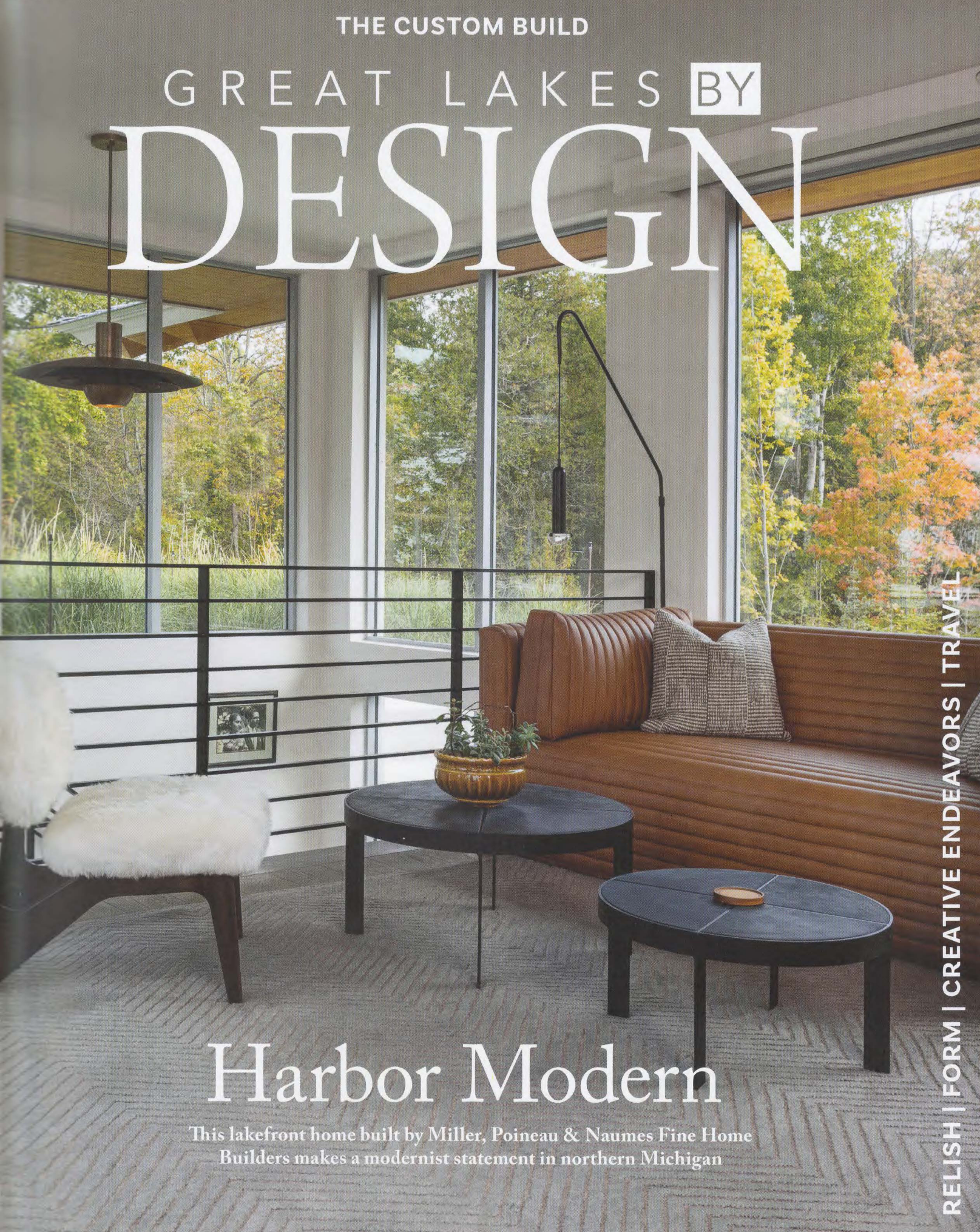


THE CUSTOM BUILD

GREAT LAKES BY

# DESIGN



## Harbor Modern

This lakefront home built by Miller, Poineau & Naumes Fine Home Builders makes a modernist statement in northern Michigan

# Quiet luxury on Crystal Lake

Text: R.J. Weick

For the long-time, repeat clients of Julie Novy, principal interior designer and founder of JWN Designs Inc. in Crystal Lake, Illinois, this lakefront home was a childhood dream come true, blending urban-edged contemporary design with the natural warmth and materiality inherent to rugged mountain landscapes. Designed to support their active lifestyle and affinity for entertaining both family and friends, the home is an invitation into the overall experience, unfolding as one moves

deeper into its highly intuitive spaces where every detail was carefully considered.

It is intentional in its quiet luxury, in which the functional and the unexpected moment are elevated in artistry, woven from initial approach and throughout the home to the rooftop deck with its lantern that acts as a beacon across the water. It frames the natural landscape, bringing the depth and dimension of mature oaks and the shoreline into relationship with the home, and integrating the rhythm and movement

of wood grains and water into cabinetry and floors. For Novy, design is personal, and it is her role to help clients imagine possibilities beyond what they thought possible, realizing environments that bring out their best and inspire joy in the experience. It is about listening and collaboration and building a team that can bring that dream into reality.

"I love that the clients tell us how much they love being there. It's about the whole, collective experience. The minute you drive up to





this home, there is a sense of movement, and it is not expected. We used some traditional and transitional and contemporary elements, but it has a glue that holds it together that makes it really work. It has a flow of 'live life well' and 'be engaged,'" Novy said.

"It was such a collaboration. I think that is what was the biggest joy of this project. It was always that conversation of, 'We all have a seat at the conference table, everybody is equally important, and so we need to support each other, and make sure that everybody is weighing in properly with the clients, who sit at the

head.' It was beautiful, we could just really shake through struggles, and everybody appreciated being pushed and pulled," Novy added.

#### The team

Tasked with finding a builder and an architect to collaborate on the project, Novy looked to Orren Pickell Building Group, or OPBG, of Wilmette, Illinois to help realize the project. Novy founded JWN Designs in Crystal Lake as a collaborative interior architectural design firm dedicated to inspiring both residential and commercial clients to achieve the unique poten-

tial of space. JWN works on projects nationally, traveling coast to coast for clients, and Novy, who has more than 20 years of experience in the industry, was looking for a partner to help further develop architectural plans and realize the build out of the home. OPBG is an integrated firm offering architectural design, remodeling, construction, carpentry, cabinetry, and home maintenance throughout Chicago, Wisconsin, Indiana, and Michigan, and has become recognized over the years for its meticulous design, construction excellence, and innovation.

The family-run company is backed by a team of in-house licensed architects and designers, craftspeople, specialized professionals, and maintenance staff and is driven by a commitment to the client experience and a truly custom process. For Lisa Pickell, president of OPBG, the mission behind the company is to build better lives for their clients and employees, and it is an honor to be chosen to participate with each client in such a critical process. Novy also noted it was through John Forehand, president of the Orren Pickell Design Group at the time, that they then connected with O'Brien Harris LLC of Chicago, Illinois as a design partner for the interiors.

"I really wanted O'Brien Harris to be on this project. Ann [Stockard, designer at O'Brien Harris] was a great collaborator. The easiest part of it was she and I tossed things back and forth, drew on each other's plans, and it was so fun to have somebody who could see the vision of what we were trying to do," Novy said.

O'Brien Harris manufacturers handmade, bespoke cabinetry for interior spaces, delivering heirloom furniture delivered by a dedication to heritage, skill, and materiality, where the grain, the weight, and the finish of ethically sourced woods become an enduring moment in the overall built experience. Defined in-part as a design partner, O'Brien Harris is about the curation, the organization, and the well-edited feeling of thoughtfulness, as Laura O'Brien, owner of O'Brien Harris, has noted in the past, creating beauty amid function through harmony, rhythm, and flow.

For this Lakewood, Illinois home, Ann Stockard, designer at O'Brien Harris in Chicago, said the point in which she came into the process, there had been a lot of initial design already completed and saw her role as really interpreting that vision in terms of what O'Brien Harris could bring to spaces like the primary bedroom and bathroom, the family workstation and message center, and the kitchen, dining, and wine storage areas.

"I am so grateful that we were brought into the project. My role was just expanding on that vision to the best of my ability and working together to make that happen," Stockard said. "Design is really about getting to that place where your heart sings, and for me, it is listening to my inner voice as much as it is about lis-



tening, really listening, to the client and getting to the root of what their needs are. Design is beautiful and it makes us happy, and it needs to function. And home is a place where you walk in, and you feel happy in your heart.”

### The site landscape

For the clients of this lakefront home, the site itself was an ideal location and “dream property” on the cherished shores of Crystal Lake in Lakewood, Illinois. Novy said the clients envisioned a home where people felt comfortable and welcomed in, and as avid travelers and wine aficionados, wanted to incorporate some of those elements into the home in a way that reflected who they are without being ostentatious, rather expressed in quiet luxury, where one can’t help but feel at home—and the positioning of the home in regard to the lake really informed that experience.

“The site had these big beautiful oaks on the property and we wanted to keep them to create that foreground and background [experience] since the clients love the mountains and that kind of scenery, and also love the lake. Having the lake right there, we wanted it to be super approachable while also having enough space, so we set the house back,” Novy said. “The site also has a little bend, a curve on their property where the shore meets the yard. We strategized how to place the house so it also had a relationship to that bend. We also staggered multi-layered outdoor living spaces so the lake seemed to wrap with the home.”

Its approach is also intentional in its welcoming design, piquing interest from the start with the brick paver driveway that leads to the center courtyard, drawing family, friends, and guests to the home and lake beyond. Novy noted with casual lake life living, there are often late arrivals and as a result the design team wanted to create a space that welcomed them without having to traipse through the entire home to access lakeside activity.

“We devised this bridging space between the garage and the main house with glass walls that is bookended by the stone of the home. We worked really hard to create this breezeway space that feels welcoming, and as you step through it, a stone path leads down to the lake. It is intended to excite people as they move through, and that is one of the biggest elements to the home: it draws you in. We intentionally layered the design to create a sense of tease and intrigue of what’s beyond as this house is navigated. There is no simple, full-picture view of this home’s narrative; it encourages engagement,” Novy said.

“When you walk into the main living area, the view is just absolutely breathtaking and it is very strategic. The team did a wonderful job bringing the outdoors into the home that you are immediately taken with the beautiful landscape and the water. It is really so impactful, particularly in the kitchen. The wood tones and the glistening water details in the beautiful finishes, some of those reflective elements in the kitchen and adjacent spaces, brought a really

nice nod to outdoor elements and the beautiful water,” Stockard added.

### Interior landscape

Intentionally layered, its experience is one that unfolds as guests move deeper into the home. It is a home that embraces efficiency and functionality, carefully considering axis points and architectural connections that are fundamental in creating that “je ne sais quoi” of energetic symmetry and flow. Spaces are visually connected, each room has been designed to optimize the home’s access to natural light and views into the tree canopy and shoreline beyond, and centerlines are tied together in rhythmic harmony. Elements and materiality are intended to be subtle throughout the home—save for the swirling, wavelike mosaic in the entry floor in direct reference—finishes and undertones of custom cabinetry are meant to speak to the natural landscape, and the volume of space, concept of scale and proportion, were key drivers in creating a cohesive whole.

“It is about nature, it is about luxury, it is about comfort, and it is about welcoming, and yet, it is also about good design that makes you just feel good. You don’t know what it is, but you want to be there and it just feels great. That was our intention of this home, to feel great,” Novy said. “Ann [Stockard] and I really dug in with the clients to focus on their different likes, since they are accustomed to living in multiple locations. They wanted a heartfelt, sophisticated home that felt urban and had structural in-



tegrity. They were very detail-oriented, and we really honed in on the functional aspect for her specifically. They also wanted a home that was geared toward entertaining to the nines.”

For Novy, the quiet luxury that defines the home was about the purposeful intent behind placement of cabinetry and storage, the intuitive layout of kitchen space and pantry, and also translated into the tactile experience, where that luxury was not necessarily all about the look, but rather the feel, which is where O’Brien Harris came in.

“O’Brien Harris is luxury, it feels different,” Novy said. “You can feel that luxury with every wood finish and the close of every door.”

O’Brien Harris collaborated on interior spaces like the primary bedroom and bathroom, the laundry room and mudroom, family workstation and message center, and the powder room and guest coat closet. The bespoke cabinet maker also was involved in the kitchen and dining room, the bar and wine storage area, and the kitchen pantry. The kitchen, which is open to the dining room and bar, features two islands and Galley sink, with custom cabinetry provided by O’Brien Harris.

The island is hand-painted in “Barely There” white by O’Brien Harris and features polished stainless steel cuffed foot detail to create a furniture feel, while slab doors and drawers are mixed with a custom stepped profile, a collaboration of JWN, O’Brien Harris, and the client. Perimeter cabinetry is rift and quartered in white oak, drawers are dovetail with a walnut interior, and there is a custom hood with polished stainless-steel banding and light patina body. A second iceberg quartzite

island features an ice maker and beverage refrigerator, and a Galley workstation. And the pantry features a pocket door with a polished nickel mesh grill that allows for sightlines into the space in functional artistry.

In the adjacent bar and dining room, O’Brien Harris and JWN Designs also designed and fabricated the custom wine storage display that can hold 151 bottles of wine—which is in addition to the storage located in the lower level. The lit wine storage is complemented by antiqued mirrored tile, Acqua Quartzite, and a bar featuring tobacco-stained walnut with natural walnut cabinetry interiors, pull-out drawers for liquor storage and cigar accessories and utensils, and mesh-paneled doors in brass.

“We even considered different seasons and the impact it might have on functional storage,” Stockard said. “Everything was thought through for storage, for the pantry, and even for cord management and how it might support their lifestyle needs. There was a lot of detail that went into figuring out solutions for charging iPads and iPhones and other electronics. It was a great challenge and opportunity to be really thoughtful, even in terms of the cabinetry interiors and how the drawers were designed as storage for Keurig cups. It was really fun to delve into that, organization was so important.”

Novy said another favored challenge was creating the open armoire, guest closet to store items when family and friends visit. The closet, which mimics the panels in the primary bedroom, is custom finished in a gray flannel by O’Brien Harris and was devised as a piece of millwork with beautiful proportions that can be seen from the exterior in an added

architectural nod. The view from the exterior is of the guest coat hallway.

“I loved that detail,” Stockard said. “The design of the guest closet nodded to other architectural details in the home, and if you look at it, it is just very interesting and makes a visual statement with its wider panel on the bottom. It was one of my favorite details that we worked on together in this home, and it was really Julie’s [Novy] vision. I just absolutely loved it.”

### The experience

The home, which features countless other details—like a floating wood-and-iron staircase, a rooftop deck complete with beacon lantern that illuminates down into the screened porch below, and a three-sided fireplace—is a quiet sanctuary for the clients. Designed specifically for daily use of two, the home can also flex to accommodate sleeping up to 24 individuals across highly intuitive and purposeful spaces. Rectilinear rooms are juxtaposed with organic details and elements, and its overall palette quietly sits as background to the active, lakefront lifestyle of its homeowners.

“Good design is about creating distinctive spaces that are elevated by inspired details, precise architectural connections, and timelessness that is all woven together with an unexpected twist that evokes a captivating response,” Novy said. “Great design produces a love of engagement in the space, where high-quality work quietly elaborates those three-dimensional connections. However subtle at first, great design becomes more intriguing as those intentional layers are exposed, and while those fine details might not be noticed, their impact is always felt.”



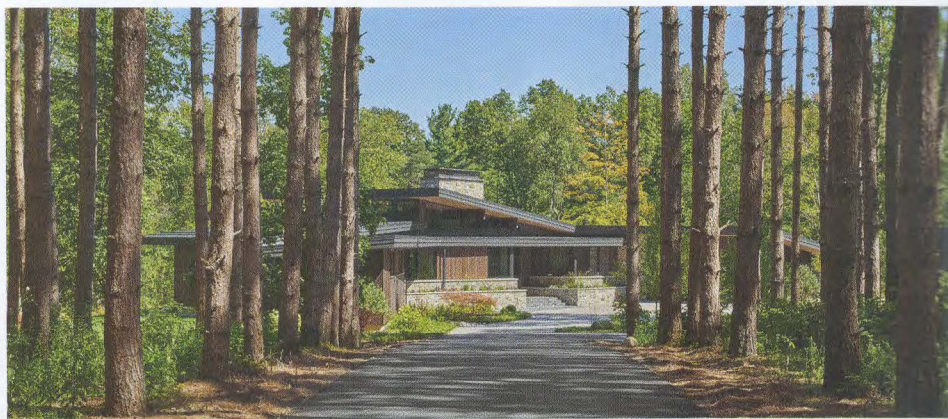
# Hidden Creek

Text: Diane Kolak

An exciting homesite can ignite the imagination of an architect. As they study the contours and landscape, they develop ideas to enhance its unique features and conceptualize structures that bring its inhabitants closer to its beauty. Often this process produces a few variations for clients to review, but rarely does it produce seven workable plans, each with a slightly different functional emphasis and visual appeal.

Such was the case after Ben Franceschi, AIA, principal and architect at Mathison | Mathison Architects in Grand Rapids, Michigan, developed concepts for a picturesque creekside site in Rockford, Michigan. In addition to providing a setting rife with possibilities, the clients also gave the firm the gift of time to explore, think, and sketch. The extended timeline afforded the team a uniquely immersive design process.

“We just went on lots of walks,” said Franceschi of his design team, which included Brent DeKryger, architect, and Matthew



Schulte, director of project operations. “This was a slow start—which we love—because they were really investing in a long-term house for their family for generations.”

The approach to the site, known as Hidden Creek, meanders through a mature pine stand

planted decades ago in a strict grid—the kind of evergreen forest you see all over Michigan, a result of reforestation efforts after the lumber boom. The towering trees create a sculptural effect over a thick carpet of russet-colored needles, quieting the atmosphere and setting a



mood of intrigue. The flat land eventually hits a ridge where it begins to slope toward the creek. A well-worn trail defines this edge and runs the length of the property.

“That ridge became the place we all agreed was the most advantageous for the placement of the house,” Franceschi said. “But we were just captivated by this whole piece of property. It felt very architectural already, almost like being in a church. It was manmade, this grid of trees, but it really helped us imagine the approach to the site and it helped give a scale to the property.”

The team went to work with a couple of foundational assumptions. One was that the home would perch upon the ridge trail, and the other was that the driveway would take a long, winding route from the road to enhance the sense of discovery, eventually “catching a lane” through the pine grid to reveal the house’s entrance. With the basic requirements in place, the Mathison | Mathison Architects, or MMA, team poured out ideas and felt that all seven were worth presenting to their design-savvy clients.

The final choice was a plan that emphasized transparency and balanced it with substantial forms that settle the single-story home into the site contours, giving priority to the existing landscape. In this long, sprawling plan, the living spaces open sequentially along the natural ridge, following strategic angles that hinge upon the living room. Where the trail once existed, a clear walkway with long views to the outside now serves as the “spine” of the house, almost as if the trail is still in place.

“We just wanted to bring that [trail] inside the house,” Franceschi said. “To give that sense that you were sort of still walking the trail, except now you happen to be inside the home.”

This meandering layout required a flexible roof design that could function properly while helping the structural masses reflect the land contours in an organic way. Franceschi used the hinge point of the living space as an apex for two planes ascending gently from each end of the home. To bring a more human scale to the entrance area in the middle, he introduced a third roof plane that’s flat. “It gives a little bit of compression as you enter, and it helps mitigate that big gesture with the other two roofs.”

The home is not about grand gestures. It’s about a whispered welcome, a placid feeling of settling in, and a solidity that belies its transparency. It is light but not delicate, with views that reveal just enough without giving it all away. True to its design roots in organic modernism, the house sits in and not on the site, its layers of construction gently rising from the earth.

An abundance of triple-pane glass helps create the effect of light layers, and wide views to the forest and creek become an element of its interior design. This became an important factor for Kathy Waite, interior designer and owner of Kathy Waite Interior Design in Grand

Rapids, Michigan, who worked closely with MMA to ensure all the details contributed to the mysterious allure of the home.

A limited materials palette, inside and out, is central to the project's noticeable design cohesion, despite the input of two separate design firms. Franceschi explained that his firm prefers to restrict each project to an "essence" of three to five materials. This minimalist approach provides a simple and consistent base that gives an interior designer a clean visual foundation upon which to layer finish elements.

For Hidden Creek, the architectural materials lean heavily on stone and wood. A multi-colored dolomitic limestone is introduced on a tiered planter wall at the entrance of the home and shows up again around the central fireplace, then spills out to the back patio. Wood treated with the Japanese charring technique known as shou sugi ban clads the exterior, and its deep blackened-brown color repeats in elements within the home such as structural beams and window frames. Clear vertical-grain Western redcedar provides a warm contrast on walls and ceilings, extending outward onto soffits for a seamless look above clerestory windows.

Waite introduced some elements of surprise and contrast with substantial, curvy furniture and delicate light fixtures, but her textile selections blend harmoniously with the architecture and setting. The interior has a humbly luxurious look that allows the views to shine.



Invisible elements, as well, are important and Franceschi is quick to recognize the project's general contractor, Rockford Homes, who engineered many of the features that

make the home sustainable and comfortable. Special attention went toward insulation and waterproofing, given the home's location above the creek. The team also integrated solar panels, which bolster passive solar design elements—such as deep eaves and strategic window placement—to create a home that's highly energy-efficient.

The homeowners wanted an informal elegance that lends itself to collaborative use of space, depending on the situation. Rather than defaulting to a great-room concept, the plan employs the positioning of roof forms, floor level changes, and transitions in materials to help each space derive its own identity while still maintaining spatial fluidity with the other rooms.

"One cool thing in this project is this kind of welcome mat of slate that starts outside, and then it runs down the main walkway through the house. Then that same slate becomes the hearth of the fireplace and continues in front of the banquette by the dining room," Franceschi said.

The slate tile "trail" continues the sense of discovery that begins at the winding driveway, revealing the delights along the way: a sheltered entrance, a comfortable seat, a welcoming fire, a rushing creek, and the continuing intrigue of Hidden Creek as it unfolds along the ridge.

