

# *biblioteca. magnifica*



THE GLASS-FRONT balcony overlooking the Two Ponds library gives it an operatic feel, a theatricality magnified by the Tuscan festival lights and reproduction Renaissance marble fireplace.



**THE NEED FOR A LIBRARY INSPIRES A CONTEMPORARY  
COSMOPOLITAN CLASSIC ON THE MAINE COAST**

WRITTEN BY EDGAR ALLEN BEEM • PHOTOGRAPHED BY ROB KAROSIS







**COPPER AND CLAPBOARDS** collaborate to clad the complex Cubist building (LEFT) that sits in a landscape of birch trees and wild blueberry bushes. Fluted spiral columns (ABOVE) form an almost temple-like entry in the library. The central table is fashioned from a Parisian wrought-iron gate.





**TWO PONDS SITS HIGH IN THE COASTAL MAINE HILLS COMMANDING** panoramic views of lakes, mountains, and sea. On a remote hilltop far removed from architectural context, the year-round estate is free from the dictates of the 19th-century vernacular that defines so much of architecture along the New England coast. Here, the main house, a late 20th-century contemporary, and its companion building, a new freestanding library/guesthouse, almost form their own little village.

"It's an Italian hill town with good Scandinavian bones," says architect Sam Van Dam of Van Dam Architecture and Design in Portland, Maine, and Thetford, Vermont, who designed the new building, which also houses an office, garage, gardener's workroom, and an outdoor terrace that acts as a piazza for this little collective. Van Dam's is an eclectic Cubist construct of granite, copper, clapboard, and natural wood with a Mediterranean Maine ambience. It speaks across a 75-foot granite courtyard to the house designed by Camden, Maine, architect Christopher Glass. Built in 1992, the house features 10 rooms,

all on one level. The exterior was slightly remodeled so that the doors, entryway, and clapboard cladding mirror those of the newer building.

Two Ponds is the year-round home of Ken Shure and Liv Rockefeller, publishers of Two Ponds Press, a fine art press that follows in the footsteps of artist Leonard Baskin's Gehenna Press. Ken represented The Gehenna Press while Baskin (1922–2000) was alive and continues to do so today. The Gehenna Press, which published more than 100 books in its 60-year history, is generally regarded as one of the most successful private presses of all time.

"Baskin is the genesis of all of this," says Ken of the library complex and its contents.

"Leonard and Lisa Baskin's library was an inspiration," adds Liv.

Faced with a growing collection of rare and fine press books crammed into a back bedroom and stored in an off-site office, the bookish couple decided it was time to build the library that is the intelligent heart of the Two Ponds operation. Their book collection is as eclectic







EXPANSIVE WINDOWS GIVE the guest bedroom (FACING PAGE) a view of the two ponds and the woods. The kitchen of the guest quarters (RIGHT TOP) is finished in the same dark stain as the library, which can be sealed off when necessary. Edgar M. Ward's 1877 painting *Italian Women at the Well* (RIGHT BOTTOM) is one of the many accents adding to the European flavor of the interior spaces.

tic and idiosyncratic as their home, ranging from Gehenna Press books and books on fine printing and presses to books on surfing, 1960s radicalism, and books by children's author Margaret Wise Brown (to whom Liv's father was once engaged) and Norwegian adventurer Thor Heyerdahl (to whom Liv's mother was once married).

Maple shelves and flat file drawers stained a matte black give the library a sense of serious intimacy that is wonderfully leavened by a pair of gaudy Tuscan festival light chandeliers overhead, spiral fluted Anglo-Indian pillars at the entry, a 19th-century reproduction of a marble Renaissance fireplace, and a glass-topped table made from an 18th-century French iron gate.

"The structure itself is very modern and the interior retains a modern feel, but it also reflects their lifestyle," says interior designer Deborah Chatfield of Chatfield Design in Rockport, Maine, who found the chandeliers and Parisian gate. "The impact for everyone that visits it is that this space is exactly who Liv and Ken are. It has the wow factor, but it is very representative of who they are and what they do."

"Display in the library had to accommodate all of Ken and Liv's books, folios, sculpture, hidden large-screen TV, LP record collection, and turntable," says Van Dam, "and they acquired the fireplace and two columns, which they purchased well into the process. Unifying this eclectic assembly while keeping it open for possible new collections was probably the most difficult part of the design. I went to Baskin's studio to see how he displayed prints, medals, and sculpture."

Baskin taught printmaking and sculpture at Smith College and Hampshire College for many years, and his home studio and library on a farm outside Northampton, Massachusetts, became a mecca for his friends and colleagues.

The Two Ponds library, which can be sealed off from the guest apartment, office, and workrooms, features a climate control system and has remote-controlled shades for the clerestory windows set high above in the vaulted center of the ceiling.

"Fine printing is the tradition we work in, love, and collect," says Liv. "That makes the library not just a design statement. It's what we do. It's what we love."

Two Ponds Press has published four handsome handmade volumes

#### DESIGN DECISION *The Perfect Finish*

The case work in the Two Ponds library was built by Ezra Howell of Ezra Howell Furniture Maker, a fifth-generation cabinetmaker from Camden, Maine. Working with Cold Mountain Builders of Belfast, Maine, the project's contractor, Howell needed to determine how to finish the bookshelves so that valuable volumes would not stick to the surface and color would not rub off on the books.

The original thought had been to paint the shelves, but Howell suggested a more subtle finish. "The wood is all hard white maple, but the boards are painted with a blend of black and yellow aniline dyes that has been diluted so you can still see the grain," says Howell. "The clear coat on top of the dye is a high-performance conversion varnish that is sprayed on and dries to a dull sheen. The sheen of the product, which is next to nothing, is very unusual."

The matte finish is dark and formal while allowing the wood grain to show, creating an elegant yet intimate impression.







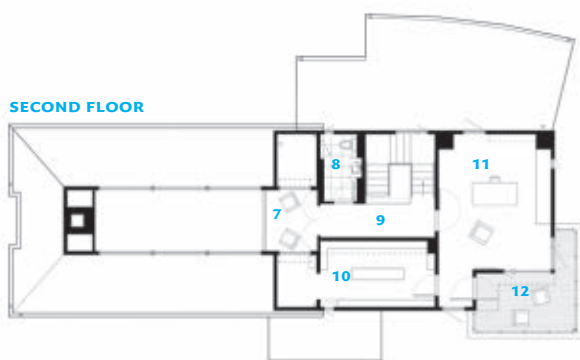
**MASSIVE GRANITE BLOCKS** anchor the building to its hilltop perch. The terrace (BELOW) features a wood-fired oven and a table made from a single piece of West African iroko wood.







A GRAVEL PATH meets stone steps (ABOVE) that lead to the loggia, where the roof extends to protect the entrance (RIGHT) to the building. To the right of the front door more copper detailing adds interest.



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|--------------------------|------------------|
| 1 LOGGIA/OUTDOOR KITCHEN | 7 BALCONY        |
| 2 ENTRY HALL             | 8 POWDER ROOM    |
| 3 LIBRARY                | 9 HALLWAY        |
| 4 KITCHEN                | 10 PAPER STORAGE |
| 5 BATH                   | 11 OFFICE        |
| 6 GUEST ROOM             | 12 DECK          |

for the collector and library market, a book of poems by Anthony Hecht, a story by Margaret Wise Brown, a book of woodcuts by Stephen Hannock, a former Baskin student, and a book on Jewish gangsters.

To accommodate Liv's love of cooking and company, the library building is equipped with an outdoor dining terrace complete with a Le Panyol wood-fired oven, a propane burner, and a gas grill. Guests are seated at a grand 12-foot-long picnic table fashioned from a single piece of wood. The terrace, which is sheltered from sun and rain by a rustic wooden roof, is constructed of the same great granite blocks, some the size of a small automobile, that anchor the Two Ponds library to the hilltop.

The two ponds below the house, from which both house and press get their names, are deep-dug farm ponds stocked with trout. They sit in a manicured natural landscape of native blueberry, moss, oak, and birch augmented by perennial plantings and the strategic placement of willow, dawn redwood, and copper beech trees. In the nine years landscape gardeners Beth and Bill Long of Long's Landscape in Owls Head, Maine, have been at work on the Two Ponds grounds, they have orchestrated the placement of virtually every stone, bush, boulder, and tree.

"The landscape design approach has been very organic for years," says Liv. "Bill and Beth just manage to make everything look as though it always belonged there."

Two Ponds rises above its gardens and grounds like a fortress stronghold at once ancient and novel. It is two buildings, but it possesses many faces — Italian hill town, Norwegian tower, Modernist manor, Maine mountain retreat.

"If the project is a lot of different spaces serving different needs," says Van Dam, "don't be afraid to express it. I wasn't afraid to make it look different from different sides."

This ambitious Maine aerie is not just different, it is one of a kind. ■