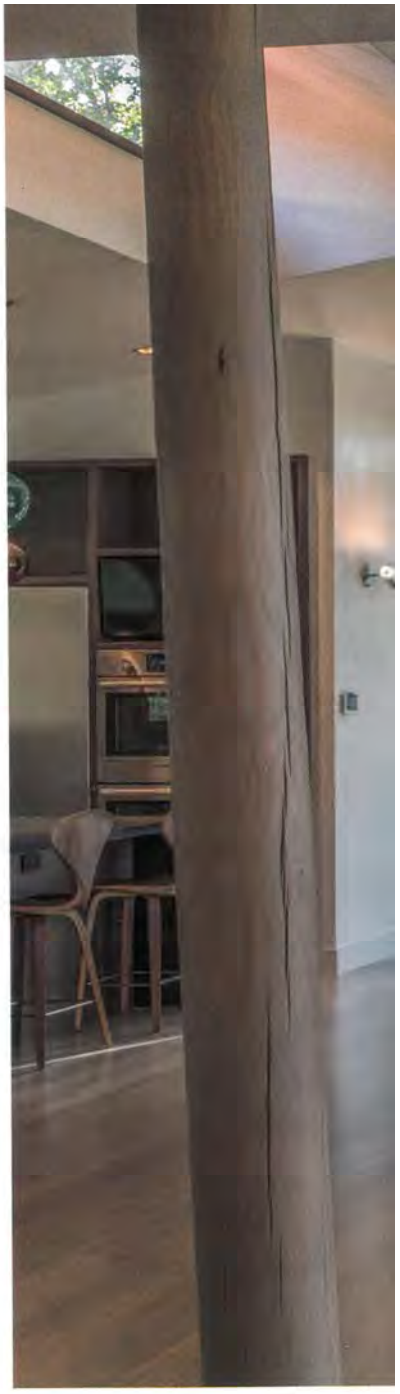
ARCHITECT JILL NEUBAUER TAKES THE CONCEPT OF BRINGING THE OUTDOORS IN TO NEW AND PLAYFUL HEIGHTS

WRITTEN BY WILLIAM MORGAN • PHOTOGRAPHED BY PETER VANDERWARKER

There is a small forest inside this vacation house on the Cape Cod shore of Buzzards Bay, and it was only a short time before family members spontaneously strung a couple of hammocks between the gray pine trunks.

Witnessing grown-ups and kids nestled in the canvas, swaying beneath an imaginary breeze, Jill Neubauer, the house's designer, says, "That represents why I am an architect: the joy of making homes for families to love."

The forest is actually 71 Southern yellow pine columns, stained gray, that range in height from 5 to 25 feet and support various parts of the house. They typify the serendipitous exchanges between clients and architect that led to this smile-making residence. A strip of untouchable conservation land lies between the house and the water, and its grove of white oaks could not be pruned. Neubauer, whose firm, Jill Neubauer Architects, is in Falmouth, Massachusetts, proposed embracing the situation. "Let's abstract that landscape and bring it into the house," she offered, infusing the interior with "the color of the outside trees on a grayish day." The clump of domesticated trunks — structural when straight, expressive when leaning — acts as a filter-like scrim from the entrance, forming a transition from the outside world through to the quiet seascape beyond.

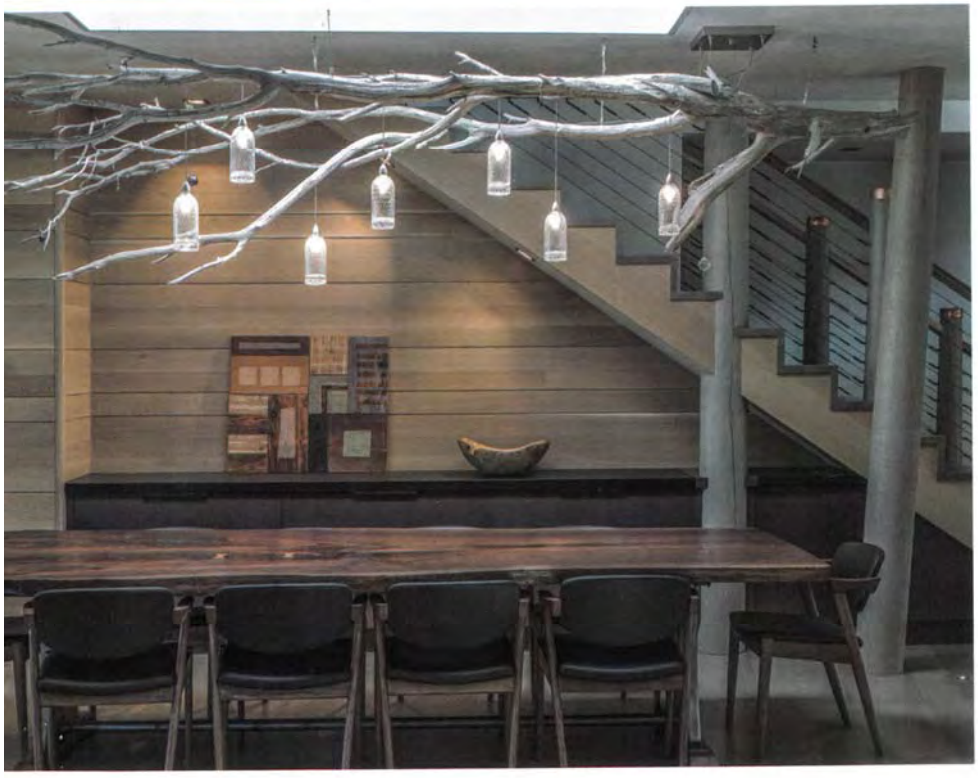


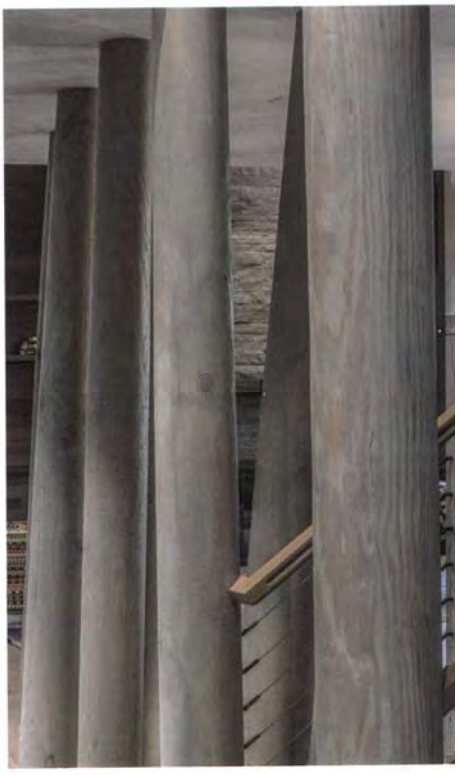
THE 12-DEGREE ANGLE created by canting the two wings of the house shapes the arrival sequence (LEFT), ceremonially funneling visitors to the entrance. Living and kitchen areas are to the left; bedrooms, studio, and garage are to the right.

A FLOOR-TO-CEILING rough-hewn chimneybreast constructed of limestone from the Vermont Structural Slate Company anchors the living room (ABOVE). The ceiling slants upward, allowing more glazing facing the view to Buzzards Bay. The Midcentury Modern furniture is from Retrocraft Design of Concord, Massachusetts, including the orange Wave Chaise by Adrian Pearsall.

The clients have owned a vacation home on an adjacent lot for many years. When the next-door land became available, they bought it with a plan to build a "simple retirement house." As the wife recalls, "We wanted to downsize to something small." The older place, a two-story contemporary built in 1984, would become a guesthouse for relatives and friends and eventually a summer home for their two children and their families. Coming from a Civil War–era Victorian in a Boston suburb, the couple had never been involved with building anything, but designing this house with Neubauer became such an adventure that the plan for a little house grew and grew.

"We had no agenda," says the wife. "We're modest people, interested in having fun and making a place." And they "preferred someone local" to help design it. The couple sought recommendations as they looked around, then visited a small house designed by Neubauer in the Woods Hole section of Falmouth. "We





THE GLASS WALLS of the living room are rolled back for the summer, joining the living space with the porch (ABOVE) and the protected shoreline beyond. A major part of the project was managing invasive species and restoring the native understory canopy. The porch columns echo the white oaks outside.

THE CLIENTS DID not want a classic white kitchen but instead opted for striking black Ashfield schist for the island and countertops (FACING PAGE, TOP). The 12-foot dining-room table (FACING PAGE, BOTTOM LEFT) is a live-edge slab of black walnut from Saltwoods Boston. The fun and colorful lighting was created with Pairpoint Glass. The house's columns (FACING PAGE, BOTTOM RIGHT) make the interior seem like a small forest.

loved everything about it," including the way the architect used its site, says the wife, "and we said, 'We could live here.' "

During the time between their own home's conception in 2013 and its realization last year, owners and architect respectfully sparred over design decisions. The couple did not want "the perfect designer house," says the wife, but a home "to live in, laugh in, and love in." Of Neubauer, she says, "I learned so much from Jill. ... She cared so much about every detail."

Led by Neubauer project manager Norman Courchesne and builder Andrew Murphy of Cape Associates, which has offices in Chatham, Eastham, and Yarmouth Port, Massachusetts, the construction crew devoted itself to this two-year project exclusively.

Matthew Cole, president and CEO of Cape Associates, the third generation of his family to run the business, says the renovation was so complicated that it needed "tight coordination" by his team.

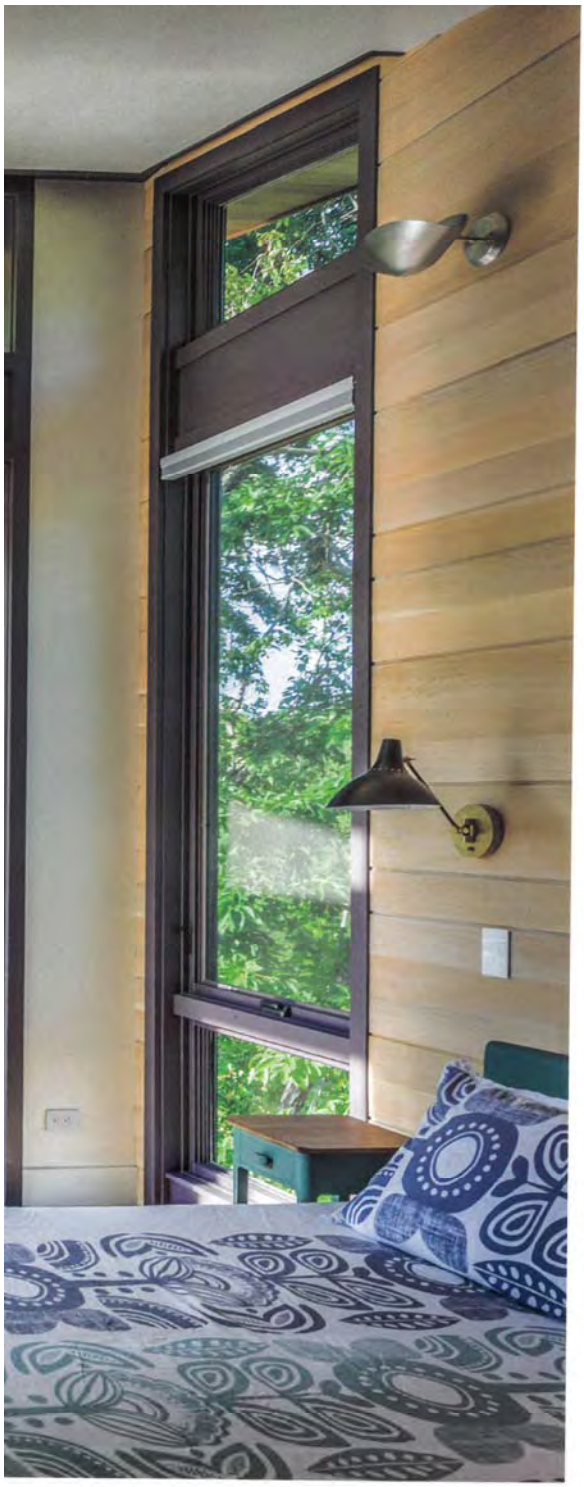
As the house evolved, it grew from the couple's original idea of a simple cottage to become a statement of the owners' lifestyle, complete with art studio, wood shop, sauna, lots of porches, three sets of stairways, and spaces to comfortably entertain dozens of people.

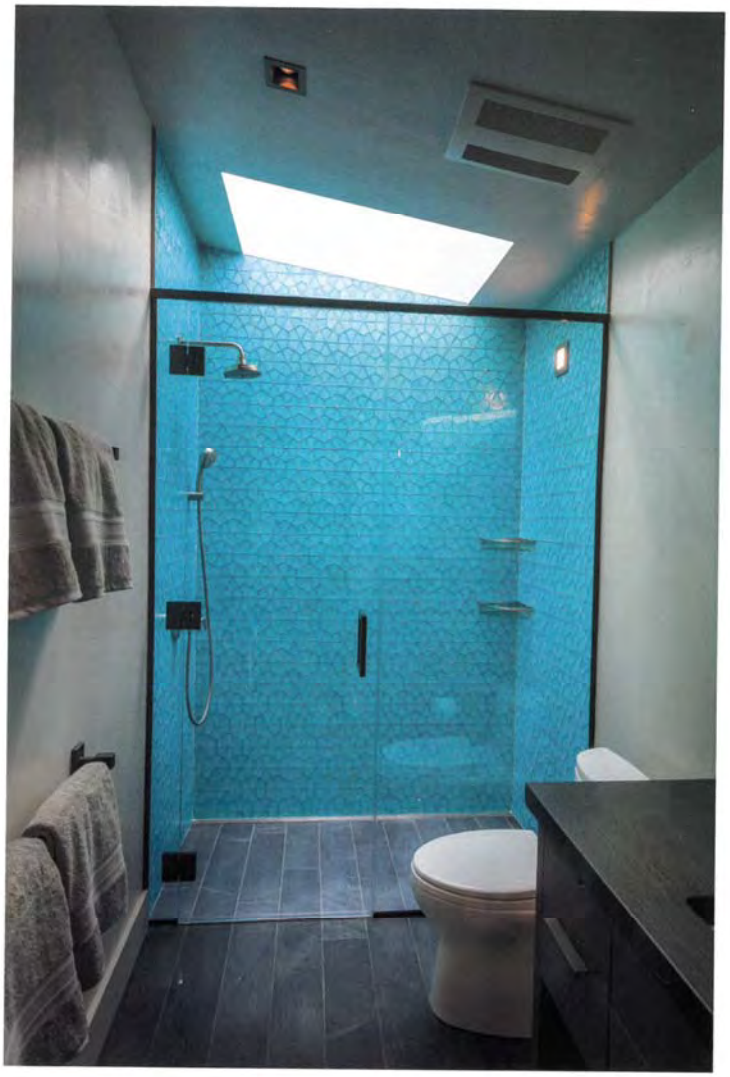
To meet the challenge of inserting a 5,700-square-foot house on a quarter-acre lot and integrating it intimately into the protected coastal bank, landscape architect Bernice Wahler of Bernice Wahler Landscapes in Sandwich, Massachusetts, says she responded to the "drama of the tree trunks backlit by the sparkle of Buzzards Bay." She envisioned the new place as a tree house interacting with the abutting native oak woodland. Bluestone walls would emphasize the geometry of the architecture and link the house to the land.

Bold lines provide cohesion for the project's varied elements. Neubauer organized the house as two shed-roofed, almost paral-

lel wings (they are 12 degrees off at the narrow end, which imperceptibly funnels visitors to the main entrance). The garage, master bedroom, guest room, and workspaces are in the longer block, while the kitchen, living room, den, and room-size porch form the heart of the other. The trapezoidal wedge between the wings forms the entrance hall and the dining room.

While white oak covers some of the interior walls in the same random widths as the exterior's red cedar sheathing, most walls are raw, unpainted plaster that echoes the gray-stained floors and cabinetry. Vermont limestone was used for the giant living-room chimney, but the "driving force for the house," says Neubauer, was gray-black Ashfield schist from Ashfield Stone Company's quarry in Western Massachusetts. The clients "absolutely loved





THE TREE HOUSE motif is especially strong in the master bedroom (ABOVE), where the white oak and tinted plaster don't compete with the view. Weaving stone and wood on thresholds, found throughout the house, is demonstrated in the black schist inserts in the oak floor in front of the balcony door. The bathrooms have glass tiles (RIGHT TOP), each in a different bright color. The ground floor features a wood shop and a sauna (RIGHT).

this stone from the start," says Neubauer, who used the dark, iridescent material for the top of the kitchen island and the sinks in the bathrooms of the guest room, master bedroom, study/office, basement den, and entry powder room. It also caps the dining-room credenza and the bar in the great room. The stone ingeniously reappears in random lengths in every doorway in the interstices of the oak flooring, so that each threshold is like a weaving of stone and wood.

FOR MORE DETAILS, SEE RESOURCES

It is easy to enjoy the home's views and comforts. With the sophisticated interaction of land, stone, wood, and angles, the structure's layers unfold in a masterly fashion — a remarkable achievement in a house that richly demonstrates the energy of the clients while retaining the repose of the land's shoreline.

"Every time we walk through the front door," says the wife, "we can't believe we live here." ■

BEYOND THE BLUESTONE walkway at the entry (ABOVE), the gravel driveway captures, infiltrates, and recharges the sandy aquifer. Cutting through the multitiered geometry of bluestone are steel runnels (LEFT) that channel storm water from the roof. The house feels like a natural part of the landscape around it (FACING PAGE), which is, as Wahler says, "lush, organic, and wild."