



Romancing the Lodge

CASUAL GRANDEUR ON A LAKE MICHIGAN BAY

When Deborah Guerrero and Casey Cowell married a few years ago, their lives changed more or less overnight. Suddenly, as parents of a combined family that included five children, they had to have more space—lots of it, and fast. “We needed to get quite a few bedrooms in a hurry,” says Cowell. “If it took five years to do it and the kids were long gone, what would be the point of that?”

As one of the fathers of the modern modern, Cowell has made a profession out of moving at lightning speed. After he cofounded U.S. Robotics with some college friends back in the mid-1970s, “we rode the modem into the age of the microprocessor,” he explains. “We made it better and faster and less expensive.” So there was nothing daunting about commissioning a house. Working with a tried-and-true team that included architect Linda Searl and proj-

ect designer Ann Blossfeld (of the Chicago firm Searl and Associates), and interior designer Nancy Willert, Cowell shot forward at his usual breakneck pace. Within 15 months of buying property near the charmingly old-fashioned resort of Traverse City, Michigan—“the epitome of a beautiful midwestern town,” as Guerrero describes it—the couple and their brood moved into their completed home.

“I call it a modern lodge,” Searl says of this massive

ABOVE: Casey Cowell and Deborah Guerrero commissioned architect Linda Searl, of Searl and Associates, to construct a lodge-like house on the shore of a Lake Michigan bay. Cozy, spacious interiors were created by Searl, project designer Ann Blossfeld and consultant Nancy Willert.

OPPOSITE: Enrique Santana’s *Civic Opera Building* hangs in the entrance hall, beyond which is the living room. The main staircase, with an *anegré* balustrade, leads to the second-floor bridge. The beams and columns were crafted from Douglas fir. Christian Liaigre bench from Holly Hunt.

Architecture by Searl and Associates/Interior Design by Nancy Willert and Searl and Associates

Text by Penelope Rowlands/Photography by Matt Wargo







OPPOSITE: Frank Martin's *Lacewoods*, 1994, is near an Indiana limestone wall, with a fireplace, in the living room. Christian Liaigre sofas and Dakota Jackson chair, with Edelman leather and pillow suede, from Holly Hunt. Kerry Joyce low table from Holly Hunt. Todd Hase side tables.

ABOVE: "The dining room is defined by a glass wall, with wood trusses, to the west and a stone wall to the south," notes Searl. "A feeling of warmth and openness is intended. At the same time, the materials suggest a casual elegance." The table runner fabric is from Donghia.



LEFT: *Serway*, 1996, by Emmi Whitehorse hangs above the bed in the master bedroom. Searl used an Indiana limestone wall to “add strong texture,” she says. Windows, with smooth wood frames, break up the rough surface and offer southwestern vistas of the water.



wanted to experience as fully as possible. “I like to have a lot of glass. When you’re inside the house, you want to feel as if you’re outside.” Built on a sloping site on a bay shore near Lake Michigan—known to some midwesterners as “the Third Coast”—the residence takes full advantage of the beauty of its site.

The house is made up of three intersecting wings, with the main living spaces—including 28-foot-high living and dining rooms—in the wing that runs from north to south. Two other wings run on an east-west axis: One of these comprises two of the children’s bedrooms, guest rooms, a sitting room, the library and the master suite; the other, the kitchen, the lab, the family room and more bedrooms. Almost anywhere you look, there is a view of the lake. “There’s always a destination at the end of these axes,” notes Searl. (The bedroom wing’s lower level, for example, ends in one of the house’s two screen porches.) Although the house is enormous—15,000 square feet—it appears smaller. Because it’s built into a hill, with three stories on one side and two on the other, from some angles it almost seems to disappear.

The house’s centerpiece is its soaring, formal living area and the 100-foot-long bridge that traverses it—a per-

house, which was inspired by some of the great structures she’d encountered in Yosemite, Yellowstone and other western parks. She thought the casual grandeur of lodge architecture, with its huge volumes and its copious use of wood and stone, would be perfect for these clients. “Those spaces are so wonderful and comfortable. They’re like the way Casey and Deb live. They like to entertain, but they’re casual about it. The idea of this house is that it’s easy to live in all the time.”

Searl has done five projects with Cowell. “We were on the same wavelength by the time we got to this house,” the architect says. In some ways, the project was a homecoming for Cowell, who’d spent childhood summers, as well as some adult years, in woody northern Michigan—a landscape he



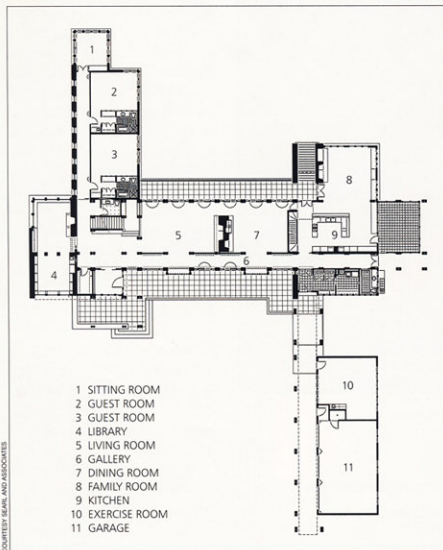
OPPOSITE: Joan Miró’s *Serie Barcelona* 1973 is at the end of the second-floor bridge, which provides access from the master suite to a staircase that leads to the kitchen and the family room below. “It defines the north-south axis and captures views of the lake,” says Searl.

ABOVE: A closet and two vanities, in the master bath, are opposite a row of tall windows that look to the courtyard and flood the space with natural light. Marble countertops offset ash cabinetry and window trim and a cedar ceiling and trusses. Tub and sink from Kohler.



ABOVE: The poolhouse features a copper roof and a cedar trellis and columns. Bluestone paving surrounds the pool. **BELOW:** The first-floor plan. “The residence is organized into three intersecting wings,” notes Searl. “The main living spaces are located in the largest wing.”

RIGHT: “The courtyard is defined by the two smaller wings of the house,” Searl says. “It’s a place for entertaining and sunning when guests are swimming or boating on the bay.” Landscape architect Maria Smithburg, of Artemisia, designed the plantings to accommodate the views.



fect connection,” according to Guerrero. Located on the second floor, this dizzyingly open walkway runs parallel to the dining and living rooms’ sheer glass walls and connects the master suite to a staircase that leads to the kitchen and the family room. “When you’re up there, it’s as if you’re floating in mid-air,” Cowell says.

For all of its transparency, this is a house that, in keeping with the local vernacular, relies on stone and wood. On one second-floor landing, all of the major components used in the house can be seen, including cedar ceiling beams with black steel plates, stone walls, *anegré* railings and columns of Douglas fir. “There was this kind of system of parts,” Searl explains. “We wanted to pare things down and keep them interrelated.” Most of the woods used—including ash, which predominates—are local, she adds.

Lavish attention was spent on the stone, which Cowell wanted to be rough-cut. “The house is very clean and crisp in parts,” he says. “We want-



ed to soften that and add texture.” They installed a copper-shingled roof, which would become greener over time. “Between the strong stone and the tingeing copper, the house has a natural feel,” remarks Cowell.

That the client, who’s now an investor, is still an inventor at heart is evident in the

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house's numerous playful details. "I'm reasonably idiosyncratic, if not eccentric, when it comes to these things," he admits. Several rooms foster discovery and play, including a crafts room where kids—and adults, for that matter—are encouraged to let go and even paint on the walls. In the electronics lab, on the house's low-

er level, one can toy with such amazing gear as massive printers (for making outside photographic prints), oscilloscopes and frequency counters.

Almost every room has one whimsical element or another. In the master bath, a fold-down table swivels out from the side of the tub. Cowell and Searl worked out the table's

design together several residences ago, and it now figures in all of his homes. "It's sort of his meditation place," says the architect. Here, he reads the morning newspaper and indulges in paperwork—with the occasional predictably soggy outcome. Cowell, who's an avid fly fisherman, also finds this surface

to be an excellent place for tying fish flies. And he doesn't rule out other uses: "Nothing prevents you from putting hors d'oeuvres, a bottle of wine and a candle on it."

Working with such an inventive client and following through on even the most scattered-sounding concepts

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is a privilege, asserts Searl. "He lets you create an idea. He lets you go with it. You can really explore your creativity. Many clients don't have that kind of confidence." That this one does is evident everywhere, down to the close juxtaposition of the study with the master bedroom. This positioning was critical, since, Cowell says, "I do my best thinking when I first wake up. I like to be within a minute or two of my study. It makes a difference." He finds that the room itself provides inspiration. Three of its walls are made predominately of glass, and "when you're in the study, you think you're on the prow of a ship, right over the water."

The interior was a collaboration among Searl, Blossfeld and Willert. "I wanted the house to be comfortable and cozy for being so large," says Guerrera. A realist, she knew the interior would have to stand up to quantities of teenagers in full hanging-out mode. She favored "slouchy sofas" and informal but beautiful fabrics. "We needed them to withstand salsa spills," she says. "There are no silks." Willert designed the house's bright, often geometric-patterned carpets, with input from Guerrera, who delighted in adding "little whimsical secrets" throughout, including the five small fish, representing the children, that are woven into a corner of the dining room rug.

"I wanted to keep it very minimal and contemporary and playful," says the designer, who's based in Milwaukee. "That was my challenge, to make it feel like a home." Willert gravitated toward casual yet highly stylized pieces, such as an angular chair and, next to it, an elegant, surprising occasional table—one of two—in the living room. The massive photographic monoprint on a nearby wall, *Lacewoods* by Frank Martin, complements the lakescape that is seen through the massive opposite window. The art is "pretty eclectic," says Cowell. "It's things we picked up here and there. Just things we like."

Now that the project is done, Willert is the first to say the interior still feels incomplete. One thing is missing. "I was going to hang a racing scull above the bed in the master suite," she says, "because I have room to do it and it would be so beautiful." But she hasn't found the right boat yet. Still, you sense that, when she does, her clients will approve. □