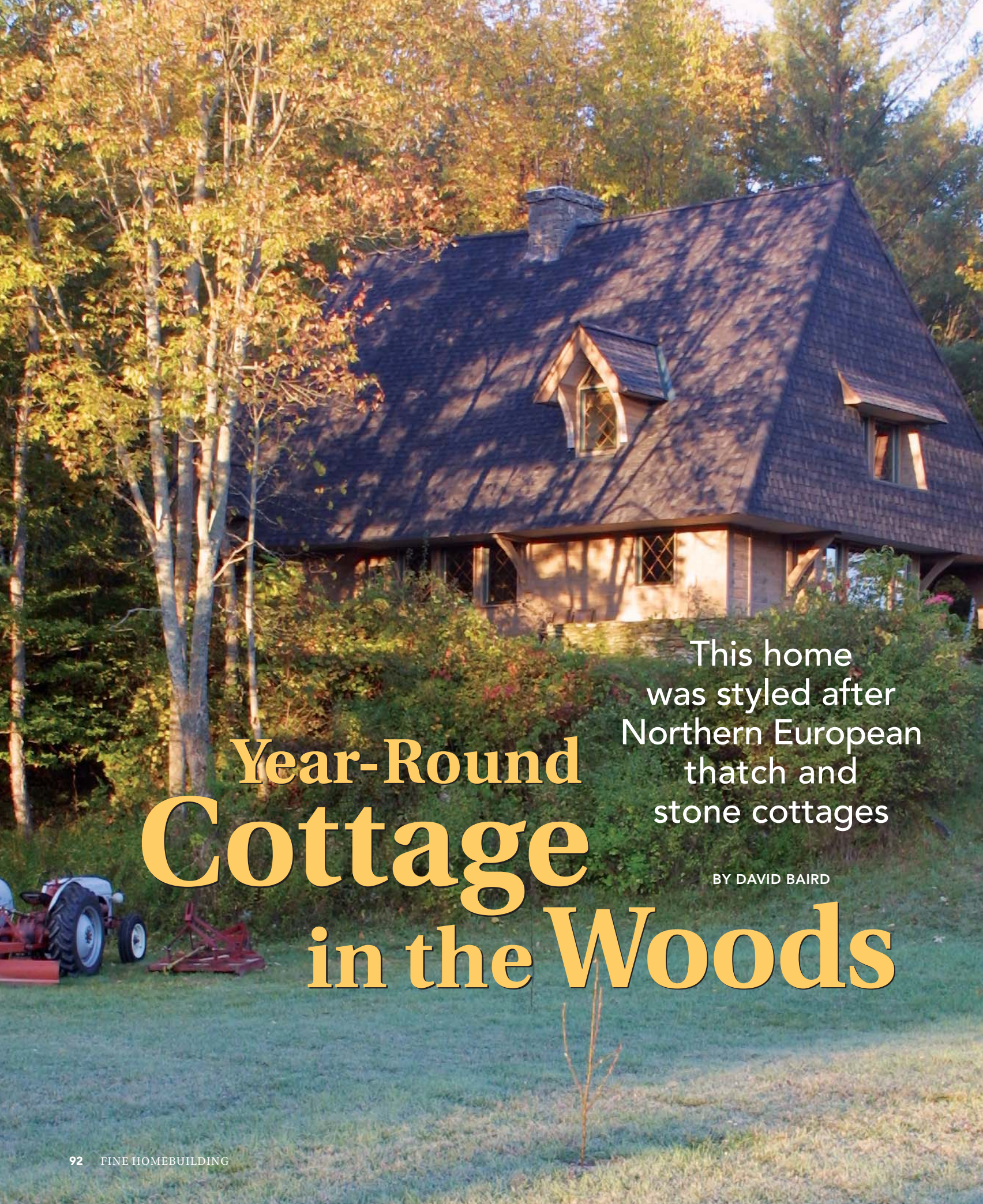


Year-Round Cottage in the Woods

This home was styled after Northern European thatch and stone cottages

BY DAVID BAIRD

A good part of my childhood was spent wandering these woods and fields. The property, which my parents bought in 1955, is crisscrossed with stone walls, and at one time my brother and I built forts out of them. Years later, when it came time to build my own home on this land, I knew I would use many of the same stones.

Once I'd finally settled on a building site—a knoll tucked into the woods facing a field frequented by deer and fox—I spent weeks imagining the house from every direction. I didn't want to disturb the hilltop or the surrounding foliage. I wanted the house to match the site, not to dominate it. And it had to look like it was always there.

Eventually, I had a form. There would be a stone cylinder supporting an elevated terrace and three stone columns to carry the roof on the south side of the house. Like Northern Europe's stone and thatch country homes, which I've always admired, the house would have a steep, protective roof with low, deep eaves overhanging stone terraces (photo facing page). The eaves, sometimes only 4 ft. from the ground, would have arched openings carved back into the rooflines, creating deep-set windows, doors and dormers.

Rustic materials gathered from our own backyard

My brother and I cut "roads" into the woods and began scavenging rocks from some unsound stone walls. After spending two summers amassing a mountainous pile of stone, I began building the cylinder, which came to be known as the "round thing." My wife, Linda, had categorized the stone according to shape and size, and more often than not, she knew which stone I needed before I did. I was able to raise the round thing's walls only 12 in. to 18 in. a weekend, backfilling and tamping, and starting all over the following weekend. Eventually, it grew to 16 ft. in dia., rising to 18 ft. at the tallest point (photos p. 95).

After four years, with one summer taken off to finish the design, we were ready to hand off our project. Garth Quillia of Kline Con-





Under the big top. *The steeply pitched roof extends over the native-stone terraces, giving this 1600-sq. ft. cottage a massive first impression while protecting it from Vermont's fierce winters. Photos taken at A, B and C on floor plan.*

THIS HOUSE'S ROOF EXTENDS FAR AROUND THE ENTIRE STRUCTURE LIKE AN OPEN UMBRELLA.



struction in Bethel, Vermont, evaluated the plans, the site and our approach to building, and convincingly said, "No problem." One October morning, he showed up with a bulldozer and began to cut and pull huge white-pine trees from the surrounding woods, piling them in a field to be milled later for the interior beams. We were off.

A simple footprint with a twist

As we began excavating for the foundation, we soon realized that we were sitting on a bluestone ledge, and unless we blasted, a basement was out of the question. Instead, we would place our footings directly atop the ledge, pouring frost walls from 52 in. to only 6 in. in some places to accommodate the ledge. This same ledge wasn't so cooperative later. It shifted in direction and rose up, forcing us to create three levels on the first floor, and eventually to change the direction of the roofline.

To keep the roof over solid ground, I decided to bend it a bit, creating a shallow hip, then straighten it again after finding the wandering ledge (drawing, facing page). Although complicated to frame, it is reminiscent of a 17th-century thatch roof.

Versatile space and feathering for an empty nest

The interior space is organized around a large central fireplace, historically the first drawn element in any house and the center of activity (photo left). We wanted it to be our starting place as well. The fireplace has proved to

The center of the house. *The stone fireplace is capped with a 2-in. by 16-in. wide clear-cherry mantel. The upstairs balusters reflect the changes in floor height, and the massive white-pine timber framing is as structurally important as it is aesthetically pleasing. Photo taken at D on floor plan.*

THE FIREPLACE CAN BE ENJOYED FROM ALMOST EVERY VANTAGE POINT IN THE HOUSE.

Drawing facing page: Steven N. Patricia

Turret, terrace and ledge

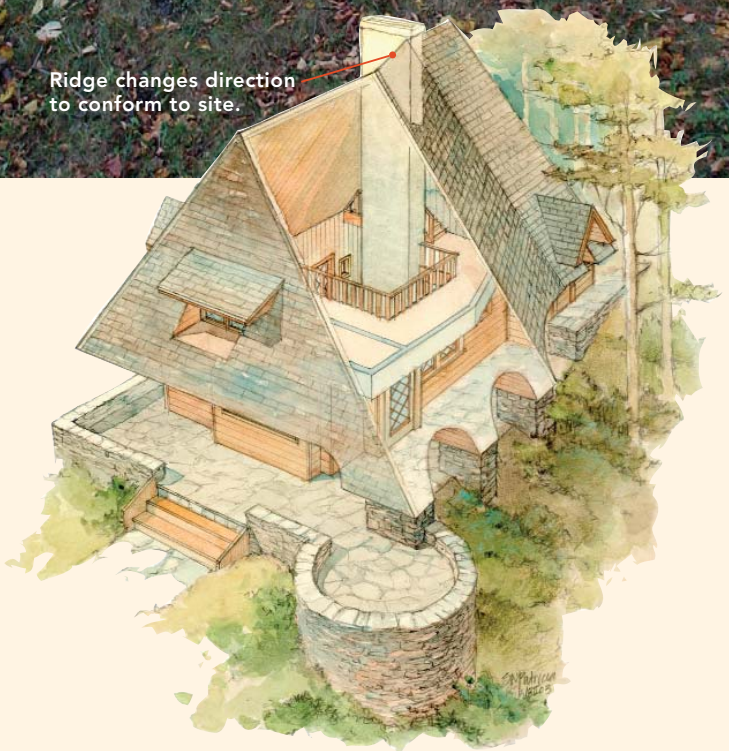
The roof isn't the only thing acting as an umbrella. The stone turret (photo right, taken at F on floor plan), rising to 18 ft., flares out at the top, keeping rain from soaking the base, which is built into the ledge. The author was able to increase the diameter gently by using a radius rod (inset photo) cantilevered where the drainpipe runs. The stone wall surrounding the terrace is the right height to sit at or to rest your feet from a chair (photo below, taken at E on floor plan).

—*D. B.*









The house takes a step to the left. *The underlying ledge that supports the house changes direction, and true to his plan of letting the site shape the house, the author had the carpenters bend the roof with a shallow hip and straighten it again.*



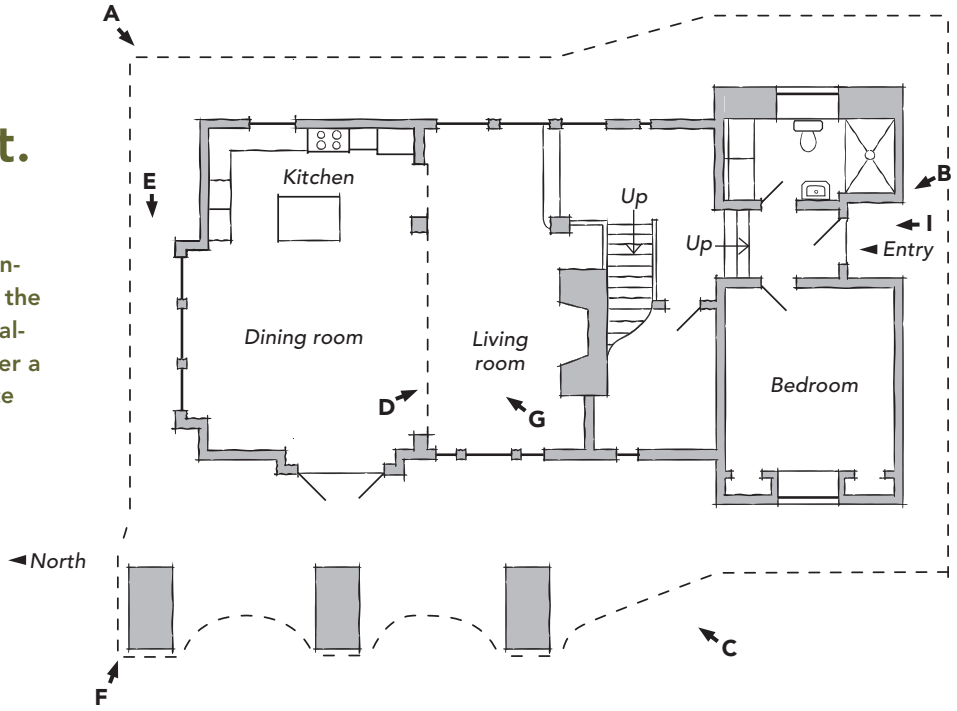
A well-executed plan. *The kitchen/dining area and living room (photo above, taken at G on floor plan) were designed to accommodate a group. The upstairs studio (photo right, taken at H on floor plan) once was a bedroom but has been transformed into a light, airy space.*



WE CHOSE WHITE-PINE FLOORS FOR MOST OF THE HOUSE. THE PINE

Comfortable, open spaces in 1600 sq. ft.

The extensive roofline protects the house and creates a transitional outdoor space off the dining area. The timber framing relieves much of the roof's massive weight from the outside walls, allowing the second floor to be cantilevered over a portion of the terrace and using as much space as the humble footprint permits.



be a wonderful, warm presence that can be seen and enjoyed from almost every vantage point in the house. The chimney rises the full 18 ft. of our "pretty great" room, effectively linking upstairs and down.

The upstairs is organized around the chimney, with open balconies lined with bookcases overlooking the living room. The balusters and railings around the balconies are inspired by a 13th-century Flemish tapestry and animate the space from above and below.

Originally, the upstairs had two bedrooms and a master bath, with a third bedroom and a laundry/bath downstairs. We have two teenage children and designed the house with that fact in mind. Within three years of moving into our new home, both of our children would be moving on to their own lives, so we designed the upstairs kid's bedroom to have a wall that could be removed. We have since converted it into a painting studio (photo left).

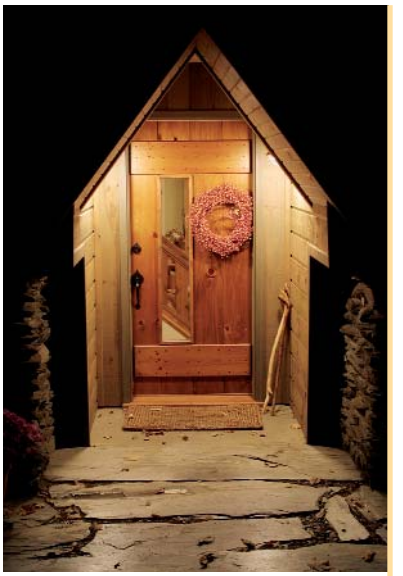
Invoking a sense of the past, but mindful of present needs

We chose white-pine floors for most of the house, and tile for the downstairs entry and bath. The pine is friendly and warm, evoking the sense of an elegant camp. We even used it at the entry, where Garth and the crew created a site-built door in keeping with the sturdy nature of this house (photo right). We aren't concerned about the marks and scars left in the soft pine because those marks tell a story and add to the charm. We chose radiant heat for the entire downstairs because that kind of heat rises only so far, then dissipates. The high cathedral ceilings couldn't draw all the heat from the floors.

We live simply and weren't building a house for a large family, so we chose to eliminate some of the appliances we didn't need or use, such as a dishwasher, and put more of our budget into a commercial cooking range and refrigerator (photo left, facing page).

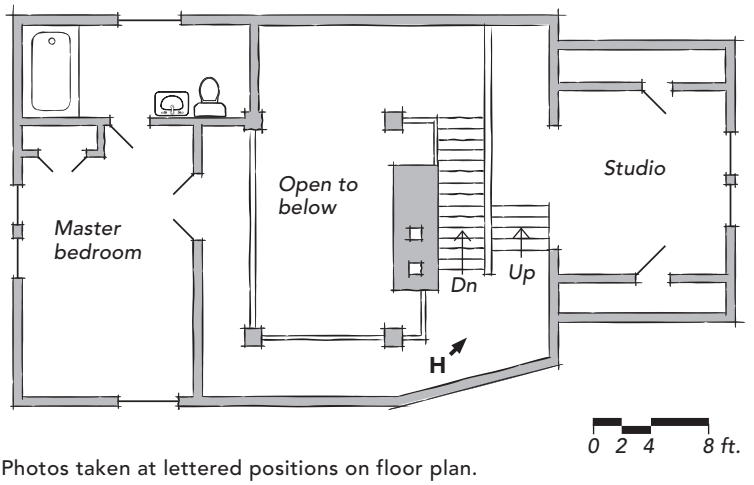
Although we had a limited budget, we were lucky enough to find an intelligent, sympathetic builder who believed in what we were trying to do. He guided us, making suggestions and being creative with simple materials. As a result, we have a beautifully crafted home that will stand for a long time to come. □

David Baird is a designer, illustrator and painter living in Berlin, Vermont. Photos by Charles Miller.



A welcome sight on a stormy night. *The well-lighted front door is protected from the elements under a dormer carved into the deep eave. The door's plywood core is sandwiched with 5/4 white pine and varnished to an antique patina, making it both inviting and stable. Photo taken at I on floor plan.*

IS FRIENDLY AND WARM, EVOKING THE SENSE OF AN ELEGANT CAMP.



Photos taken at lettered positions on floor plan.

SPECS

Bedrooms: 2, plus studio

Bathrooms: 2

Size: 1600 sq. ft.

Cost: N/A

Completed: 2000

Location: Berlin, Vermont

Architect: David Baird

Builders: Peter Kline, Garth Quillia, principals

Floor-plan drawings: Paul Perreault