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THE FAMILY THAT PLAYS TOGETHER

A family lodge gives an elegant nod to cabins of decades past



Deane Hillbrand's creative take on the kitchen island, done in Douglas fir with high gloss lacquer. Counters are honed black granite, and the floor is California gold slate.

Take five adult siblings; add their parents, their kids, thirty-five acres of private land on a pristine lake and a well-appointed lodge, and you've got the formula for a family that stays connected despite the distance between them. Hailing from Detroit Lakes, the family's current addresses are as distant as Alaska, Seattle and California. But they wanted a place to congregate and found it near Spooner, Wisconsin. Then they set out to create the space that would house the next generation of family memories.

"They said, 'We want Teddy Roosevelt with plumbing,'" laughs interior designer Talla Skogmo, ASID and partner at Edina-based Engler-Skogmo

Interior Design. But the whimsical directive set the tone. Katherine Hillbrand, AIA and principal of SALA Architects in Minneapolis, drove the design and Skogmo created the interiors. Together, they blended a rustic backdrop of timber framing and stonemasonry with plush, comfortable furnishings.

FAMILY STRUCTURE

With four of the five siblings now parents themselves, the family needed space — lots of it. And despite its whopping 7500 square feet, the home conveys a cozy feel. "Working on such a big structure and making it feel intimate was a big challenge," says Hillbrand. "We wanted each room to feel comforting

and of human scale." And by bringing roof lines down and creating living space within those roof lines, Hillbrand invoked the spirit of park structures from the turn of the century.

Timber framing supports the lodge's nostalgic feel, and Hillbrand's husband, Deane Hillbrand, can take credit for that. His hand-peeled stacked logs compose the entire wall system up to the eaves, while curved logs make up the truss system supporting the roof. "They have this sculptural quality to them," says Katherine Hillbrand, "and they're silky smooth." Stonemasonry completes the effect, appearing in the 18-foot tall fireplace in the living room and the thick stone veneers on the exterior. >>>

FAMILY GATHERING

Despite the family's assorted zip codes, the lodge is used frequently throughout the year. Two siblings, Minnesotans, make regular visits to the lodge; the entire family attempts to gather en masse at least twice a year. And according to Skogmo, they gather in the kitchen. "They love to cook. That's part of the fun — cooking and having massive dinners with everybody together." The fulcrum point of activity, the kitchen was designed as an open space with plenty of room for the entire family. "Someone's cooking, someone's handing food over the counter, someone's prepping... They're all part of it." And because the head count can exceed twenty, they opted for some

restaurant-grade appliances. "The dishwasher is commercial grade — you load the trays and put them in," says Skogmo, who laughs as she points out the kitchen sink's faucet. "It's a commercial sprayer and, because it's a fun group, it's easy to envision a water fight after a few glasses of wine."

Keeping the sense of togetherness in the dining room was paramount, but finding a table that suited both smaller and larger parties was easier said than done. Deane Hillbrand rose to the challenge by creating two trestle tables that lock together and are connected by a giant lazy Susan. "You can take them apart so you have two separate tables and put people all the way around them. They wanted flexibility;

they wanted to be able to sit together," says Skogmo. "And there's a kitchen table just around the corner so all the kids sit there, all the adults are at the two big tables and they're all in the same area."

Completing the great room trilogy, the living room was designed to accommodate a host of comers with an assortment of cozy sofas, loveseats and easy chairs. With the fireplace as its focal point, there's not a flat screen to be found. "There's no TV on the main level," says Skogmo. In its stead, the family opted for a sound system, and Skogmo says the wood and stone create a potent acoustic cocktail. "The space is so alive and the sound is unbelievable. You can let music do what it should do — it's really fun." >>>



A dramatic 18-foot fireplace and Douglas fir walls frame the living room. Above, custom railings made by Deane Hillbrand from wrought iron and twigs frame the reading loft. Baker Knapp & Tubbs brown sofa, fabric by Dorelia. A. Burle floral sofa, fabric by Myung Jin; pull-up chairs Baker Knapp & Tubbs, fabric by Calvin Aubry Angelo rug. Artifacts coffee table



The timber-framed sun porch offers a view of the lake and a cool place to sleep. Benchcraft furnishings, outdoor fabrics by Perennials and LuLu DK.

FAMILY PLANNING

The togetherness theme climbs the stairs to the loft outside the bedrooms and overlooking the great room. "When we did this, there were all these little kids involved so we wanted a place to go and read bedtime stories and just hang out," says Skogmo. And again, Deane Hillbrand's artistry found expression in the wrought iron and twig railings that frame the space.

"Egalitarian" is the word Katherine Hillbrand uses as she recalls designing the siblings' sleeping quarters. While the process could have conjured up old family issues, she managed to avoid the potential landmines. "We had to balance it out so that everybody felt that they had something special," she says. Two of the siblings live in Minnesota; combined, they have seven children. Because they use the home most frequently, their spaces are largest. One of the West Coast siblings has a larger closet so she can leave things there. And for the two siblings that visit the least, two smaller bedrooms can open up to each other through pocket doors to create a suite. All the bedrooms feature their own bath, and the master bedroom – the parents' quarters – is the only sleeping chamber on the main floor.

Nevertheless, family members have been known to sneak downstairs on crisp summer nights to sleep in the sun porch. Perched on the deck overlooking the

lake, the porch is equipped with a hide-a-bed and chaise, ample space for a couple of adults or a gaggle of giggling kids.

FAMILY DYNAMIC

Kids rule on the lower level. "It's all concrete flooring so the kids can rollerblade in the winter," says Skogmo. "If you're going to use this place year-round, what are your kids going to do? They're too little to cross-country ski... Do you really want to go skating with them all the time? We kept the floor concrete so they could do whatever they wanted... shoot hockey pucks, whatever." And Skogmo says the kids can get their Nickelodeon fixes downstairs in a small room with a large television. But keeping the area simple was utilitarian as much as it was to amuse the younger family members. "There's a big shower so they can all come in from the lake and rinse off."

Both Skogmo and Hillbrand were taken in by the family and continue to stay in touch with them even now that the project is completed. Says Skogmo, "You want to be a part of this family." And Hillbrand recounts her visit to the cabin for a final inspection. "The sun was sparkling off the lake and somehow they got all the kids together. They were standing in the water and on the count of three they all yelled, 'Thank you for the house!' They're lovely, intelligent, lively people." ■