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Luxury Living

M A G A Z I N E

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Ship shape

Alan Simonini's family retreat reflects passion for lake living

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Nantucket meets Lake Norman



photo SEAN BUSHER

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Hand-split cedar shake siding recalls an era far earlier than the Simonini home's August 2000 construction date. Each individual shake is slightly different in size and shape, and their bluish gray stain lends the exterior a weathered, windswept appearance. (Left) The house and grounds were designed for casual entertaining. "Almost every weekend we have a campfire on the beach. We cook marshmallows and drink wine," says Alan Simonini, (pictured right).

Builder's home blends family life with New England coastal setting

by Tess Gadwa

Custom builder Alan Simonini has been sailing since he was 12 years old. So it's no surprise that he and wife Libby chose Lake Norman for their family's home. Inspired by the coastal architecture of Nantucket and Cape Cod, the design fits its lakefront environment both aesthetically and practically. With a sail loft in the garage and a boathouse pavilion out back, the property lends itself to water-based activities: sailing, windsurfing, swimming, and jet skiing, bonfires on the beach, or just watching the sunset from the back porch.

The house is part of the 23-lot Connor Quay community in The Peninsula area of Lake Norman. Simonini and his firm built all the homes at Connor Quay, but he had his eye on one particular lot from the beginning.

"I knew when I bought this property that I wanted to live here," says Simonini. He believes that being on a cove with a view is the best of both worlds—the same lake

access and vistas as the main channel, but less boat traffic and erosion.

"For me, the New England coast — like Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard is probably my favorite place in the world. I just enjoy the feeling that those settings have and I tried to recreate it here," says Simonini. He and his family have often chartered sailboats and cruised through Maine and Massachusetts waters.

To capture that New England mood, Simonini enlisted architect Chris Phelps, who referenced Robert Stern's "shingle style" East Hampton homes. Hand-split cedar shake siding recalls an era far earlier than the home's August 2000 construction date. Each individual shake is slightly different in size and shape, and their bluish gray stain lends the exterior a weathered, windswept appearance. Even more distinctive are the unstained cedar shakes that cover the roof in place of standard asphalt shingles. One Southern feature that has made its way into the New England design is the massive, columned front porch. With slate flagstones and an entranceway made



photo SEAN BUSHIER

of south Georgia river rock, the porch displays the same attention to detail and materials seen both inside and outside the home.

Built-in seating and storage areas give the interior a nautical feel, as do oval windows in the pantry and living room. Meanwhile, beadboard paneling in kitchen, bedrooms and bathrooms suggests a 19th-century seaside cottage. Kitchen and cabinet designer Emily Bourgeoise created ingenious curtained storage pillars lit from within and a baking center with built-in mixer. The master bathroom boasts a recessed whirlpool tub and heated towel bar. Circa Interiors chose classic traditional furniture for the house, such as the oak farmhouse table in the breakfast nook overlooking the water.

Uniting all these distinctive, elegant

touches is the owners' underlying concern for livability. "What I wanted was a house that was relatively informal and to be able to use every room in the house," explains Simonini.

There are no "perfect rooms" in the 8,200-square-foot floor plan. Rather, every room is designed for daily use. For instance, most families only eat in their formal dining rooms once or twice a year. Recognizing that the kitchen would be the center for meals and family gatherings, Simonini gave the dining room a dual function as a library. He uses the space as a meeting room for clients, and his children do their homework there; as a result, the dining room is used nearly every day.

Just a few steps away, the kitchen flows into the living room and breakfast nook. The open pattern of tables and countertops works for even large family gatherings — it's possible to comfortably seat 10 to 20 people in the same space. With its cool tones of blue and slate gray and perfectly framed water view, the living room already feels like an extension of the lake. Open the living room doors and the space extends still further; the back porch is stocked with weathered but inviting wicker seats.

This is the first house Simonini has built for himself and his family. He believes the best decision they made was creating three separate zones — one for each level — to preserve privacy in a house that often serves a lakeside entertaining function.

The three children — Julia, Nina and Alan Charles — have the upstairs to themselves. The main level is a family-oriented gathering space, and also contains the master bedroom and bathroom in a side wing. If you want to catch the game with your buddies, head to the lower level, where you'll find the bar and big-screen TV.

The basement's dark leather upholstery, stuffed animal trophies, pool table and model ships give it a decidedly different feel than the rest of the house — think yacht club or smoking lounge. It's his favorite part of the house, Simonini admits. It's where he goes when he wants to get away, or to build models or play pool with his son.

The lower level is also the most lake-oriented. Just outside the back door is an outdoor fireplace and dining area; nearby there's a 12-seat Jacuzzi and an outdoor shower. (Like every shower in the house, it



photo SOUTHERN EXPOSURE

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contains a hotel-style clothesline where guests can hang their swimsuits.)

Of course, the river-stone fireplace is not the only outdoor dining option. "Almost every weekend we have a campfire on the beach. We cook marshmallows and drink

wine," says Simonini.

On either side of the dock, smooth, multicolored boulders give the shoreline the appearance of a tumbled, rocky, Northern coast. Walk out along the dock, past the boathouse pavilion with its speakers and TV hookup, and you may find any number of craft moored. The family keeps a Malibu Wakesetter ski boat, jet ski, Sunfish, Hobie kayak and catamaran, and J24 sailboat for racing and cruising.

Simonini grew up in a Chicago suburb; his family had a vacation home on Lake Geneva. One day a neighbor gave him a 12-



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foot sailboat. "I got on that boat," Simonini recalls, "and I had this newfound freedom."

As exhilarating as solo sailing can be, Simonini finds plenty of opportunities to share the lake experience with family and friends.

Summer vacations are filled with tubing, water skiing and family swims in the middle of the lake. College-age nieces and nephews come for dockside parties on the weekends. Simonini once hosted a 350-guest wedding reception for his niece on his back lawn; the bride and groom left by boat.

For some people, a lakefront home may be no more than a status symbol with a pretty backdrop.

For Alan Simonini and his family, it's a way of life.

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