



HANDCRAFTED MAINE





## Will Winkelman

### *Portland*

"I haven't taken a shower indoors in months," says architect Will Winkelman as he leads us across his Peaks Island property. He is barefoot on the mossy groundcover as he shows off his "tree house shower," a compact little structure built around and into several tall trees. "It was a slapdash job," he says, "but it's so much fun to use." Nearby is his home. From where we stand, we can see the scrubby low-bush blueberries that grow on his roof.

Will loves building small, unusual structures that utilize every square foot of available space. His living roofs, which typically feature local plants, both ground the structure in the landscape and provide garden space where one may not typically expect it. "The only drawback is that you have to weed it," Will says of his elevated plot of greenery. He grabs hold of a long chain that runs from one corner of the roof to the ground. "This is a clever bit of problem solving. It helps the roof drain, and in the winter, it creates these amazingly cool structural shapes as the ice adheres to the metal."

They say a carpenter's house is never finished, and that appears to be true of architects as well. Will is continually tinkering with new, whimsical structures,

creating airy workshops for his wife, Kathy, or fun playhouses for his kids. "I reached out to Will after I found his website. He had all these beautiful restorations and big lovely homes. But what really got me was a play structure he built with all these funny angles," remembers John Bullitt, a sound artist and former client of Winkelman Architecture. "I saw it and thought, Yes! That's the kind of designer I want. I want someone who doesn't think in terms of boxes." But John is an artist and as such he has particular ideas about what his home should look like—and some specifics for how it should function. He needed a sound studio with good acoustics. Since much of John's work involves listening and recording the sounds of the natural world, he wanted a quiet space, one that blended into the natural landscape. John is also a practicing Buddhist, and he wanted his house to have a sense of peaceful cohesion—to "respect the world around it," he explains. "I wanted to be set at a respectful distance from the ocean," says John. "I didn't want to be right on top of all that power, all that noise."

In order to best realize John's vision, Will scheduled a small charrette to take place on the land.







Will credits the collaborative nature of his team for much of a structure's success. "Mature designers are able to check their egos," he says. "It's never all about me and my vision. The house should be all of ours." Will and Eric Sokol, a lead architect at the firm, traveled north from their Portland office to meet landscape architect Todd Richardson and landscape designer Ken Studtmann (of Saco-based Richardson & Associates) at the Steuben site. "We spent two or three days together, walking around the land, talking about our ideas, and brainstorming," John remembers. "It was this open-ended, blue-sky thinking, which really appealed to me. We talked about what the land was asking for and what I needed. Working with Will felt like play to me."

The resulting home has a living roof, large windows, and a freestanding studio with walls that splay outward as they rise up. "You think acoustics and sound engineering is some sort of magic, something no one can understand," says Will later. "But really, I just called up a sound engineer and told him what we needed. He knew right away the best way to do it, at what angle to set the walls, and how the sound would function within the space."

When Will looks back on that project, completed in 2013, his face still lights up with excitement. "It flows with the landscape, as if the field were jumping up onto the roof. In the summer, when the grasses are three feet tall, it melds right into the surrounding area," he says. "And we built in this great little surprise for John. I designed the placement of the windows so that you can still have a view of the lighthouse, even if you're standing outside, behind the house, away from the ocean." John didn't notice this precise framing until months after he had already moved in. "I'm always discovering something new, partially because Will has this amazing attention to detail," he says. "Just the other day I saw how the light comes in through the skylights through the network of woven beams—it creates this wonderful changing pattern. These things are little Easter eggs that I find unexpectedly as I'm walking around the house." Toward the end of construction, Will added another small, personalized touch for John—brass disks set into the wood floorboards. "We made him a walking meditation path," he explains. "The little bronze nickels are the pivot points."







Months after our first meeting on Peaks Island, we join Will on the shores of Sebago Lake where he is working on a vacation home for Karen Burke, owner of Portland boutique K Collette. "I feel like I got the A Team," says Karen, who, like John, has also chosen Richardson & Associates as her landscape designers. "I wanted Will because he knows how to work with a small space, and I wanted this to be a functional, compact camp. It's a retreat and a place to step away. It's all about living with less—no dishwasher, no TV, no microwave. Just small and simple." Sebago Lake holds a special place in Karen's heart. As a girl, she attended summer camp at nearby Wohelo Camps. Years later, she married her husband at nearby Migis Lodge. "I wanted this house to be a part of the forest, to feel like the Sebago I remember from growing up," she says. "Most importantly, I wanted it to meld into the land. I want to preserve the original landscape as much as possible." To that end, Todd has decided not to remove most of the plantings on the property, which means Will and his team must figure out how to set the foundation without damaging the roots of nearby trees. (Carefully placed concrete pylons were the solution.) They were also tasked with designing an exterior that harmonized with the surrounding homes while incorporating mid-century modern elements.

"This book was our bible," says Will, as he flips open *Norwegian Wood: The Thoughtful Architecture of Wenche Selmer*. This copy is Burke's and it's bursting with yellow sticky notes. Inside, she has highlighted entire passages, circled pictures that she loves, and written small notes to herself that read simply, "color!" or "living room." For Will, Todd, and Karen, the book provided a visual vocabulary for the project, one full of raw wood, modern shapes, and sophisticated, muted hues. "What's really cool is that this is a book I discovered ten years ago. Wenche Selmer was on my radar, and I've used this as inspiration for other projects," Will says. "But Karen found it separately and brought it to me. She said, 'This is my vibe.'"

For the Sebago Lake retreat, Will combined elements of classic camp architecture, like exposed beams and a large gable at the front of the house, with modernist touches, including flat roofs that link the gables (which will be covered with small stones and forest duff), irregularly dimensioned vertical siding, and updated, scaled-down rafter tails that reference Japanese architecture as well as post-and-beam homes. "We used traditional forms and materials, and then gave it a little edge with deliberate, subtle tweaks on proportion to make the entire structure feel special and detailed," Will says as he walks around the half-finished house. He points to the windows as an example. "They're ordinary windows, but we didn't use regular trim on them. Do you notice how they're aligned with the gaps on the siding? To make that work, Eric drew every side of the house, with every board, and placed the windows exactly. Although you don't notice it at first, it gives a calmness to the house," explains Will. "And Karen is smart, she feels it. She's a vibrating force. The moment something is off, she knows."

Todd Richardson's landscape design highlights the natural serenity of the region. Instead of planting a traditional lawn, Todd used squares of local moss and groundcover that the landscaping team transported from a wooded corner of the property. Any trees that were removed during construction were replaced with tall, white birches. "What we are doing here is stitching the landscape back together," explains Todd as he walks through a hedge of highbush blueberries, mountain laurel, and huckleberry bushes. "We aren't even making true trails down to the water, just little sneak-downs covered in pine needles where the plants part enough to let you through." "If we do our job right," adds Will, "you won't be able to tell that this has been landscaped. You will feel as though the house just flows with the land. Like it belongs here."





