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Tiny Treasure

A petite retreat in the country proves wonderful things do indeed come in small packages.

By definition, it's a pool house: a two-room house that opens onto a pool. The owners even call it a pool house. But that doesn't do it justice.

At just over 700 square feet, it's a diminutive architectural beauty that sits a little northwest of the middle of Massachusetts. It's a good three-and-a-half-hour drive from New York City, where owners Sally Holmes and her husband, Doug Curtis, live with their daughter, Josephine Zulma Curtis. It's a fully operational second home. A retreat. A getaway that "takes me out of my regular life," says Holmes.

"It" is a simple, elemental, wooden structure as organically connected to the land as the family is.

It's sited on a ledge ridge, on twenty mostly wooded acres contiguous to The Farm School in the town of Orange. Holmes's brother Ben is the founder and director of the school, which has been offering adults and children an immersive agricultural experience since 1990. "We've been coming to the area frequently since then," says Holmes, "sometimes staying with family or in a tent we got when we bought the property six years ago."

Architect Maryann Thompson, who met the couple when she was working on housing for the school, directed the design and construction of the pool house. "Sally and Doug really wanted something

The Japanese-inspired structure, crafted of glass, steel, and wood, serves as a home away from home for its owners, who live in New York City. They come up most weekends in summer, and one or two times a month the rest of the year.

| TEXT BY MARIA LAPIANA | PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHUCK CHOI |

Special Spaces

that was a more permanent version of the camp they'd set up," she says. "The connection to the outdoors was key. The owners are amazing gardeners. In a sense, their relationship to the land is spiritual, in keeping with their farm school roots."

Says Holmes: "We slowly moved into the property over a number of years. The land was cleared and a meadow established first, then came the tent, then the storage shed, then the pool, and then the pool house." Local forester and builder Fred Heyes "cleared the land with remarkable care and precision, then built

the house with loving attention to every quarter inch," she says.

The couple both grew up on the West Coast in houses with an aesthetic similar to this one: lots of wood and glass, a flat roof, a Japanese feeling. Thompson says they wanted to keep the building simple, use natural materials, and express the structure on the inside as well as the outside. "The use of metal, wood, and steel gives it an authenticity of material," she says. "It's minimally insulated and designed to take advantage of natural daylight and cross ventilation."

There are overhanging eaves, clerestory windows, and floor-to-ceiling panes. The interior can be completely open or compartmentalized

TOP: A challenge in designing the pool house was "sticking to the idea of it being simple but modern," says architect Maryann Thompson. Her team was intent on enhancing the natural beauty of the site. **LEFT AND BELOW:** Local red oak, birch, and pine mix in the efficient interior, where form and function share the spotlight equally.



"This is a place that gets you out of the person you are most of the time," says Sally Holmes. "When I arrive, I always unclench a little."



Special Spaces

PROJECT TEAM

Architecture and interior design:

Maryann Thompson,
Maryann Thompson
Architects

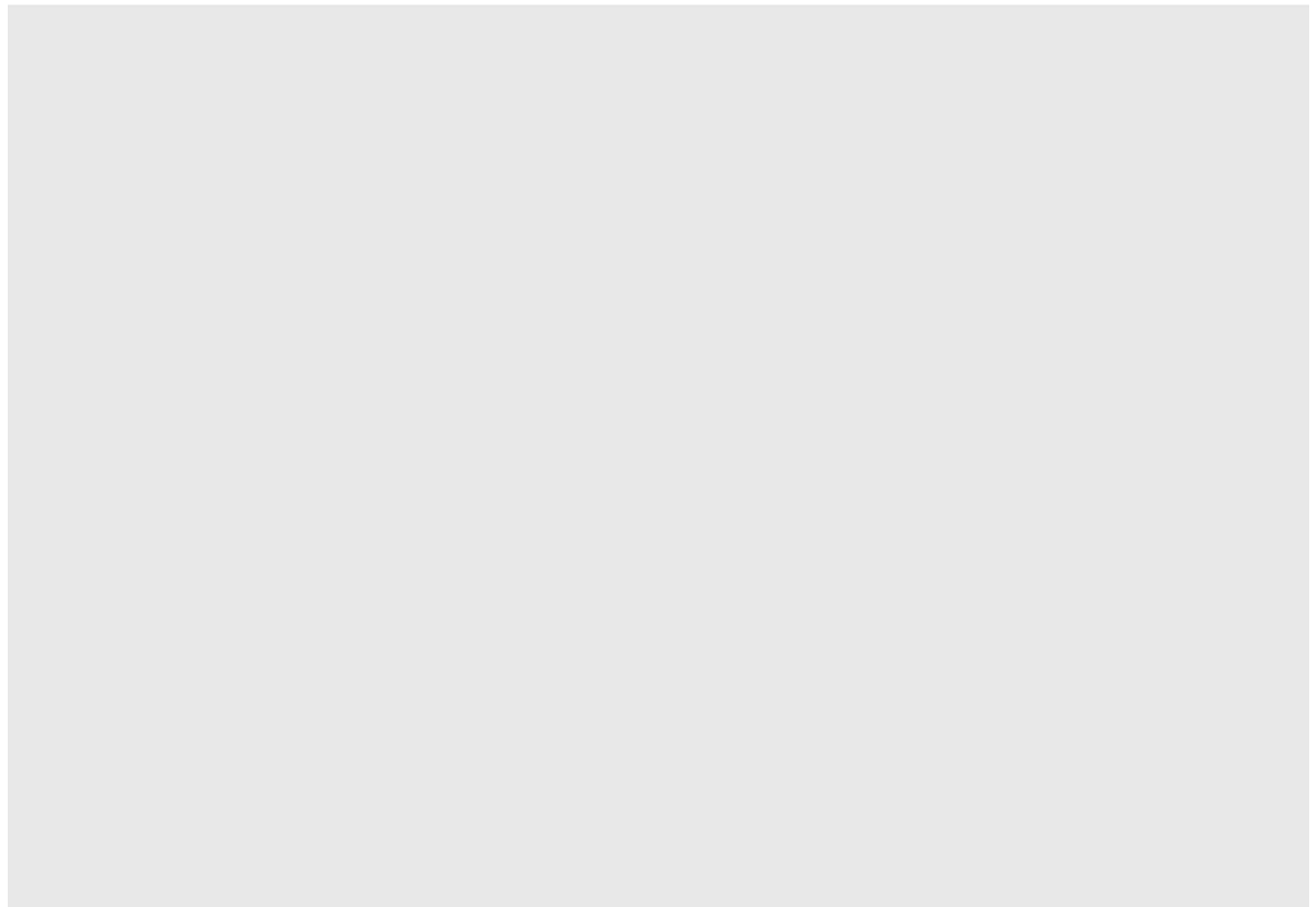
Builder:

Fred Heyes, Heyes
Forest Products

for sleeping and privacy. The kitchen/living room/dining area flows to a screened porch and the sleeping quarters. Because it's so small, the house has all the efficiency of a ship, with thoughtfully designed storage and a place for everything. The only shower is the circular, wood-enclosed one outdoors.

The finish material is all wood. On the exterior,

that means a mix of western red cedar siding and natural bark shingles. Inside, the main area's casework is made from local red oak and ash, all supplied by Heyes, the builder, who also runs his own sawmill.





The living here is easy. “We’re short of a full kitchen to keep the interior aesthetic calm,” says Holmes. “We have a portable induction cooktop, electric frying pan, toaster oven, and grill, so we can

cook almost anything.”

And while a pool house might seem like it’s built just for summer use, radiant heat in the floor and a super-efficient wood stove ensure the home is comfortable even when the outdoor temperatures get into the single digits, Holmes says.

An “indoor/outdoor connection” is commonplace these days, but this is the real deal. “Sally and Doug wanted to experience the sense of a garden indoors,” says Thompson. “In a way, the garden and the structure become one, in the form of flowering vines that climb up the exterior columns.”

And because Holmes really enjoys doing the wash (really!), the laundry room was designed with access to the outside. “She engages the landscape every time she does the laundry,” says Thompson.

“This is a place that gets you out of the person you are most of the time,” says Holmes. “I have a full-

time job, and I’ve lived in the city for more than forty years. This place is just so removed. When I arrive, I always unclench a little.” ■

RESOURCES: For more information about this home, see page 260.

The sculptural outdoor shower gets used in all but the deepest months of winter. **FACING PAGE:** Exposed structural elements, such as the open-framed wall, steel support beams, and cement floor, give the sleeping quarters a minimalist feel.