



Interior Design: Dan Rak, Dan Rak Design Home Builder: Patrick Murphy, Patrick Murphy Builders, LLC

# Lakeside Revival

Inspired by the wooded setting, a designer transforms a 1960s cottage into his ideal weekend retreat.

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Clearing tired, old lakefront cottages to make way for grand summer houses is a trend along this stretch of Lake Michigan's eastern shore—about two hours from Chicago by car and a short drive from the

Ox-Bow School of Art & Artists' Residency that began drawing creatives to the area in the early 1900s. One might have expected interior designer Dan Rak and his partner, Bob Garechana, to have followed suit after purchasing a 1968 cottage whose midcentury modern aesthetic had been diminished by harsh weather, encroaching weeds and a 1980s renovation with a traditional touch.

But while exploring the home's dim, mazelike interior, the couple discovered an irresistible charm. "It had this creaky, weird, what's-around-that-corner magic that you can't create," Rak says. Determined to preserve that quiriness, they embarked upon a renovation that would celebrate the wooded lakeside setting while accommodating their lifestyle, which Rak describes as a "revolving door of friends and family coming through all summer long."

In collaboration with general contractor Patrick Murphy, the designer reconfigured some rooms while keeping the inverted floor plan that gives the top-floor living and dining spaces, kitchen and primary suite the best water views. The lower level, once a garage, became a lounge, gym, laundry room, office and guest bedrooms. Small windows sparingly placed throughout the house were replaced with more generous expanses of glass, and the worn exterior was refreshed with tongue-and-groove cedar siding painted a deep, woody green-brown hue.

In a nostalgic move—and to the surprise of his designer friends—Rak preserved the brick fireplace that gives the living room a 1980s timestamp. "I had the same brass fireplace doors in the house I grew up in; they're creaky and hard to open, and I love them," he says. "Besides, I didn't want to strip this house of everything that had happened to it over the past 50 years." In places where old finishes had to go, Rak employed what he calls "head-scratcher" design elements—including tongue-and-groove paneling, narrow-plank red oak flooring, and handmade tile in sea

green—"that make people wonder, 'This isn't original—or is it?'" he explains.

Rak initially envisioned filling the abode with clean-lined furnishings inspired by the modern architecture, but his discovery of an armchair with subtly carved arms and cane sides shifted his trajectory toward pieces that nod to the forested setting with warm, organic finishes and textural fabrics. Two of those inspirational armchairs, upholstered in prima alpaca plaid, now face the living room fireplace. In the dining room, seats with woven rope backs surround a reclaimed wood table. And on the second-floor porch that spans the front of the dwelling, rattan furniture adds an Adirondack-camp vibe.

The furnishings' natural palette contrasts against wallcoverings that bring color and whimsy: romantic crimson florals in a passageway Rak calls "the *Beauty and the Beast* hallway," a green plaid in the entryway, and an abstract treescape in the kitchen that complements the room's new white oak cabinetry. "I had seen that pattern in Paris before we bought the house and had been carrying it around in my bag," Rak says of the latter. "It was the first material I selected, and its soft greens and muted blues set the tone for the whole place."

A swan motif on the lounge walls memorializes the pair of waterfowl that once swam on the property's long-since overgrown pond. The couple had initially planned to restore the water feature—and to call their new residence "Little Pond Cottage"—"but no one would even give us a price for the restoration, so we decided it was going to become 'Lost Pond Cottage' instead," Rak laughs. In its place, landscape designer Scott Golin created a wide lawn that extends down to the road separating the dwelling from the lake. "The changes to the house made it stand out as so clean and simple, and I wanted to do the same with the landscaping," Golin explains. "Long, sweeping bed lines and mass plant groupings accomplished this by preventing any area from appearing too busy."

Across the road, 100 stairs lead down to 150 feet of private lake frontage and a deck furnished with a row of umbrella-shaded lounge chairs. "It's a commitment when you go down there," Rak says—but trifles compared to giving an old property an entirely new look and life. ■



Tongue-and-groove paneling emphasizes the quirky winding staircase of a Michigan lake house. "We tried to add subtle details that brought in that cottage-y, woody feel," says designer Dan Rak. Above the vintage stool hangs a Visual Comfort & Co. lantern.

Natural materials star in the family room: rattan on a Universal Furniture armchair, woven fabric on the Sherrill Furniture sectional and oak on a Dovetail coffee table. The adjacent lounge features Osborne & Little's Swan Lake wallcovering.





**Left:** In the kitchen's bar area, white oak cabinetry complements the Iceberg Quartzite Extra countertop from Terrazzo & Marble Supply Companies. A lower cabinet holds a Monogram wine refrigerator.

**Opposite:** The primary bedroom's Bernhardt sofa and Crate & Barrel armchair—above which hangs a Zoe Bios Creative diptych—provide perches for taking in lake views. A Crate & Barrel coffee table centers the seating arrangement.





**Above:** Riad Tile's sea-green zellige tiles on the shower wall inject a sense of verdancy into the primary bath. Draperies in Rose Tarlow Melrose House's Little Bird frame a Victoria + Albert freestanding pedestal tub.

**Opposite:** A Four Hands bed features cane accents that bring warmth to a guest bedroom. The nightstand, also by Four Hands, is topped with a Renwil lamp. The Loloi Rugs accent pillow and rug add soft color.



With its row of woven chaises by Four Hands and pair of Safavieh umbrellas, the private lakeside deck is ready for sunbathing. Along the railing, Rak placed a faceted concrete table and weathered-teak chairs, all by Four Hands.

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—DAN RAK