



EDITORIAL DISCRETION

ENTRY DRIVE
A gentle approach
through farm fields and
woods sets visitors up
for a dramatic climax.

WAGNER HODGSON'S ASSIGNMENT
FOR A LAKESIDE ESTATE IN VERMONT
REQUIRED SUBTLE DELETIONS,
ESSENTIAL CORRECTIONS, AND
THEMATIC CONSISTENCY.

BY JONATHAN LERNER / PHOTOGRAPHY BY JIM WESTPHALEN



PLAN

- 1 MAIN HOUSE
- 2 TERRACED SLOPE
- 3 POOL HOUSE
- 4 BARN
- 5 NORTH BAY GUESTHOUSE
- 6 SOUTH BAY GUESTHOUSE
- 7 RESTORED POND
- 8 WILDFLOWER MEADOW
- 9 RIPARIAN CORRIDOR
- 10 MAIN ENTRANCE

OPPOSITE
The oval porch addition to the house was inspired by the curves Wagner Hodgson traced in the landscape.

THE PROPERTY is a stubby peninsula jutting west into Lake Champlain. The lake is nearly two miles wide here. Beyond it, in New York, the tiered peaks of the Adirondacks appear flattened and monochromatic, blurring as they recede into the distance. Given the setting, the place seems even more expansive than its 140 acres. But the grandeur is counterbalanced by the land's gentleness—it has the unassertive quality characteristic of Vermont's culture, if not of the state's more typical mountainous terrain. From a country road, you turn onto a half-mile-long drive. The approach runs between meadows, where sheep from an adjacent farm are grazed, before entering a wood and then curving toward the house. From here, 30 feet below through the filter of trees, the lake gleams slate blue.

Bays scoop out the north and south shores of the peninsula, shaping it like an anvil; the west shore runs for 2,000-plus feet along the lake proper. The main house sits in neat, tree-dotted lawns near the anvil's southern point. It's grand in scale, and traditional though restrained in style. There's a pool and pool house, and a carriage house that doubles as entertaining space. Both are well spaced from the house and each other

OPPOSITE

A badly eroded bluff was reimagined and stabilized as descending terraces.

and visually buffered, at least in summer, by planting areas: There's a curve of river birches undergirded by Limelight hydrangea (*Hydrangea paniculata* 'Limelight'), *Astilbe*, and a mix of sage and grass varieties, and separately, a little grid of honey locusts. Farther away, past an intervening sweep of woods, a guesthouse overlooks the south bay. A quarter mile from that, above the north bay, sits a smaller second guesthouse. Near that structure, but also shielded by trees, there's a reconstructed antique barn. Aside from a short steep drop down to the lake all around, the land has only soft contours. As a whole, of course, this estate is plenty splendid. But its buildings are scattered, and unostentatious. Sight lines are veiled by the skeins of trees. There is no hill to provide a commanding view of the place all at once. When you're there, it feels understated and quiet.

The Burlington, Vermont, firm Wagner Hodgson was hired in 2014 to create a coherent master plan that would transform the abandoned farm property into a working estate. That required addressing woodland management, shoreline protection, field restoration for sheep husbandry, management of agricultural runoff, siting of outbuildings, and establishment of outdoor living spaces for the client family. The property had been neglected. Some fields had been in agricultural use, but wooded areas including the lakefront bluffs had become overgrown and thick with invasives. "Before, all the way up to the house, you couldn't even tell there was a lake here," says H. Keith Wagner, FASLA, who was the principal in charge on the project. "You couldn't see the house either," until you'd come right up to it. A big part of the job came down to editing. Wagner says, "It wasn't only what you added; it was what you subtracted." Thinning of trees along the bluff now allows views to the water as you get close. And selective removal neatly "opened up a shot," as Wagner puts it, between remaining trees, to provide a 400-foot head-on prospect from the curve of the driveway right to the front of the house. You glimpse the building for a moment—it's a stately one, well served by that long view—before passing back among trees that intermittently screen it, and finally arriving at the door.



KEENLY CUT BLOCKS OF LOCAL PANTON STONE EXPRESS THE FIRM'S PENCHANT FOR MODERNIST, CLEAN GEOMETRY.

Editing, of course, involves not only deletion but also elaboration and punctuation. The entrance drive is arrow-straight for more than 2,000 feet from the road, with a few attractive dips and rises, before it begins its curve. It begged to be treated as an allée. There were already mature trees dotted along it, red maples closer to the road and pin oaks farther back. But these were too few and too randomly spaced to establish the necessary linear structure. After inventorying the standing trees, the team “worked out a cadence” for interplanting new ones of the same two varieties, and “filled in the missing teeth,” Wagner says. His partner Jeffrey Hodgson, FASLA, notes, “There’s something nice about their different ages. It doesn’t feel so perfect.” If this project were a piece of writing, that would be one way to state its subtext: The refined and the exuberant can happily coexist. Overall, apart from the allée, relatively few new trees were planted—just a few strategic gestures such as the groupings between the main house and pool; a staggered grid of six apple trees to partly shield the smaller guesthouse from the driveway; and another grid of a dozen apples—some transplanted from elsewhere on the property—that does the same for the barn.

The first, longest part of the allée divides two broad meadows. The landscape architects suggested that in such an open setting, lines of trees alone wouldn’t give firm enough definition. They proposed bracketing the allée with fencing. The owners—who by instinct sometimes tended toward simpler solutions—were reluctant. Then they were shown alternate renderings, with fences and without. Score one for visual aids: Dark-stained rail fencing now lines the most open stretch of the driveway, reinforcing the allée and underscoring it as a mark on the land. On a separate question, the owners’ penchant for the light touch turned something that might have been treated as a blemish destined for erasure—a temporary construction road through the property—into a charming feature. “They said, ‘Keep it, like a farm road,’” Wagner recalls. “They liked the idea that it’s just a simple ribbon through the meadow.”



LAKE CHAMPLAIN
The upper terrace is furnished for dining, while this one is for gazing at the view.



PLAN

- 1 MAIN HOUSE
- 2 BANK RESTORATION
- 3 LAKE ACCESS STAIRWAY
- 4 LAKE TERRACE & FIRE PIT
- 5 GAZEBO
- 6 SCULPTURAL STONE WALL
- 7 ARCING STEPPING-STONES
- 8 TRAIL TO SOUTH BAY GUESTHOUSE
- 9 BIRCH GARDEN
- 10 POOL & HOT TUB
- 11 POOL HOUSE
- 12 HONEY LOCUST BOSQUE DINING TERRACE
- 13 CARRIAGE HOUSE



LEFT Shown images of the allée without and with a fence, the owners opted for the latter.



Two situations demanded remediation and more aggressive intervention. Manure-tainted runoff from an industrial-scale cattle operation across the road drains through the property into a pond, before ultimately running down to the lake. “When we first went on site, the pond was almost an ellipse, and brilliant green”—owing to algal bloom—“like a putting green on a golf course,” Wagner says. To encourage sedimenta-

tion and filtering, two forebays were sculpted out, and riparian plantings—sedges, red osier dogwood—introduced. The pond itself was enlarged and naturalistically reshaped. Two newly planted weeping willows, already sizable after only a couple of seasons, drape the water’s edge. A file of big stone slabs, laid crossways over the pond’s outflow, functions like a ford. “You can drive a tractor over it,” Wagner says.

There was a more complicated challenge where a curve of the lakefront bluff by the main house “was falling away,” Wagner says. The problem was likely owing to several factors: scouring from below, when ice breaks up and moves north with the lake’s flow each spring, and the tilting and collapsing of trees growing on the steep slope. Hodgson hazards that the process was accelerated during 2011, which brought record snows and rains in winter and spring, with accompanying unheard-of water levels in the lake, followed that August by Tropical Storm Irene’s fierce wind and tremendous downpour. The solution was to cut three narrow terraces into the curve of the hillside, linked by a staircase that descends to the water. Each terrace is only about a dozen feet deep. The highest is for dining, with an indirectly lit space for a drinks bar cunningly recessed into its wall. The purpose of the second level is, more than anything, for gazing at the view. It has several broad bluestone slabs cantilevered from its wall as benches, and is furnished with a line of—what else?—Adirondack chairs. The view, incidentally, is not just of lake and distant mountains; closer by is the focal point of a little rock island, a glacial relict thick with trees. On this terrace, too, for a different kind of gazing, a fire pit is recessed into the ground. The lowest terrace is a simple band of lawn. Below that, to

counter erosion, stone blocks and boulders are lined up for 100-plus feet in both directions at the water’s edge, above which the slope was stabilized with low-growing, clumping fragrant sumac (*Rhus aromatica*) and rose (*Rosa rugosa*). Making use of a traditional Vermont solution for delivering materials to shoreline construction projects, much of the stone was driven to the site over the frozen lake surface in winter.

The material used was Panton stone, a locally quarried limestone distinguished by its blocky fractures, contrasting tones—charcoal, bone white, silver gray—and quantities of small fossils. This is also the stuff of which the austere, century-old original section house was built. (The house’s extensive gray-painted frame additions are new construction.) The rocks used for the house and an existing gazebo are random in shape and rough in texture, mortared in place. The stone was handled differently in the new terraces and in a network of low walls that now delineate more from less formal outdoor spaces and lead between buildings and zones. The latter are “connective tissue,” in the words of Rolf Kielman, a principal at TruexCullins who designed the additions to the house and the guesthouses. In these new hardscape elements, the individual stone pieces vary enormously in size; some in the terrace walls are as much as 10 feet



PLANT LIST

MAIN HOUSE

TREES

- Acer rubrum** (Red maple)
- Amelanchier x grandiflora 'Autumn Brilliance'** (Autumn Brilliance apple serviceberry)
- Betula nigra 'Cully'** (Heritage river birch)
- Hamamelis virginiana** (American witch hazel)
- Quercus bicolor** (Swamp white oak)

SHRUBS

- Clethra alnifolia 'Sixteen Candles'** (Sixteen Candles summersweet)
- Fothergilla gardenii** (Dwarf witch alder)
- Hydrangea arborescens 'Annabelle'** (Annabelle hydrangea)
- Hydrangea arborescens 'NCHA2'** (Invincibelle Spirit II hydrangea)
- Hydrangea paniculata 'Limelight'** (Limelight hydrangea)
- Physocarpus opulifolius 'Ruby Spice'** (Ruby Spice ninebark)
- Rosa 'Meimiro'** (Apricot Drift ground cover rose)
- Syringa pubescens ssp. patula 'Miss Kim'** (Miss Kim Korean lilac)

ORNAMENTAL GRASSES

- Carex morrowii 'Ice Dance'** (Ice Dance Japanese sedge)
- Deschampsia cespitosa 'Pixie Fountain'** (Pixie Fountain tufted hair grass)
- Panicum virgatum 'Shenandoah'** (Shenandoah switchgrass)
- Sporobolus heterolepis** (Prairie dropseed)

PERENNIALS

- Agastache 'Blue Fortune'** (Blue Fortune hyssop)
- Alchemilla mollis** (Lady's mantle)
- Allium hollandicum 'Purple Sensation'** (Ornamental onion)
- Amsonia tabernaemontana var. salicifolia** (Eastern bluestar)
- Anemone sylvestris 'Madonna'** (Snowdrop windflower)
- Anemone tomentosa 'Robustissima'** (Windflower)
- Anemone x hybrida 'Rosenschale'** (Windflower)
- Astilbe 'Federsee'** (Federsee astilbe)
- Astilbe japonica 'Europa'** (Europa Japanese astilbe)
- Astilbe x arendsii 'Hyacinth'** (Hyacinth astilbe)
- Astilbe x 'Versililac'** (Younique lilac astilbe)
- Centranthus ruber 'Coccineus'** (Red valerian)

- Echinacea purpurea 'Prairie Splendor'** (Prairie Splendor coneflower)
- Heuchera 'Berry Timeless'** (Berry Timeless coral bells)
- Iris germanica 'Feedback'** (Feedback bearded iris)
- Liatris spicata 'Floristan Violet'** (Floristan Violet blazing star)
- Matteuccia struthiopteris** (Ostrich fern)
- Narcissus spp.** (Daffodil)
- Nepeta x faassenii 'Walker's Low'** (Walker's Low catmint)
- Paeonia lactiflora 'Doreen'** (Doreen garden peony)
- Perovskia atriplicifolia 'Longin'** (Longin Russian sage)
- Rudbeckia fulgida var. deamii** (Deam's coneflower)
- Salvia nemorosa 'Caradonna'** (Caradonna meadow sage)

LAKE TERRACE

TREES

- Amelanchier x grandiflora 'Autumn Brilliance'** (Autumn Brilliance apple serviceberry)
- Quercus bicolor** (Swamp white oak)

SHRUBS, ORNAMENTAL GRASSES & PERENNIALS

- Amsonia 'Blue Ice'** (Blue Ice bluestar)
- Deschampsia cespitosa 'Pixie Fountain'** (Pixie Fountain tufted hair grass)
- Diervilla lonicera** (Northern bush honeysuckle)
- Juncus effusus** (Common rush)
- Nepeta x faassenii 'Walker's Low'** (Walker's Low catmint)
- Rhus aromatica 'Gro-Low'** (Gro-Low fragrant sumac)
- Rosa rugosa 'Alba'** (White rugosa rose)

CARRIAGE HOUSE

TREES

- Acer rubrum** (Red maple)
- Crataegus viridis 'Winter King'** (Winter King green hawthorn)
- Pinus strobus** (Eastern white pine)
- Tsuga canadensis** (Eastern hemlock)

SHRUBS

- Clethra alnifolia** (Summersweet)
- Ilex verticillata 'Afterglow'** (Winterberry, female)
- Ilex verticillata 'FarrowBPop'** (Berry Poppins winterberry, female)
- Ilex verticillata 'Jim Dandy'** (Winterberry, male)
- Philadelphus x 'Snow White Sensation'** (Snow White Sensation mock orange)
- Viburnum acerifolium** (Mapleleaf viburnum)

ORNAMENTAL GRASSES & PERENNIALS

- Amsonia tabernaemontana var. salicifolia** (Eastern bluestar)
- Anemone hupehensis 'Hadspen Abundance'** (Japanese anemone)
- Athyrium filix-femina** (Common lady fern)
- Hemerocallis 'Pardon Me'** (Pardon Me daylily)
- Hylotelephium spectabile 'Iceberg'** (Showy stonecrop)
- Lamprocapnos spectabilis** (Bleeding heart)
- Nepeta racemosa 'Blue Wonder'** (Blue Wonder catmint)
- Schizachyrium scoparium** (Little bluestem)
- Tiarella cordifolia 'Running Tiger'** (Heartleaf foamflower)

POOL HOUSE

TREES

- Acer rubrum** (Red maple)
- Betula nigra 'Cully'** (Heritage river birch)
- Carpinus caroliniana** (American hornbeam)
- Gleditsia triacanthos var. inermis 'Shademaster'** (Shademaster thornless honey locust)
- Pinus strobus** (Eastern white pine)

- Quercus bicolor** (Swamp white oak)
- Quercus robur 'Fastigiata'** (Columnar English oak)
- Thuja occidentalis 'Smaragd'** (Emerald Green arborvitae)

SHRUBS

- Cornus stolonifera 'Farrow'** (Arctic Fire red twig dogwood)
- Hydrangea paniculata 'Limelight'** (Limelight hydrangea)
- Viburnum acerifolium** (Mapleleaf viburnum)

ORNAMENTAL GRASSES & PERENNIALS

- Actaea matsumurae 'White Pearl'** (White Pearl bugbane)
- Calamagrostis x acutiflora 'Karl Foerster'** (Karl Foerster feather reed grass)
- Carex pensylvanica** (Pennsylvania sedge)
- Centranthus ruber 'Coccineus'** (Red valerian)
- Dennstaedtia punctilobula** (Eastern hayscented fern)
- Deschampsia cespitosa** (Tufted hair grass)
- Echinacea purpurea 'Kim's Knee High'** (Kim's Knee High purple coneflower)
- Matteuccia struthiopteris** (Ostrich fern)
- Perovskia atriplicifolia 'Longin'** (Longin Russian sage)
- Salvia nemorosa 'Caradonna'** (Caradonna meadow sage)

SOUTH BAY GUESTHOUSE

TREES

- Acer rubrum** (Red maple)
- Amelanchier x grandiflora 'Autumn Brilliance'** (Autumn Brilliance apple serviceberry)
- Betula nigra 'Cully'** (Heritage river birch)
- Picea glauca** (White spruce)
- Quercus macrocarpa** (Bur oak)

SHRUBS, ORNAMENTAL GRASSES & PERENNIALS

- Calamagrostis x acutiflora 'Karl Foerster'** (Karl Foerster feather reed grass)
- Fothergilla gardenii** (Dwarf witch alder)
- Nepeta racemosa 'Blue Wonder'** (Blue Wonder catmint)
- Syringa meyeri 'Palibin'** (Dwarf Korean lilac)
- Syringa pubescens ssp. patula 'Miss Kim'** (Miss Kim Korean lilac)

NORTH BAY GUESTHOUSE

TREES

- Acer rubrum** (Red maple)
- Betula nigra 'Cully'** (Heritage river birch)
- Malus spp.** (Variety of semidwarf apple trees)
- Platanus occidentalis** (American sycamore)
- Quercus macrocarpa** (Bur oak)
- Salix babylonica** (Weeping willow)

SHRUBS, ORNAMENTAL GRASSES & PERENNIALS

- Allium roseum bulbiferum** (Flowering onion)
- Bouteloua gracilis 'Blonde Ambition'** (Blonde Ambition blue grama)
- Clethra alnifolia 'Ruby Spice'** (Ruby Spice summersweet)
- Deschampsia cespitosa 'Goldtau'** (Gold Dew tufted hair grass)
- Echinacea purpurea 'Kim's Knee High'** (Kim's Knee High purple coneflower)
- Panicum virgatum 'Heavy Metal'** (Heavy Metal switchgrass)
- Perovskia atriplicifolia 'Little Spire'** (Little Spire Russian sage)

ENTRY DRIVE

- Acer rubrum** (Red maple)

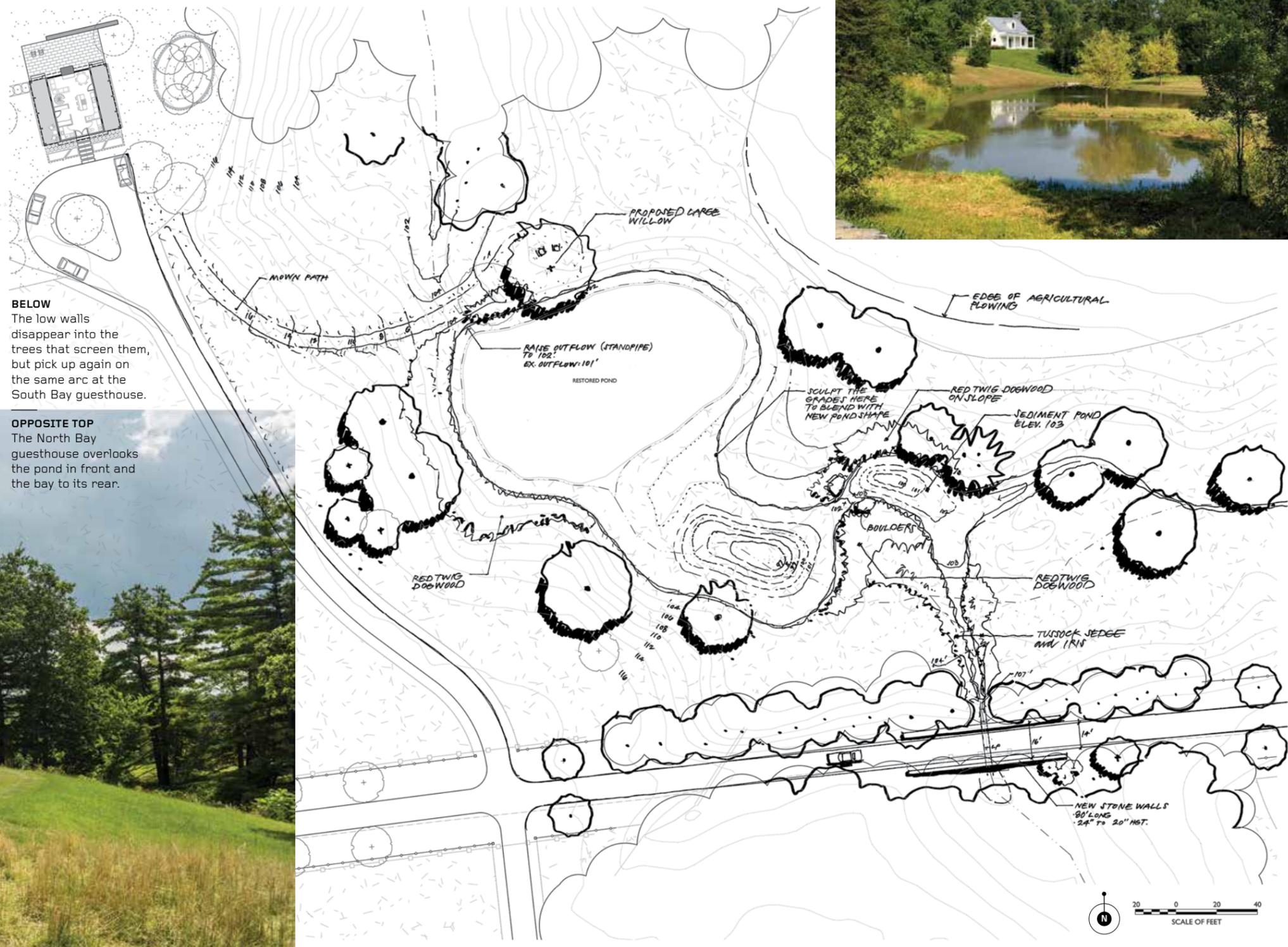
ABOVE

A mix of grasses and perennials softens the presence of the carriage house.

→ The low stature of and gaps between the sections of wall render it penetrable, both psychologically and physically; they're like standing invitations to step beyond the manicured spaces, whether you do so or not. After passing the pool house, the wall dies out, but its arc is replicated by an unpaved pathway through the woods to the cleared area above the south bay where one of the two guesthouses sits. There the curved wall picks up again, with four short sections separating active-use space next to the house from the slope down toward the water. The guesthouses tell another old Vermont tale. It used to be common practice, given the severity of the winters, for farmhouses

and their barns to be built conjoined; one could step between them without going outside. These two guesthouses were once sections of an old farmhouse. They were split apart and moved to their present locations overlooking the peninsula's north and south bays.

There's always an exchange, sometimes fraught, between architects and landscape architects on a project. Kielman, who has collaborated with Wagner Hodgson many times, says, "The landscape architect is the stepchild in some of these design processes. Not everyone appreciates how much they can contribute." And it's rare to be able to



BELOW
The low walls disappear into the trees that screen them, but pick up again on the same arc at the South Bay guesthouse.

OPPOSITE TOP
The North Bay guesthouse overlooks the pond in front and the bay to its rear.



GIVEN THE SETTING, THE PLACE
SEEMS EVEN MORE EXPANSIVE
THAN ITS 140 ACRES.



LEFT
Beyond the gazebo,
a focal point, is a
little rock island—
a glacial relict.

explicitly pinpoint a feature of a building that was inspired by an element of the landscape design. The most interesting, and least conventional, element of Kielman's additions to the main house here is an elliptical dining porch that is offset at an oblique angle to the rear facade. "I'd been toying with, 'How do we put a screened porch onto this structure that doesn't get in your way?' Then I saw Keith's rough drawings, one of the first takes he did, where that wall started to meander away from the house, to shape an oval outdoor space," Kielman says. "You can understand that if you put anything that was orthogonal out there, with sharp edges, the notion of being able to slip around it to the view would get lost. That oval of Keith's was something that I said bears repeating." An oval makes a good metaphor for the project as a whole, too—being forthright, balanced, and uncomplicated. ●

JONATHAN LERNER LIVES IN NEW YORK'S HUDSON VALLEY, A PRETTY DRIVE AND LAKE CHAMPLAIN FERRY RIDE AWAY FROM VERMONT.

Project Credits

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