



into the woods

A HIGH-FLYING INTERNET EXECUTIVE LOOKS TO THE DELAWARE SHORE FOR A SHADED MODERN RETREAT WHERE HE CAN TOUCH DOWN AND RELAX.

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ARCHITECTURE Tom Kamm and Kelly Saunders, Kamm Architecture

HOME BUILDER Charles and Jeff Garrison, Garrison Homes

BEDROOMS 6 | **BATHROOMS** 5 | **SQUARE FEET** 4,800



Growing up near Detroit, John Burchett dreamed of being an architect and building a house in the woods on a Michigan lake. Instead, he became a public policy expert in Washington, D.C., with a cookie-cutter weekend pad in Delaware. But after purchasing a new wooded lot in Rehoboth Beach, the Google executive returned to his childhood visions, hiring architect Tom Kamm as a collaborator to design a modernist tree house by the shore.

Burchett had gotten to know Kamm, along with Kelly Saunders, Kamm's wife and business partner, through mutual friends, and the three enjoyed philosophical discussions about architecture and design. Burchett appreciated Kamm's minimalist sensibility, honed by his production work for such playwrights as Robert Wilson, Tony Kushner and Charles Mee. Kamm also has a Motor City connection—not only was he born there, but he also designed the dark, moody set for the

Double-height windows frame views of the pine trees from the living room, while a maple-clad media wall holds the television, storage and a pantry. *Left:* The house is covered in classic gray shingles and siding; the semi-enclosed "sky room" deck at the rear overlooks the canal.



A screened porch off the main floor provides passive ventilation and converts to a winter solarium with glass-panel inserts. An outdoor rug from West Elm grounds a Nest sofa and loveseat by Kanna; the reclaimed-teak dining table is by Kingsley-Bate.

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Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company's production of *Detroit* last fall. So when the time came to commission an architect and designer, "It was clear that Tom was going to be the first person I would call," Burchett says. "It was wonderful that Tom and Kelly let this process be totally inclusive. They had the expertise, and I had the concepts and vision."

The resulting three-story house is a modern hybrid of a shingle-style beach cottage and a Michigan North Woods lake house. The boomerang-shaped structure comprises two wings separated by a circulation spine that links the floors. Both halves are transparent on their east and west ends, offering views through the house to the woods and a canal beyond. The north and south elevations offer more selective vistas while providing privacy from neighbors.

The airy house nestles into pine, oak and walnut trees on a property that slopes down to the Lewes and Rehoboth Canal. It's situated so the vegetation cools the structure without blocking the rooftop solar panels—and Kamm preserved as many trees as possible in the process. "The house looks like it's been there for 20 years," he says, "unlike the typical scenario, where you would have to wait that long for plantings to mature before you get that sense of place."

Horizontal bands of windows frame slices of the natural surroundings, from forest floor to leafy canopy. Outside, a rear deck reveals views of the canal, woods and sky. "It's an homage to James Turrell's *Skyspaces*," Kamm explains, referring to the artist's semi-enclosed chambers that frame the sky through an aperture in the roof. Builders Charles and Jeff Garrison playfully dubbed Kamm's deck design "the sky room."



In the upper gallery, Harry Bertoia's wire side chair sits near the elevator, along with an oil on canvas by local artist Gary Fisher. Wide-plank ash flooring complements the maple banisters that cap the stainless-steel cable railings. The shelving is from Crate & Barrel.



Steel beams contrast with warm wood accents throughout the double-height living spaces. In the dining area, two Random Light fixtures by Bertjan Pot for Moooi hang above a table made from reclaimed barn wood. At night, the lights' shadows resemble fluttering leaves.



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Inside, the owner filled the interiors with minimalist lines, but warmed them with materials such as reclaimed wood, a flokati rug and gold accents in the main living area. Burchett spends nearly half of his life on airplanes, so the weekend retreat is his chance to hang out with family and friends. Guests pile onto the huge charcoal sectional by Mitchell Gold + Bob Williams to watch television, which is built into a maple-clad wall that echoes the exterior's gray siding and visually connects the living room to the kitchen.

In his old house, weekends centered on where to eat out. Now, Burchett's guests prefer to stay in. "They never want to leave," he says happily. But he's working on one new amenity that might entice them to venture out—a dock on the canal so the gang can boat to breakfast in town. **L**

Nestled into the trees, this modernist house features large windows in the front and back, while the sides are shielded from neighbors. Stargazing is a favorite activity from the rear-facing second-floor "sky room," which frames views outward in three directions—and the Big Dipper up above.