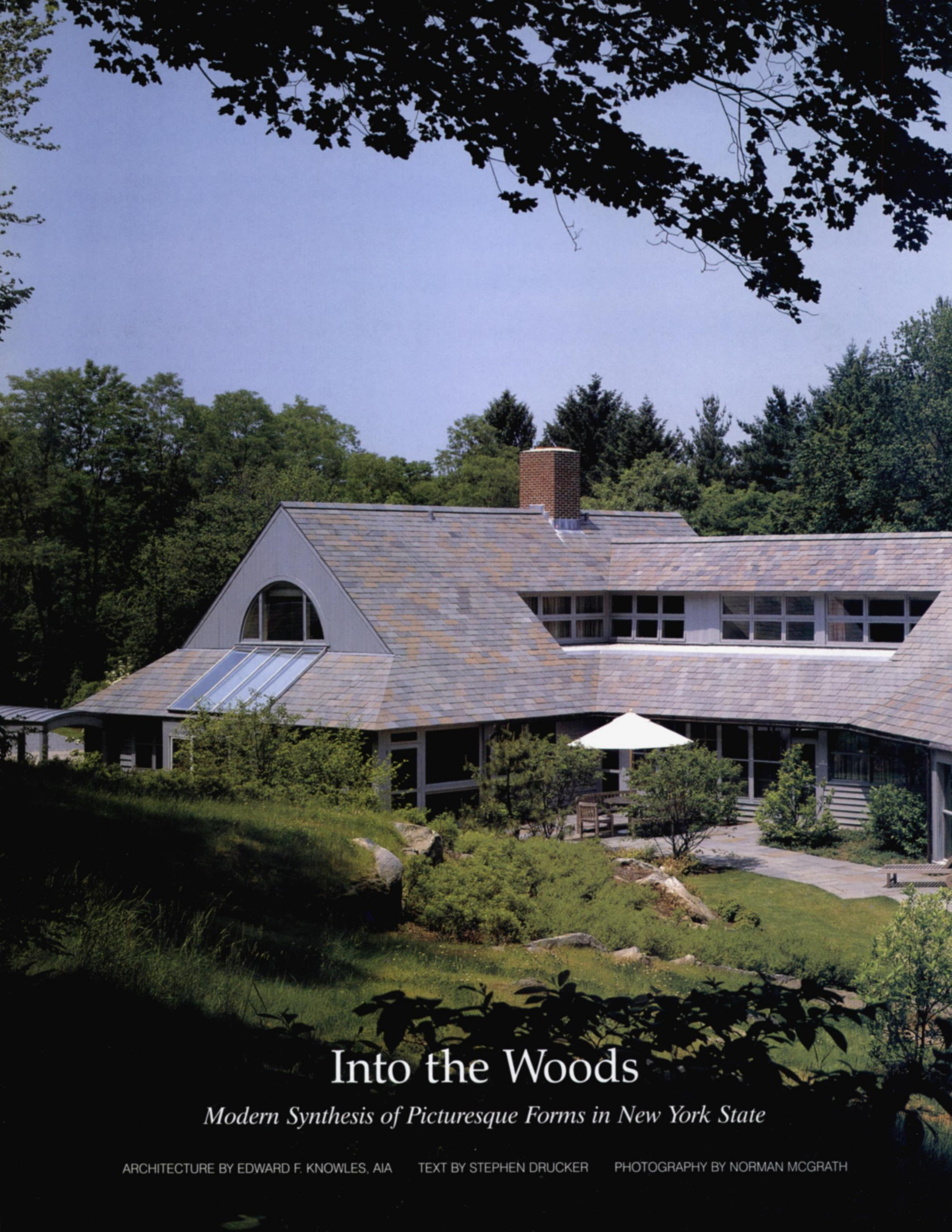


# ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

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# Into the Woods

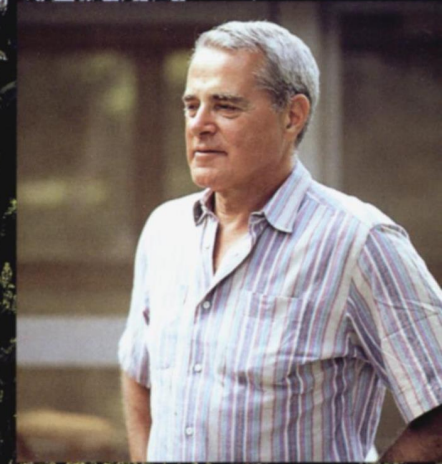
*Modern Synthesis of Picturesque Forms in New York State*

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In upstate New York, architect Edward Knowles has designed "a modern interpretation of an English Arts and Crafts house" on 72 wooded acres. "The angle of the wings of the house creates a 'sun trap,' and overhangs on the living wing, at left and center, keep out the summer sun while letting in the winter sun," he says. Clerestory light floods the interior spaces. The wing with the indoor pool, at right, is set at an angle.



"A rather large expanse of building is broken down in scale through the use of related but different elements," explains Knowles (inset), "such as rounded windows and dormers, varied roof shapes and sliding doors of different sizes."



EDWARD KNOWLES WAS A pink-cheeked young architecture student at Pratt Institute when Philip Johnson came to lecture on modernism. The year was 1950, and Edward Knowles, to his teachers' dismay, was designing Tudor houses.

"Can you believe I had the audacity to ask Philip Johnson to lunch?" says Knowles, recalling the day. They had hot dogs; Knowles does not say who picked up the check.

Then he took Johnson on a tour of the stately homes of Brooklyn: turreted piles of brick and brownstone from what was then regarded as the Dark Ages. "I think these are great," Knowles told Johnson. "They really move me," he added, for emphasis. Johnson did not even put up a fight: "You're right, and they're wrong," he said to Knowles. "Stick with it."

Edward Knowles stuck with it.

Central casting for architects could not improve on him. His thick hair has now grown silvery; he wears a tweed sack sport coat and a silk bow tie that stands at attention.

One of his more recent projects is a house he built north of New York City, in a prerevolutionary area where the roads grow twisty and fragments of ancient stone walls hold back the hillsides, where the gambrel-roof farmhouses cling to the old turnpikes and the shutters are incised with crescent moons. There, Knowles and his associates created an estate for a client on seventy-two acres surrounding an old millpond, where the deer come along not singly but in herds.

The house, built with project architect Michael Blasberg and associate architect Seth Hiller, is a modern synthesis of all the picturesque styles of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It is as romantic as any of the great Shingle Style houses, although there isn't a shingle to be seen. It is as pure as any product of the Arts and Crafts Movement, although it is neither didactic nor ascetic. Like a house by H. H. Richardson, it has an ad hoc quality, in a calculating way. And like a house by C. F. A. Voysey, it has a great sweep of a roof that promises warmth and security. "Not coldly modern, not sentimentally traditional" is how Knowles characterizes the design.

Ask him the usual questions and he mentions that back at Pratt Institute, he hated having to justify his designs to the modernists. Ask him why

A screened gazebo with glass walls, framed in cypress with a slate roof, sits in what was formerly a millpond. "It is accessible via a boardwalk that also serves as a canoe dock," says Knowles, who worked with landscape architect David Engel as well as architects Michael Blasberg and Seth Hiller. Most of the major rooms in the main residence overlook the pond.





and he responds, "Why are you wearing a tie?"

"You can rationalize any shape with any philosophical system," he observes. "The modernists did what they did because they liked it, not because of philosophy."

So suffice it to say that Knowles and his associates did what they felt like doing, and in the process they somehow made thirteen rooms and 6,000 square feet seem intimate. Let's call it the house of three moods.

The first mood was established by the pond. Everyone agreed that the house ought to stretch out along the magnificent view. Unfortunately, the pond lay to the north and the rocky site sloped upward on its south side, blocking the sun.

Architects, like plants, tend to be phototropic; in this case, Blasberg says, "the whole house faces the wrong way." A series of expansive public rooms and bedrooms focus on the view, with huge windows to the north and clerestories to the south to enhance the light. The south side of the house has a series of cozier rooms: a screen porch, a winter garden, a sunroom and what Knowles refers to as "Grandma's kitchen."

The rooms interconnect virtually without corridors. "The house represents a compact approach to planning," says Blasberg. "We started with a distinct perimeter, and instead of sticking things on, we carved things out."

The second mood was introduced with Tidewater cypress from the Carolinas, which was milled into paneling, doors, window frames and other architectural details. Knowles felt that Stick Style was more appropriate for the staircase than the usual turned balusters, and that it should be dramatic even though it only leads to two modest upstairs bedrooms. The windows vary from room to room. There are ribbons of glass in the north-facing rooms and four-over-four windows in those facing south. "Why not?" says the architect. "The scale is more intimate."

The exterior is cypress, too, but the roof was covered with Vermont slate—"to hold the house down." Normally a heavy-looking slate roof is reserved for a masonry house, but, Blasberg explains, "you get sharper corners and a flatter roof with slate."

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"We wanted to create a cheerful, informal country house on a beautiful site and include traditional elements in the design," says Knowles, who brought in Lauder Bowden to do the interiors. RIGHT: In the living room, paneling and cabinets of cypress—the dominant material used throughout—surround the fireplace, while wide-plank oak floors have been stained a pale gray brown. Porcelain birds by Dorothy Doughty line the shelves, complementing two George Wright coaching scenes. Chair fabric from Clarence House. Cowtan & Tout sofa fabric.

BELOW: A fanciful window in an upstairs bedroom "enhances the sense of playfulness," says Knowles. OPPOSITE: The wing containing the swimming pool looks onto the woods. "Its ceiling, of vaulted cypress boards, is slotted at the peak, allowing light to filter down from a long skylight," Knowles points out, "and the sliding glass doors are opened in summer." Whimsical sea creatures decorate the bottom of the pool.





## INTO THE WOODS

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The third mood of the house was established by David Engel, a principal in Landgarden, a landscape firm in New York. Known for his Japanese-style gardens, Engel is a man who can have a meaningful relationship with a rock, and after careful study of the stones on hand, he created numerous paths and waterfalls.

Louis Kahn used to say that every architect builds a chapel somewhere in any project, and in this house it is the poolhouse. It sits at the end of a one-hundred-foot-long enfilade, hidden by a hook in the last few feet. "The kinetics of the space pop you in," Knowles says.

"A poolhouse shouldn't look like an athletic club," he explains. "You have to make it a room and provide places for people to enjoy themselves." And so there are plants and furniture; there is a curve in the pool to make it seem less institutional; and the client's drawings of whales, starfish, flying fish and porpoises have been transferred to the pool bottom.

To improve the acoustics, the roof—a blend of two arcs—has been clad in cypress. Blasberg is especially proud of it. "Each board had to be cut to a different angle," he says. "Each joint had to be thought out, but the results were worth it."

Aside from the usual pantheon, Knowles cites one other significant influence on his architectural development: Miss Irene Knowles.

"Yes, I had an Auntie Mame," Knowles says. "When I was thirteen years old, she asked what I wanted for my birthday, and I said I wanted to go to Chicago and see all the houses by Frank Lloyd Wright. I would walk right up and ring the bell, and Aunt Irene would hide behind a tree. Of course," he continues, "the owners would see this little kid and say, 'Come in.' Then I would wave her in."

Perhaps one day some thirteen-year-old and his Auntie Mame will knock on the door of the house with the big slate roof, and another young architect will be on his way. □