

# Maine Home

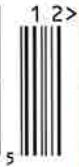
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## +DESIGN

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# DESIGNING the details

Architect Will Winkelman's foray into industrial design

## PROFILE

WILL WINKELMAN

by Debra Spark

Photography Trent Bell

**W**ill Winkelman's architecture career began twenty-five years ago with his first post-college job, working on hospital design in San Francisco. In a certain way, his focus has been narrowing ever since, his talents and predilections taking him from commercial work to residential work to something akin to industrial design. At the same time, he's gone from working at a big firm to smaller offices to, most recently, Winkelman Architecture in Portland, his own three-person company.

Winkelman first came to Maine in 1984. He followed a girlfriend to the state, but the relationship didn't last long after they arrived. The breakup left Winkelman in a winter rental on Higgins Beach, wondering where he would go once summer came. A friend told him that there was inexpensive waterfront property on Peaks Island, so he went to have a look. He immediately knew he had found his home, and he has been there ever since.

During his first five years in Maine, Winkelman worked for Goduti/Thomas Architects in Portland. He then moved on to Whitten Architects, also in Portland, where he worked for seventeen years, the final two as a partner. By the time he branched off on his own, he was a very different architect than he had been in his youth. "When I was a younger architect," he says, "it was all about a good plan and cool design. But that's the easy part. That's the candy. The hard work is managing the process, handling the budget, being clear with clients, dealing with details like wind-driven rain and wet basements. You have to manage all the parts."

These lessons came from his experience with Goduti/Thomas and Whitten, as well as the work he did on Peaks Island—sometimes as a freelancer, sometimes under the umbrella of the firms at which he was employed. Over the years, Winkelman designed close to thirty new homes, additions, and renovations on the island, not to mention his own home, which incorporates a four-story, lighthouse-inspired tower.

Since establishing his own practice, Winkelman has particularly enjoyed working for one client who owns three properties—a private home, a downeast camp, and a northern fishing camp. Winkelman has designed large structures for this client, but the man is also drawn to idiosyncratic projects and has often come to Winkelman with offbeat ideas—such as when he asked for a wooden walk-in refrigerator and freezer that would make the solid hardware sound that an old refrigerator makes when closed. Or when he wondered if a beer keg could be retrofitted as a barbecue. Or when he saw a junky bus on the side of the road and wondered if it could be turned into a vehicle that would also function as a camper and a guest bedroom. He imagined the interior as having a "hippy Moroccan" look.

Winkelman enjoyed the challenge of all these projects. The "short bus" required that Winkelman lay out automotive and fresh and wastewater systems, even as he designed a funky interior with bathroom and sink, walls of quarter-sawn white oak, and side benches with storage drawers underneath. In the final design, the



benches also function as two single beds, which can slide together to form a single queen bed. Winkelman designed and fabricated all the hardware in the bus, including the lights, curtain rods, and grab bar. “Part of what I love is making unique things with a unique process,” he says, citing, in particular, the adjustable arm sconces that he made from brass plumbing parts.

Winkelman also used plumbing materials for a chandelier to brighten the dark central space of his client’s downeast camp. The large lighting fixture—“it probably weighs as much as a small Volkswagen bus,” Winkelman says—is “a sculptural piece, delivering high-performance light.” The light comes from three sources: recessed lighting tucked into the plumbing tees, a dimmable uplight placed in an old industrial wheel with heart-shaped cutouts lined with mica, and decorative lights under multiple beaded lampshades.

The client’s northern fishing camp also entailed some interesting design challenges. The property already had a main lodge and cabins when Winkelman came aboard, but he added a boathouse, icehouse, staff commons, and utility house. Winkelman’s efforts led the client to another thing the client wanted: a fire tower. It turns out Winkelman knew someone—Nate Holyoke of Nate Holyoke Builders in Bucksport—who could find one. The fire tower was dismantled, reconditioned, brought to the northern camp, and re-erected. Winkelman designed a road to the fire tower’s site and re-designed the fire tower’s upper booth as a destination overlook for the whole property with its multiple lakes and buildings.

Not all clients offer such a chance for unusual invention, and despite his attention to objects, Winkelman is still first and foremost a designer of homes. In addition, Winkelman notes, “I enjoy taking on much smaller projects. My analogy is to social work, especially with my Peaks work. It’s a good deed to help people navigate Portland zoning and permitting, to connect them with a builder who will treat them fairly, to be somewhere on time, and to do solid, thoughtful planning and design. It’s not rocket science. No photos for the portfolio. It’s more about karma.”

Winkelman is very much a man who likes what he has, whether it is his work (“I do feel I am truly blessed”) or his office, which is on Union Wharf in Portland. There, he and Harry, his black Labrador, can watch baitfish move from wharf to lobster boats, and seagulls eagerly try to take advantage of the transaction. “It’s not for everyone,” Winkelman says of the commotion outside, although he might also be talking of his work as a whole. “But it is awesome to be part of it.” **MH+D**

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*For more information, see Resources on page 111.*

Will Winkelman stands in front of sketches for several projects (opening spread), including a fishing camp and a coastal residence in Steuben.

This boathouse on cribbing is made of skip peeled hemlock. Since visitors often arrive at the property by float plane, the boathouse serves as the entryway for the extensive fishing camp beyond (top). A chandelier—made of plumbing parts and an old industrial wheel—illuminates the great room of a Maine camp. A fireplace by Freshwater Stone of Orland is in the background (middle). Winkelman took an old bus and turned it into a funky camper with a “hippy Moroccan” interior (bottom).

