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Alexandria Winery
Goods from the Woods
Green Routes

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"It's all about the lake,"

says Andrea Swan, when asked about the inspiration for the lake home she designed for her family—husband, Bret, and eight-month-old daughter, Emilia—on the north shore of Mille Lacs Lake. "We wanted to create something lasting, a place where we could make memories."

Although they live just north of the Twin Cities in Coon Rapids, the Swans have logged many hours on Mille Lacs Lake since marrying six years ago. The superb fishing and stunning views made them return again and again, as did the lake's proximity to Andrea's brother's cabin twenty miles away on Farm Island Lake.

It wasn't until last year, however, that the Swans decided to buy land on the lake they love. "We would look from time to time at places for sale, but nothing really clicked," says Andrea. But when she and Bret learned they were expecting their first child, the search for a place on the lake took on a new urgency.

In April of 2008, the Swans made what is perhaps their best lake catch ever—landing a 100-by-208-foot lot with a breathtaking view of Mille Lacs. "One of the contractors who came to do some work called it a million-dollar view," says Andrea.

For Andrea, an architect, the lot was more than just land, it was a blank canvas on which to create a place that would nurture her family and honor the lake. "It was about simplicity," says Andrea. "What I particularly loved about the final design was that it looked like a chapel. To us, it is a spiritual experience coming here."

In addition to its small footprint (under two thousand square feet), the home was built with low impact in mind. The bamboo floors are a renewable and sustainable alternative to wood. The roof is made from metal, an incredibly durable and energy efficient material that can easily endure without repair for fifty-plus years. The fiber-cement siding is rot- and fire-resistant.

Inside, high-efficiency windows and spray-foam insulation combine with equally efficient window treatments to keep out the hot rays of summer and the cold lake winds of winter. The

Swan Fish Camp

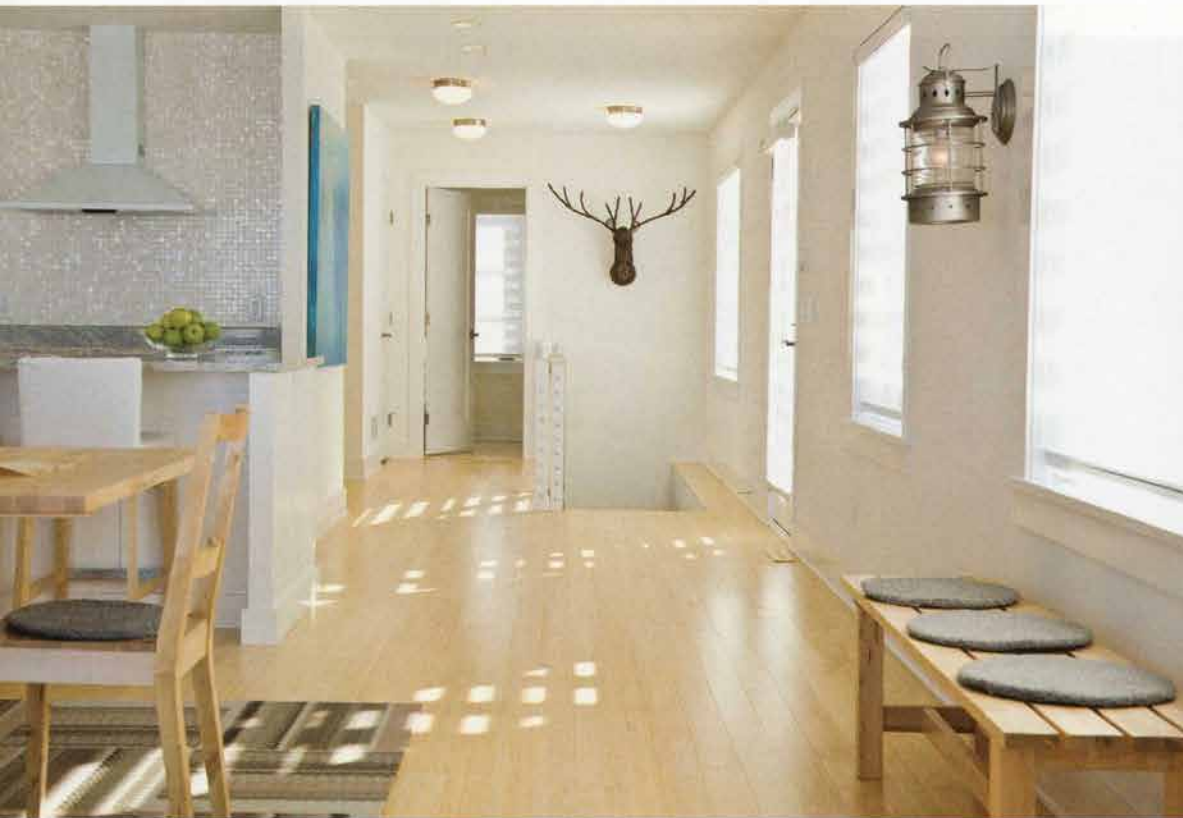




ABOVE: Carefully chosen furniture, art, and lighting prove that less is more in the main floor living space.

RIGHT: Perched atop a hill, the weekend retreat offers stunning views of Mille Lacs Lake.





ABOVE LEFT: Made of crushed oyster shells, the kitchen backsplash is not only earth-friendly, it's also a focal point.

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Swans say the extra money spent on their dual-fuel furnace (electric heat pump and gas furnace in one), was more than worth it due to its exceptional energy efficiency.

The home is made even more efficient through its open design and strategic use of ceiling fans that help to quickly disperse hot and cold air. The Swans contracted with Nor-Son of Baxter and, as much as possible, made a conscious effort to purchase supplies, appliances, and light fixtures from local vendors.

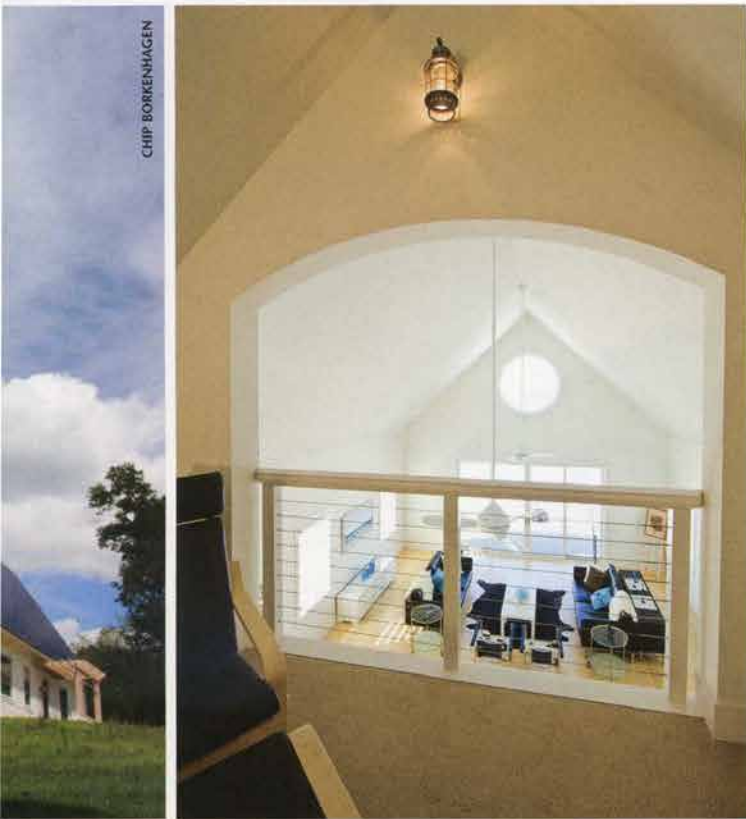
Andrea, who is a principal in the Minneapolis-based architecture firm Swan + Simmons, says architects can sometimes find it difficult to design their own homes. "We can get so absorbed in the details, in wanting to constantly change and enhance things, that it can be hard to commit to a final design."

But Andrea knew she wanted the project completed before her daughter was born and this, along with the lake itself, became her muse. While the temptation for many would have been to place the house parallel to the lake to maximize views from multiple rooms, Andrea placed it perpendicular to the lake for several reasons.

First, the perpendicular placement allowed her to tuck the garage under the house, thereby making it less obtrusive and saving valuable lot space for other purposes. At a little more than one thousand square feet, the garage still provides ample storage. It's also impressively functional, with a sprayer and drain system for everything from cleaning fish to washing sandy feet.

"Siting the home this way works on several levels," says Andrea. "We wanted to emphasize the places where friends and family gather: the living room, kitchen, and dining areas. We wanted these areas to have the most spectacular views of the lake. By placing the house perpendicular, we were able to leave a space outside where we can create a sitting area and enjoy the amazing view from the outside as well."

The desire to meld the inside and outside spaces was one of Andrea's primary goals. The same nautical light fixtures used on the exterior of the home, for example, are also used



to wonderful effect on the inside. The smartly designed railing on the deck overlooking the lake provides an almost seamless view of the lake from the inside, similar to the effect of an infinity pool.

The blue-and-white color palette (reflective of Andrea's years spent on the East Coast) gives the home an organic quality and allows it to blend into its surroundings. The blue roof seems to disappear into the sky above it while the white plank siding is reminiscent of birch trees standing under the summer sun.

This close relationship between water, sky, land, and home culminates to dramatic effect in the loft area. A circular window stunningly captures and frames (like living art) the amazing expanse of Mille Lacs Lake. "It's like a captain's spotting scope that everyone gets to look through at the same time," says Andrea.

Indeed, the real soul of this home is found on the inside where their daughter naps in a quiet bedroom on the main floor. A more subtle hint of the importance of family is a recreation of a deer head trophy hanging on the wall, which comes with a private, smile-inducing story about Andrea's desire to give her husband a symbol of the classic, hunting-and-fishing cabin he originally wanted her to design.

The decor is minimalism at its best. The white walls and painted woodwork provide the perfect backdrop for showcasing colorful art, along with the lake, which is richly on display from multiple window views. The furniture offers ample seating without taking up undue space and the lack of extra ornamentation is soothing in its simplicity.

"We didn't want to spend our weekends cleaning and dealing with a lot of things," says Andrea. "We'd rather be outside or on the lake."

However, there are some things the Swans wouldn't live without, such as the Barbie fishing pole Emilia received from her grandfather the day she was born and which now stands propped up in a corner. "We've had Emilia out on the lake already," says Bret. "She can't quite hold the rod yet. But it won't be long." 🐟

ABOVE LEFT: The view from the loft reveals that the home's open and inviting floor plan is perfect for entertaining family and friends.

ABOVE RIGHT: Clean lines and simplified surroundings create a peaceful bedroom getaway.

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