

MOUNTAIN LIVING

*ESCAPE
TO THE
LAKE!*



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MAY/JUNE

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TREADING LIGHTLY

ON THE NORTH SHORE OF MONTANA'S FLATHEAD
LAKE, ARCHITECT LARRY PEARSON CREATES A
PERSONAL IDYLL THAT'S AS SENSITIVE TO ITS
WATERFRONT SITE AS IT IS TO THE VIEWS





Built near the water's edge as the first phase of the retreat, a one-room studio modeled after a traditional boat shed faces the lake; its window-wall is shaded by an awning made from recycled metal and logs gathered on the property. The deck features a covered dining area with a built-in bench and an open-air fire pit surrounded by rough-hewn log seats. Architect/owner Larry Pearson's rowing shell is moored alongside the dock.

Larry Pearson happened upon the aspen grove on the north shore of Flathead Lake

while saying goodbye to a vacation home he'd built nearby for his then-young family. "It was my last day at the old house, and I went on a four-hour kayak trip," recalls the architect and founding principal of Bozeman-based Pearson Design Group. "There were osprey and eagles flying above me, fantastic fall colors and the Mission Mountains just across the water. I knew I needed to hold on to some piece of it all."

That's when he saw this little place nestled in the trees. Pearson soon learned that the property was not only available but also that its pristine beauty owed much to a daunting challenge: "It happened to be on the lake's hundred-year floodplain and surrounded by tall cattails and protected wetlands," Pearson says. "You couldn't just go in and tear out trees or harm the landscape."

He bought the property anyway. Gradually, he sketched out plans for a new personal retreat by the water—one that would not just meet but exceed all regulations for low-impact design and construction while taking full advantage of an idyllic lakeside setting.

"Nobody else would dream of putting a house out there," says Travis Denman, an architectural designer and partner at Whitefish's Denman Construction, who helped Pearson bring his vision to life. Their first step was to devise a way to raise the intended structures—a one-room boathouse-style studio and a two-bedroom main house—to provide a safe two-foot clearance above the water's highest possible level. They waited for winter, when the wetlands froze solid and they

could safely move a heavy pile-driver out to the site to sink a total of 41 steel piers 32 feet into the ground to anchor the two structures.

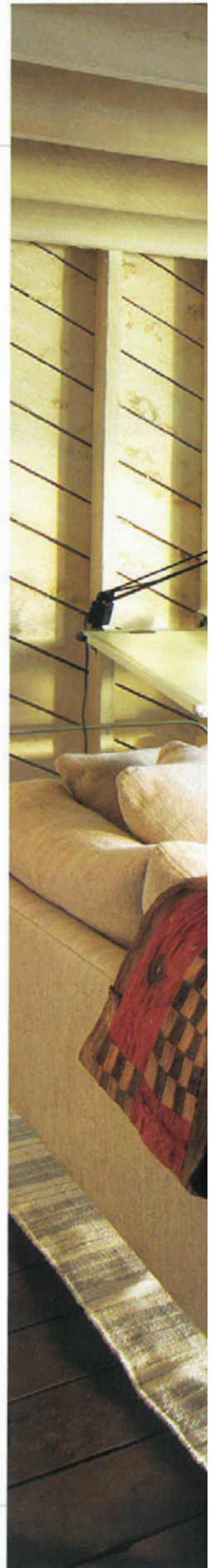
Those pilings became foundations that literally tread lightly on the landscape. In that same spirit, Pearson kept the size of the buildings small and low-impact: a mere 1,400 square feet for the house and 285 square feet for the studio. After all, he says, "A lake house should be about simple livin'."

The studio Pearson designed and built first is a model of modesty. "I call it my boat shed," he says, since it connects to the water with a deck that leads to a dock. The term "shed" is particularly apt, considering that the lightly insulated structure has no amenities beyond electricity to light and heat the space—plus simple seating and a drafting table that beckons the architect to imagine new buildings within sight of the lake. "It's a simple, industrial aesthetic," Pearson says. "Everything is just what it needs to be." As a result, the eye is continually drawn toward a window-wall and the water beyond. "When storms come through, there is no better place to watch the weather come across that lake."

The success of that first construction effort fueled Pearson's determination to build a main residence in the aspen grove about 100 feet away. Though the building sits farther from the water, its positioning and design focus just as directly on the sparkling views. The great room features a water-facing wall of glass, while the two-story bedroom wing, with identical suites on both levels, cants at a 22-degree angle so windows on two sides can offer views encompassing forest, wetlands, water and mountains.

Inside the house, Pearson kept materials, detailing and furnishings simple and spare, including naturally aged Douglas fir paneling, deck-stained oak-plank floors, and steel beams. "I can say that it's not about the architecture," he laughs. "It's about the location and coming up with a design that doesn't overwhelm this delicate, beautiful place." ◻

FACING PAGE: To avoid being distracted by the expansive lake view, Pearson positioned his drafting table to face the studio's side wall. The Midcentury-Modern sofa was reupholstered in durable fabric. A sun-bleached striped cotton rug covers a floor of fir planks—which also sheath the walls and ceiling—from a mill in Kalispell. Exposed electrical conduits and hanging fixtures express a simple industrial aesthetic.







“WHENEVER I’M AWAY, I DREAM OF COMING BACK HERE.”

Larry Pearson

ABOVE: With its steel support piers visible below the edge of the deck, the main house consists of two interlocking forms: a one-story great room and a two-story bedroom wing. RIGHT: Deep overhangs shelter the great room’s windows and adjacent deck from sun and rain. Corner windows maximize panoramic views from the upstairs and downstairs bedrooms. Weathered fir siding harmonizes with the surroundings. FACING PAGE: Although the structure is fully insulated within its exterior walls, open interior framing enhances the casual rustic aesthetic.







FACING PAGE: Sections of a cottonwood trunk support the custom dining table's white-oak top. The kitchen includes compact Bosch appliances, rift-sawn white-oak cabinets and Carrara marble counters. BELOW, LEFT: Carrara marble covers three walls of the master bathroom. A tempered-glass panel separates the vanity from the walk-in shower. BELOW, RIGHT: In the bedrooms, broad double-paned windows present a west-facing lake view. BOTTOM: The staircase leading to the master bedroom has driftwood newel posts.



Get the Lake House Look

Architect/homeowner Larry Pearson shares the guidelines he employed—in collaboration with Pearson Design Group's lead interior designer Rain Houser and her colleague Leisa Kolstad—to give his new Flathead Lake home a distinctly waterside vibe:

KEEP IT SIMPLE Choose furnishings that don't distract from the views. "I didn't want anything to feel curated or to call attention to itself," Pearson says.

MAKE IT ECLECTIC Traditional getaway homes are often furnished with odds and ends assembled over time, moved from primary homes, or bought at nearby yard sales and antique or second-hand shops. "It should look like it came together in bits and pieces," Pearson explains.

ADD FOUND OBJECTS When possible and practical, scour the home's natural surroundings for items that can add a local, organic touch. In this house, for example, the staircase balusters were made from driftwood found along the shore, and the seats around the fire pit outside the studio are squared-off sections of log.

TAKE THE PLUNGE One obvious way to reinforce the water theme is to include subtle touches of blue among the furnishings. Here, the hue meanders through the veining of marble surfaces in the kitchen and baths, bedroom drapes, and the striped cotton rugs in the living area and studio.

RIGHT: Leading from the main parking area, an 85-foot-long boardwalk winds through the wetlands, curving left toward the main house. BELOW AND FACING PAGE: A screened porch adjacent to the great room was constructed with walls of weathered fir and pine, a more refined-looking white-washed fir ceiling, and a darker stained fir plank floor. A built-in banquette provides casual seating and sleeping space for overnight guests. The hanging wood-burning fireplace, by Orb, swivels 360 degrees.



“TO ME, LAKEFRONT LIVING SHOULDN'T BE STIFF
AND STRUCTURED. IT HAS TO BE LIGHT AND EASY.”

Larry Pearson

