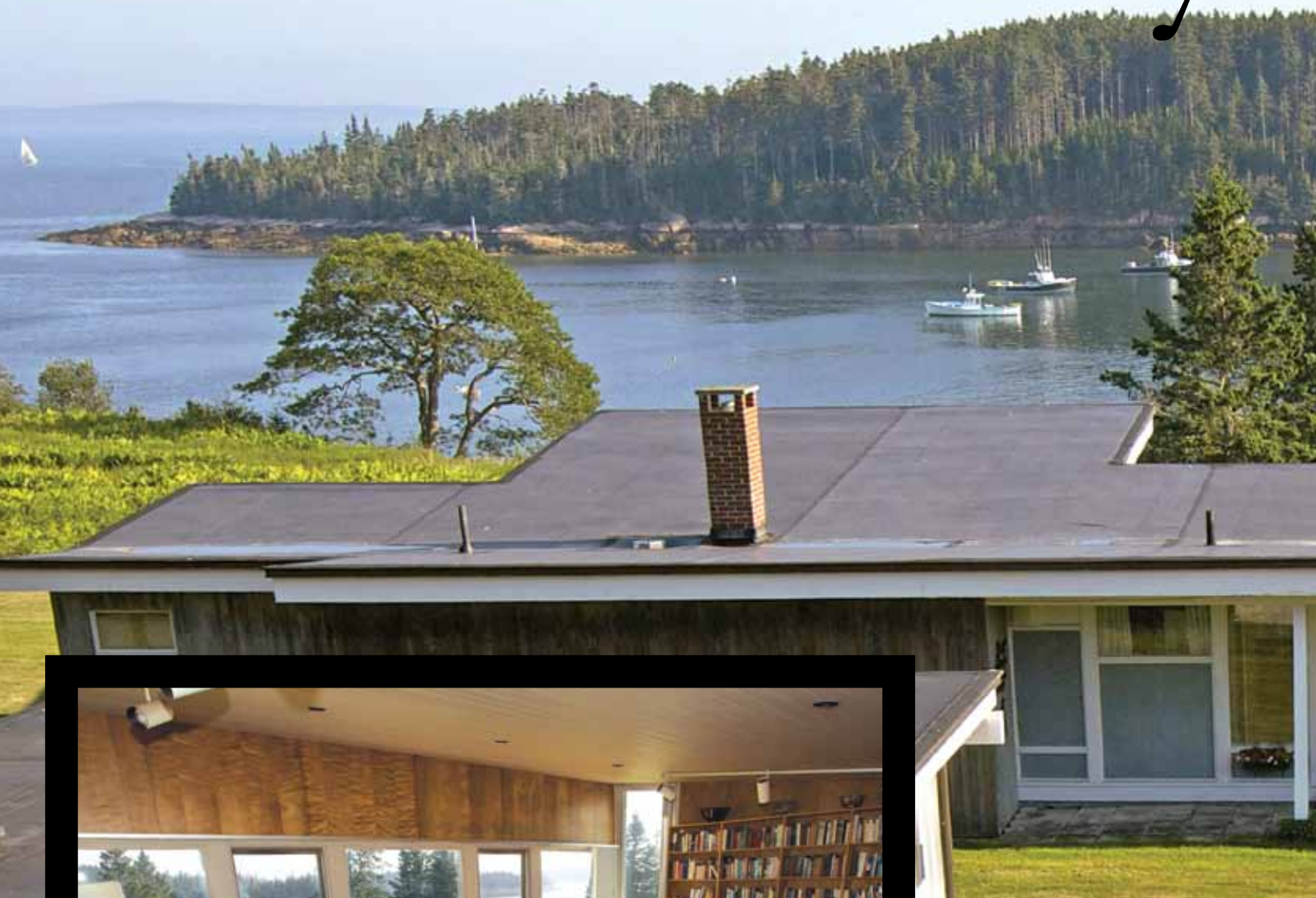


Mid-Century



In 1947, world-famous architect Walter Gropius and his subsidiary group, The Architect's Collective (TAC), were commissioned to build a simple summer house for his friends Arnold Wolfers, a noted political scientist, and his wife, Doris, whose father was president of the Swiss Parliament. A decade younger than Gropius, Wolfers had come to

Marvel

When you're not collaborating on the Met Life Building in Manhattan, what do you dream up in Maine?

BY BRAD EMERSON



America in 1933 as the first master of Pierson College at Yale and would later become director of the Center for International Relations in Washington.

The Wolfers' site was a wild bluff on the end of Naskeag Point in Brooklin, with broad views of Blue Hill Bay and Eggemoggin Reach. Cosmopolitan and artistic, they did not want the usual shingled bungalow but something new that would take advan-



Clockwise, from top left: Naskeag Harbor off Naskeag Point in Brooklin; Bauhaus architect Walter Gropius (1883-1969) in a pensive moment; spruce up your Maine summer camp with innovative Bauhaus furnishings that are still in production, including the Gropius Office Chair F51, available online from bauhaustoyourhouse.com for \$2,813, and the Rosenthal TAC Teapot from thefind.com for \$335; the unusual and handsome mahogany-sheathed newspaper shelf, however, is out of retail reach—you can find it at the Bauhaus-Archive Museum of Design in Berlin; the Brooklin kitchen reflects the designer's same sleek, clean style; Naskeag skyline—the home's unusual gull-wing roof feature.



BAUHAUS LEGEND



Walter Gropius couldn't draw. But he stunned the design world by transforming the **Grand Ducal Saxon School of Arts & Crafts** into the **Bauhaus School**. As a Harvard School of Architecture professor, Gropius and Bauhaus protégé Marcel Breuer envisioned **The Architects' Collaborative**. Launched in 1945, TAC was further energized by seven younger architects and former students, redefining creative collaboration. Under Gropius's direction, TAC explored the **social responsibilities of architecture**. Each project had a

partner-in-charge, but all partners met on Thursdays to **brainstorm**.

Although modern architecture was all but unheard of in Maine in the first half of the 20th century, **Gropius's vision is expressed in other projects beyond the Wolfers house in Brooklin**. For example, in 1947, Lynn Thompson, mother of TAC partner Ben Thomp-



son, had TAC **remodel her 1928 French provincial cottage on the East Blue Hill shore**, to the **dismay of the summer colony**. Then there's the **X factor**. Where does influence begin and end? Of the **1952 Payson House** at Thornhurst in Falmouth, designed by another



Gropius protégé, Serge Chermayeff, Earle Shettleworth writes, "I suspect that Gropius and TAC may have provided some technical backup, but the design was by Chermayeff."



tage of the views, be expansive for summer activities yet cozy for winter visits, and be easily run.

As originally built, the house comprised a self-contained main block with large living room, kitchen, laundry, service hall, and bath, and ample and logically placed storage. A breezeway connected the house to a wing of three bedrooms along a long corridor. Additionally, there was a carport with storage. The living room was, and is, a beautiful space. At each end, the walls are of veneered plywood with one window in each wall. The low rear wall is sheathed with vertical clapboard, an old vernacular material used in a new and decorative way. Along this wall are concealed closets for coats and storage. The sheathing continues up the ceiling, meeting the sky atop the wall of glass facing Blue Hill Bay. In the bedroom wing, the corridor was designed with alternating high and low windows for views and privacy.

Of his own house in Lincoln, Massachusetts, Gropius wrote, "I made it a point to absorb into my own conception those features of the New England architectural tradition that I found still alive and adequate," and so it was with the design for the Wolfers house—although many of the local



Clockwise from top: Gropius House (1937) in Lincoln, Massachusetts, was the architect's own residence; the Pan Am Building (1953-1968, with Pietro Belluschi and project architects Emery Roth & Sons), now the MetLife Building, is a Manhattan landmark; the Brooklin house nestles in the trees on Naskeag Point.



carpenters disagreed at the time. When first shown the design for the gull-wing roof and wide overhangs, so unlike anything built before in that part of Maine, the contractor told Mrs. Wolfers she might want to reconsider, as "the damn thing will either leak or it'll blow off in the first nor'easter." But Gropius knew what he was doing, and so did the builder. Sixty-five years later, the roof is still in place, dry and tight, shedding snow and rain in winter and providing shade from the sun in summer.

In 1958, the Wolfers retired to Maine year round and made a few modifications and an addition. Windows in the end walls were modified. The breezeway was glassed in to make an entrance foyer, the original natural vertical siding left intact. The former master bedroom was converted to a study, in turn opening to a new wing containing a large library with fireplace and new master bedroom and bath, duplicating the original design and materials. To the original mid-century furnishings, which included examples by Alvar Aalto and Marcel Breuer, were added 18th-century French furniture, painted Swiss armoires, and 16th-century Persian ceramics, all at home against the modernist backdrop. A notable hostess, Doris Wolfers entertained often, 18th-century candelabra on her Matthiessen table illuminating discussions that twinkled deep into the night. Writer Farnham Blair remembers her as "an equal-opportunity hostess," reveling in mixing conservatives and liberals, politicians and artists.

After Doris Wolfers's death in 1987, the house was purchased by an investment banker and his wife, who, after a lifetime in more traditional houses, fell in love with the elegant modernist spaces and ventured few changes beyond repainting and a sympathetic upgrade of the kitchen.

On the market for only the second time in 65 years, the house remains, in the opinion of state historian Earle Shettleworth, "The purest surviving example of Gropius and TAC's design philosophy in Maine." With 438 feet of shorefront and 3-car garage and workroom in addition to the main house, the landmark is listed by Downeast Properties for \$2.2 million. ■

» For more, visit portlandmonthly.com/portmag/2013/02/gropius. Brad Emerson is at work on a book about summer houses of the down east coast, to be published by Acanthus Press in 2014.




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