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SEBAGO LAKE RETREAT**



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TOP *of the* LIST

Knickerbocker Group helps a Boston couple hit all the items on their personal punch lists for a vacation home on Sebago Lake

by Jorge S. Arango
photography by Jeff Roberts





Tom and I are list people,” says Kristin Simon, describing herself and her husband, Tom Simon. “A lot of our friends make fun of us because we have lists for everything.” Why, then, would their search for a second home to retreat to from Boston—and the ensuing process of renovating and appointing it—be any different? So, in the fall of 2019, Kristin explains, they adopted a ritual. “On Sunday over coffee, while the girls were still asleep, we would draw up lists of what we each wanted.”

At the top of both lists: Where to buy? Tom hailed from Wisconsin and grew up around lakes. Kristin was raised in upstate New York but spent summers on Cape Cod and was partial to an ocean setting. Marriage, as they say, is a

negotiation. “We picked Sebago,” recalls Tom, “because it is less than an hour from Portland, so we could go to the beach but still live on a lake.” Sebago is also closer to skiing, something that the Simon girls, now 10 and 13, were just learning to do.

On Tom’s list was a rustic lodge-type home, something Kristin could get on board with as long as the interior had a bit more refinement. He wanted wood paneling, but she wanted things to be a bit brighter and lighter. The house they eventually purchased, however, was none of these things. “It definitely needed a renovation,” remembers Tom of the 3,000-square-foot suburban-looking structure built in 2008 and sheathed in shingles painted an unfortunate colonial blue. “It had a poor use of space,” he continues, “with an enclosed staircase in the middle of the house that blocked views.”

(Opening spread) The rear, lake-facing side of the house is, atypically for a camp, three stories; giving the bottom level a different treatment makes it feel like a foundation rather than another full story. Knickerbocker Group architect Michael Belleau evened out the home’s jagged roofline and added a large gable in the center.

The dining room mixes rustic wood plank around the large Marvin windows (opposite) to address the husband’s desire for a woodsy camp aesthetic (which is enhanced by the moose antler chandelier from Northwoods Furniture) with more refined elements like a modern trestle table and pared-down Shaker-style chairs.

The rustic element in the living room (above) is the fieldstone fireplace with reclaimed barn beam mantel; the clean white walls and neat green trim and built-ins are more refined.



The Simons contracted Knickerbocker Group to transform the house into something more reminiscent of a Maine camp. The first order of business, says architect Michael Belleau, “was to make it normal, then make it great.” A top priority to normalize was the roofline, which comprised four different peaked roofs, all at various elevations, and looked especially disjointed from the lake-facing rear of the house.

Building two bedrooms above the kitchen and leveling it with the double-height dining area raised the leftmost volume almost up to the tallest roof so the silhouette wouldn’t appear so jagged. (That and other alterations brought the square footage from 3,010 to nearly 3,230, plus a 253-square-foot screened porch.) Then, says Belleau, “Adding a gable in front of the dining room area helped everything gel.”

Old camps are usually clusters of single-story buildings with the occasional two-story main house. On the approach through the woods, it is indeed two stories

that we see. But from the back, the visible below-grade walkout basement make this one atypically three stories. Belleau dissimulated this stylistic anomaly by cladding the basement in contoured boards trimmed along the top with a “water level–like” band, then used cedar shingles on the two stories above it. “The rustication of the bottom made it look like a foundation, sort of like rock at the base of a shingle home.”

Essentially, it was about the balance between “a refined home that’s well detailed and a home that feels rustic,” observes Belleau. Hence we encounter windows with modern mullions flanking the front entrance, where bark-stripped tree trunks hold up the porch roof. They not only are camplike but also add a note of whimsy.

The same formula dictated the decor. After relocating the stairs to the front of the house to afford an open-plan main floor, lead interior designer Angela Ballard drew the palette from the surrounding woods and mosses (green), morning fog on the lake (grays), and loamy ground

The kitchen (opposite, top) features custom cabinetry by Knickerbocker Group—simple arts-and-crafts style over the counter paired with green below—and a kitchen island supported on tree trunks to keep the rustic inflections consistent throughout the open-plan first floor. A pass-through window from the pantry-cum-bar (opposite, bottom) enables easy beverage service to the porch seating area.

The other side of the porch (above, left) is devoted to dining. The mudroom (above, right) boasts slate tile and pine paneling.



(brown). Then she riffed on familiar tropes but elevated them. Referring to the furnishings, she explains, “They’re all plays on elements you might see in a lodge—plaid, leather, wools—but with more modern lines.”

For every aspect of the project, from layouts to finishes, the Knickerbocker team—which also included interior designer Renée Bissonnette, project manager Jessica Rodenhizer, assistant project manager Brianna Beebe, landscape architect Kerry Lewis, and site manager Jason Sorensen—presented at least three options. They didn’t know about the Simons’ devotion to list making, but, recalls Ballard, she did notice that “they definitely prioritized everything. It was very exciting when they’d give you the yes, especially on options that were going to be a little more impressive.”

The team had to strike an equilibrium between Kristin’s yin and Tom’s yang. For instance, he wanted paneling,

and she wanted lighter walls (“I didn’t want it dark and cavelike,” Kristin says). So, in the dining room, the accent wall around the dormer window that frames the lake view was paneled, but the other walls were left creamy white.

Tom’s list called for a moose antler chandelier, so Ballard suspended it above a simple trestle table surrounded by spare Shaker-style slat-back chairs. The living room’s massive fieldstone fireplace (on both the Simons’ lists) is framed in more creamy white walls and green-painted built-ins. In both these rooms, potentially heavy details are leavened with lighter surface treatments and furniture featuring clean silhouettes.

In the kitchen, this combination manifests as more austere overhead wooden cabinets in a quasi-Mission style contrasted with undercounter cabinets swathed in a calming green. The backsplashes resemble subway tile but skew more camplike by virtue of their finish, which is

The primary bedroom juxtaposes modern silhouettes (above) with warm, tactile textures such as wool on the headboard and tweedy fabric on the chairs. The stone lamp brings in the outdoors.

(Opposite, clockwise from top left) The bunkroom accommodates privacy within communality with curtains and individual reading lights; the palette of mossy green and natural wood continues on the switchback staircase. The porch offers wooded views of the lake sans mosquitoes in summer. The powder room showcases a floating vanity and vessel sink under plantation shutters.





Knickerbocker Group reclad the structure with cedar shakes and evened out the roofline. The facade features an entry portico supported on natural tree trunks.



unpolished and defined by irregular edges. Straddling the Simons' potentially opposing predilections is the lighting deployed throughout the house, which in most cases has an industrial feel that can be equally at home with rustic or refined surroundings. "They're all different metals," says Ballard, "which helped break up tones that dominated the fairly traditional elements in the spaces and also added another texture."

Outside, Knickerbocker redid all the stone walls and steps and built a stone patio that now connects to the path leading to the lake. Lewis then came in and planted a native Maine landscape: high-bush blueberries, viburnum, witch hazel, ferns, and plants with pollinator value adding accents of seasonal color. "There's nothing flashy about it," says Lewis. "It allows the architecture to speak and takes a supportive role."

It's all visible from the screened porch, which Kristin calls "my little slice of heaven." To one side, near the

pass-through window of the pantry bar, is a lounging area with wicker seating. To the other is a teak dining table and chairs. "We paid a lot of attention to the ceiling here," notes Ballard. "We wanted it to look like knotty alder so it wouldn't be too dark. But it was COVID by then, so it became a matter of what we could get." Local eastern white cedar did the trick.

The porch is where, these days, Tom and Kristin sit to make their lists, usually with the family labradoodle, Millie, snoozing happily nearby. But, instead of building materials, architectural features, color palettes, and other desires for design and construction, these lists focus on a new phase. "Here's where we plan the activities we're going to do each day, make grocery lists, and plan the Thanksgiving meal," says Kristin. And dictating all those lists is one supreme objective: to unwind, relax, and enjoy each other. **MH+D**

The house, as seen in this aerial view, sits in densely forested land that creates a sense of seclusion and ensures privacy from the neighbors. Part of the home's attraction was its position in a protected cove, which meant very little traffic and thus more safety for the couple's daughters while swimming, kayaking, and canoeing.