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Maine Attraction

In coastal New England, an artist turns a wooded property into a haven for creating and living.

Text by Justin Ellis
Photos by Trent Bell

PROJECT
Bullitt Residence
ARCHITECT
Winkelman Architecture,
winkarch.com
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT
Richardson & Associates,
richardsonassociates.com
LOCATION
Steuben, Maine

Architect Will Winkelman and landscape architect Todd Richardson collaborated with a client, JT Bullitt, to design a house that blends into its surroundings in Steuben, Maine. The green roof gives the impression that “the ground just jumped onto the roof,” Richardson says.





The exterior is clad in eastern hemlock (above). "It's local, it's native, and it's actually got a good bit of resistance," Winkelman says of the material, "and we could mill it to a unique dimension." The living room is furnished with a Tolomeo Mega floor lamp by Artemide, a Milo Baughman

Recliner 74, a Morsø 7648 wood stove, and a Hampton rug by Capel Rugs (below). Cambrian black granite countertops were installed in the kitchen (opposite). "One of the favorite things I have to do in the kitchen is wash dishes, just because it's such a delightful view out the window," Bullitt says.



It's not unusual to find JT Bullitt in his Muck Boots, exploring the Maine woods. As an artist, one of his passions is discovering and recording sound, particularly the notes of the trees, the deep vibrations of the earth, and other hidden cadences of the natural world. It was on such a walk in 2008 that he found himself winding down a dirt road onto a 17-acre property in Steuben, a coastal town three hours north of Portland.

The house that Bullitt ultimately would build here—a staggered, angular structure whose design grounds it firmly in the coastal landscape—differs starkly from the dilapidated farmhouse that Bullitt discovered on that walk six years ago, disturbing the porcupines that were its only residents.

Bullitt, who was living in Cambridge, Massachusetts, at the time, hadn't planned to move to Maine, but he had spent summers in the state for years and was struck by the property's potential. He was captivated by the quiet space where the woods meet the sea, a juxtaposition unique to Down East Maine. He thought about the land for a year before finally purchasing it in the fall of 2009.

When it became clear that keeping the farmhouse was not an option, Bullitt decided to build a home that emphasized balance—a space for living and working that mediated between the natural and the man-made. "Whatever I built, I wanted it to be harmonious and really settle into the landscape and not be this big, bold architectural statement you can see from miles around," he says.

To make his idea of uninterrupted natural living a reality, Bullitt enlisted Winkelman Architecture of Portland and Richardson & Associates, a landscape architecture firm based in Saco, Maine. The plan for the homestead began to take shape during a design charette on the property with Bullitt, lead architect Will Winkelman, and landscape architect Todd Richardson. Over two days in the summer of 2010, they walked the land for inspiration, using plywood and sawhorses to set up a drafting space in the property's ragged barn. "We kind of blurred the lines between architecture and landscape; it was really focused more on place," Richardson says of the design process. "Ultimately, the place would have a building, or buildings, and landscape elements to it."

Construction started in the spring of 2011 and was completed a year later. The house rises from a meadow as a series of timbered diagonals radiating toward the Gulf of Maine. There are four interconnected buildings: the home, a semidetached garage, the original barn, and a 900-square-foot studio, which features separate spaces for audio experiments and Bullitt's drawing and mark-making projects. >



DWELLINGS



Bullitt Residence Floor Plan

- | | |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------|
| A Art Studio | J Guest Bedroom |
| B Sound Studio | K Meditation Room |
| C Garage | L Screened-in Porch |
| D Breezeway | M Living-Dining Room |
| E Pantry | N Barn |
| F Kitchen | O Exercise Loft |
| G Office-Alcove | P Master Bathroom |
| H Mudroom | Q Master Bedroom |
| I Guest Bathroom | |

A central courtyard—a lush expanse of craggy ledges, Bog Myrtle, and bearberry—governs the flow between indoors and out, tying the separate spaces together like a living room. “The heart of it is this naturalized courtyard,” Winkelman says, “which is perfect because the embodiment of the design is it’s not about the object, it’s about the space between the objects. And it’s a really key piece; that space is this wild-grasses landscape that just kind of hops up.”

Each building is clad in locally sourced wood. Unfinished eastern white cedar shingles cover the sidewalls, while contrasting vertical boards of eastern hemlock evoke the acoustic slats of an orchestra hall. Taken together, the courtyard and buildings frame the property’s striking views. From almost any room, the eye is drawn southward through an old apple orchard to the beach, and across the bay to the lighthouse on Petit Manan Island. The windows capture views of gulls and eagles flying over the shore, as well as the occasional bobcat that strides through the courtyard, Bullitt says. Early on summer mornings, lobstermen can be seen checking their traps in the bay.

The two-story, 1,700-square-foot house has a serene interior, with two bedrooms, two bathrooms, a meditation room, and an open living-dining space that flows into a small galley-style kitchen. The native wood creates continuity with the outside, with exposed hemlock rafters, red oak floors, and white cedar trunks that were cut down during construction and repurposed as columns.

A planted roof—a bloom of wild grass, huckleberry, and blueberries—mirrors the earth below, “like the ground just jumped up onto the roof,” as Richardson says, and provides insulation that helps reduce energy consumption. Winkelman says the goal was to get as close as possible to passive-house standards. Triple-glazed doors and windows harness warmth, and a geothermal heating system regulates the temperature inside the house. A small solar field on the property helps keep Bullitt’s energy bills close to zero.

Energy efficiency is only one of the benefits that will multiply as Bullitt’s house ages. He is already collecting sounds from the tall grasses in the field and the burble of the ocean. But for Bullitt, it’s the process of watching his home reach equilibrium with the land that promises the most surprise.

“As it’s weathered, it’s kind of turned this nice silvery-gray, which settles into the landscape and looks like the dried grass in the field,” he says of his house. “And there are a lot more weeds and things on the roof. It looks very natural up there. It’s not a manicured garden. I’m trying to be careful to let nature do its thing.” □

Angled beams are a fixture of the structure, both inside and out (opposite). The beams “are an expression of the design, so they’re reinforcing view lines,” Winkelman says, “but they’re also weaving together the different axes of the site.” A verdant tundra that the architect dubbed the “courtyard”

separates Bullitt’s house from his 900-square-foot studio (below). The space, which is planted with Bog Myrtle, bearberry, and other native plants, “reinforces...the dominance of the landscape over the building,” the architect says. “The end result was an exceedingly naturalized setting.”



“I wanted it to be harmonious and settle into the landscape, and not be this big, bold architectural statement you can see from miles around.” —JT Bullitt, resident