

A steel-and-glass bridge links separate wings and spans a ravine, preserving an age-old stream. **BELOW:** Limestone used in the buildings was reclaimed locally.

LAKE EFFECT

A serene vacation house near Birmingham, Alabama, marries contemporary and traditional elements in a sophisticated and seamless expression of place.

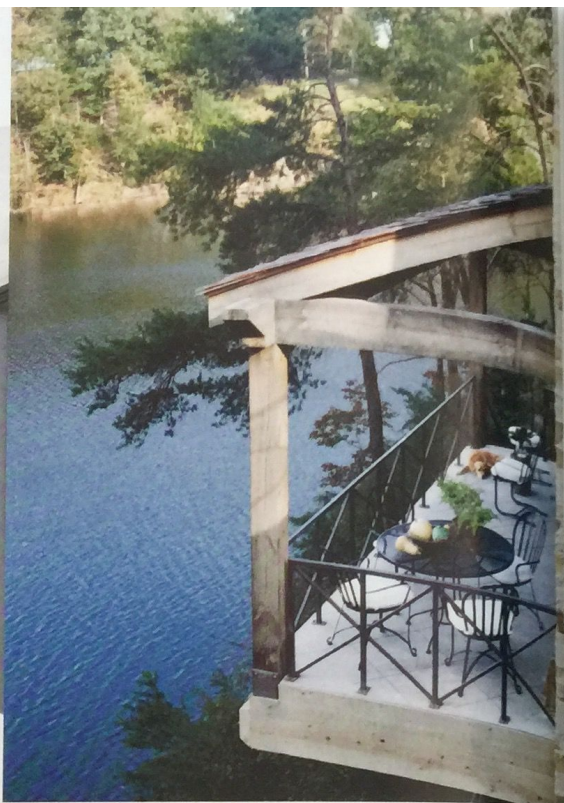


Rising from a pristine bluff above Lewis Smith Lake in Alabama, the vacation home that architects Ben Shepard and Darla Davis designed for a Birmingham-based couple is difficult to typecast. Composed of two rough-hewn towers built from reclaimed limestone, the residence looks as if it could have stood there for centuries—except for the sleek steel-and-glass pavilion that bridges the buildings.

Part living room, part viewing platform, the airy space connects the two wings of the house and spans a ravine, ingeniously preserving a stream on the property. “So often in architecture, a challenge causes you to think more gracefully and respectfully,” says Shepard.

In this case, the bridge capitalizes on a unique vantage. Fifteen-foot-wide sliding windows offer views of the creek as it cascades down the mountain on one side and panoramic vistas of the lake on the other. With the glass flung open to the spring breeze, the tonic sound of running water is omnipresent.

The modern structure feels surprisingly of a piece with the stone and mortar that surrounds it. “It has to do with volume and proportion,” explains Shepard. “Though made of steel, it has a certain lightness to it, while the house itself feels natural and organic.” Materials were carefully chosen to blend in with the surrounding landscape. “We didn’t want the house to stand out and feel like a beacon.” The stone matches the hue



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: Sofa, chaise, and armchairs, Verellen; antique workbench; curtains in a Great Outdoors by Holly Hunt fabric; ceilings in Classic Gray, Pratt & Lambert. A balcony faces the lake. The upper level of the bridge also functions as a terrace.



of the ravine itself; the shingles for the roof are made from local pine.

Indoors, the approach was similarly elemental. “There’s not a lot of flourish,” says Shepard. “We let the materials speak for themselves. The moldings are simple and straightforward. Beams were also salvaged and left rough-sawn.” The layout is basic, with an emphasis on common areas on the lower floors. “The bedrooms are intentionally modest. The shared spaces are meant for everyone to hang out in, but they’re not so grand that an intimate gathering would be swallowed up by them,” Shepard says.

It makes an ideal backdrop for serene interiors by designer Andrew Brown, who worked the same contemporary-and-traditional aesthetic. “I wanted a mix of pieces to reflect the marriage of old stone and modern steel,” says Brown, who had access to a trove of antiques the husband inherited from his mother. In the pavilion, that mix includes a hoofed Maison Jansen cocktail table, a glazed and weathered stoneware vessel from China, and a workbench ravaged by age. Sofas are covered in plain linen slipcovers, and diaphanous curtains hang at the windows. The predominant shades are buff, beige, and ivory. “I took my paint chart and held it up to the stone to match colors,” says Brown. “We wanted the house to feel inevitable. Everything flows and works together.” □

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