

great houses

the gift

a 1,600-square-foot family retreat introduced duo dickinson to the alchemy of architecture.



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What makes us want to be architects? When I was 16, I thought I would be an English professor or a historian. My best friend in high school had a retreat in upstate New York and I found myself invited to plant a vegetable garden with her in 1972. I stayed in her family's 1,600-square-foot house, which was designed by Arthur A. Carrara, a disciple of Frank Lloyd Wright. Built in the early 1960s as part of a large family compound overlooking a lake, the house projected a crisp, clean identity amid the pines. More than an architectural statement, it provided a physical harbor for a truly loving family, one that embraced me with the sort of unconditional positive regard usually reserved for people who share the same chromosomal imprint.

That house and its magnificent screen porch showed me

how buildings can be manipulated in ways I had never thought possible. Seeing the simple expression of wood, stone, and glass in so many dynamic and subtle ways displayed the mind's ability to actually control a small physical part of the universe.

To a 16-year-old, that was a magical revelation. In the nearly 30 years since I first encountered this house, countless birthday parties, planting-weekend celebrations, and holiday feasts have instilled it at the core of my memory.

Houses are indeed buildings, but when they embody the spiritual essence of a family, they are a gift from God. This house is such a gift. ra

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