

# Maine Home

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**MODERN WARMTH**

A BELFAST HOME BLENDS SEAMLESSLY WITH THE LANDSCAPE

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TWO TO TANGO

A MICHIGAN COUPLE RETIRING IN BELFAST BUILDS A HOME THAT'S BOTH CONTEMPORARY AND RUSTIC



BY **J. MICHAEL WELTON** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **TRENT BELL**



Architect Matthew O'Malia designed a 2,100-square-foot home (previous spread) on 11 acres for his parents, blending contemporary and rustic elements in a rural environment.

The O'Malias' home (above) gives a nod to rural living but also offers something clean, contemporary, and nontraditional.



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**Sometimes the most innovative design ideas are the products of conflicting perspectives.**

That's the case in a new 2,100-square-foot home on ten acres in the countryside in Belfast. In 2016 architect Matt O'Malia worked with a pair of Michigan retirees to create their new living space: a series of connected pavilions for aging in place.

Each retiree had a different design aesthetic: one liked a rustic approach, while the other wanted a clean, contemporary look. How to merge the two effectively became a subtheme for their home's design. It might have been a problem for others, but here it generated a pleasing set of solutions. Further advancing the outcome of this story is that Matt is the couple's son. "We have a good relationship, and I thought it would be fun to do," he says.

John O'Malia is 80, and Bev O'Malia is 75. They had lived in rural homes in Michigan most of their lives and were ready to downsize. "We got to thinking that the house in Michigan was too big to handle for the next two decades," Bev says. "We wanted to park near one of our children so we won't have a ten-hour trip if something happens."

Besides, they'd always wanted a home designed by their son. Matt is principal and cofounder of GO Logic, a Belfast architecture and design-build firm. He established it in 2008 after graduating from Miami University in Ohio and the Stadelschule in Frankfurt and then working in New York and Germany.



The kitchen (above) is white to keep it simple, open, and bright.

Flooring (opposite) is from a local company specializing in engineered floors and is made from a prestained lighter wood.



Among the 13 architects on GO Logic's staff is Gunther Kragler, project manager for the home. "You'd think it would be difficult to execute a project not only for your boss but also for your boss's parents, but I knew them," he says. "Matt's father comes from a civil engineering background, so he gets the process. When he's in the office, he's asking questions, and it was fun working and seeing how he embraced the design."

In fact, John and Bev jumped at the proposed contemporary design for their rural site, rejecting traditional gable roofs in favor of the hipper shed style the architects offered. But, while Bev loved its simplicity, John still wanted a rustic touch or two. "We gave it wood for warmth," Kragler says.

The couple was looking for a three-bedroom, two-bath home with open spaces, one-floor living, and a strong connection to the outdoors. Knowing GO Logic's penchant for passive design, they also wanted a high-performance house, well insulated and positioned to take advantage of solar gain in the winter. And it had to be no-nonsense. "They wanted to be comfortable as they got older, for it to be functional and to serve them for many years," Matt says.

They first requested a barn. Matt's three children are equestrians, so part of the grandparents' program became a home for the horses the children ride. Clad in rustic hemlock, the barn was the earliest building on-site, though the rest of the contemporary home wasn't far behind. "It's a strong visual that signifies the site







Guests drive up to the patio out front, while the homeowners come in from the backside, where there is a garage and courtyard. Each is a different experience that connects house to landscape.



is all about the animals—from the barn, you can see the house hidden behind a stand of trees,” Matt says. “That reverses how barns usually are. Usually you see the house first and then the barn, but here it’s a little bit of a surprise.”

The architects’ solution was not to drop a Cape Cod or a ranch into the meadow setting but to create an expression of the program, site, and views, allowing all to come together and form the home’s layout. “There’s a nod to rural living, but at the same time there’s something contemporary and clean and not traditional,” Matt says. “It’s a life-on-the-landscape kind of thing—a form that evolved into simple boxes that fit into the land. The house is floating in a pastoral landscape.”

Recognizing the need for a private entry and a more public one for guests, the architects broke

down the home’s three volumes into living area, owners’ suite, and garage. The main driveway delivers visitors to a barn courtyard that’s the southern, formal entry on the front lawn. A more casual entry for the couple is from the garage side on the north.

Between the garage and the owners’ suite sits the courtyard, because views were a top priority. “There’s privacy in the courtyard; you can look out to the woods to the north,” Bev says. “The bedroom looks out to the east.”

There’s an 800-square-foot space for living, dining, and cooking in the galley kitchen. Walls are mostly white drywall for Bev’s clean, contemporary look. But there are dramatic touches of light wood paneling for an updated take on the rustic aesthetic that John sought, too. “The white keeps



An elegant mudroom (opposite) looks out to a hemlock-clad barn. Windows provide solar gain during the day in winter, while a woodstove (above) takes over at night to provide ambience and heat.

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it simple so other elements pop out, like the reclaimed wood on the surface running along the back of the main volume,” Kragler says. “We did accents for warmth, with reclaimed local timber from old barn wood for siding, casework, seating, and storage.”

Flooring is from a local company specializing in hardwood-engineered floors that are thick, resilient, and prestained. And windows are expansive. “It’s about keeping the space open with a light feel,” Kragler explains. “There are a lot of commercial windows with cantilevered systems on the front of the house, and no structural posts at the corners, but that was solvable and engineerable—you have to think through some extra steps to hit the alignment of finishes where things come together.”

The home’s walls are 12 to 14 inches thick to hold heat in the winter, and the house is sited for windows on its southern exposure. “It was an opportunity to think about the synergies and make the most of them,” Matt says. “A high-performance building loses little energy.”

There’s not much solar gain in the bedroom that faces east, so like the other living spaces it’s equipped with electric baseboard heat. A woodstove in the living room provides both heat and ambiance. In winter, the south-facing windows warm the room during daylight, while the woodstove takes over at night. “My dad lights

Reclaimed oak from old barn wood yields a rustic look for siding, casework, seating, and storage, which contrasts with blackened steel bookshelves.









the fire in the morning, and when the sun comes out he lets it die out," Matt says. "When the sun sets, he lights it again." There's no air-conditioning in the summer. Instead, ventilation is managed by manipulating windows and clerestories. That pays off in spades in terms of electricity usage. "The bill is in the \$60 to \$70 range per month," Bev says. "The highest in the winter is \$150."

The home's exterior is clad in eastern white cedar siding, each board measuring six-and-a-quarter inches wide, already weathering gray. "The trim is minimal," Matt says. "There are no extra layered details. It's a tight and crisp envelope."

Where the home's concrete foundation slopes up to four feet on the eastern edge, Matt's father requested an exposed, rubble-stone veneer. Told that there wasn't money in the budget for that, he began collecting stones on-site, bought a cement mixer, and added the veneer himself. "He did it in three months," Matt says. "I thought it would take years." The overall effect is the juxtaposition of a clean, boardlike box resting atop a stone foundation. It's a pleasing solution where contemporary meets rustic—and a meaningful reflection of its owners' tastes. **MH+D**

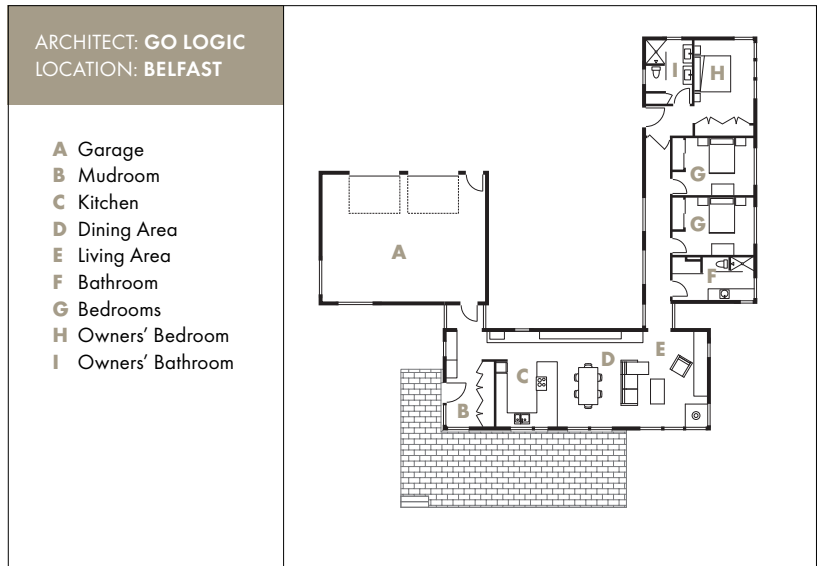


ILLUSTRATION: Tim Lohnes

The owners' bedroom (above) opens onto a private view of the courtyard.

The kitchen (opposite) is sheathed in white drywall and white cabinetry and is full of white and gray marble countertops. One wall is clad in gray reclaimed oak that picks up the gray in the marble.