

Tom Denenberg at PMA

Home Libraries

Carl Little on Canvas

MaineHOME+ DESIGN

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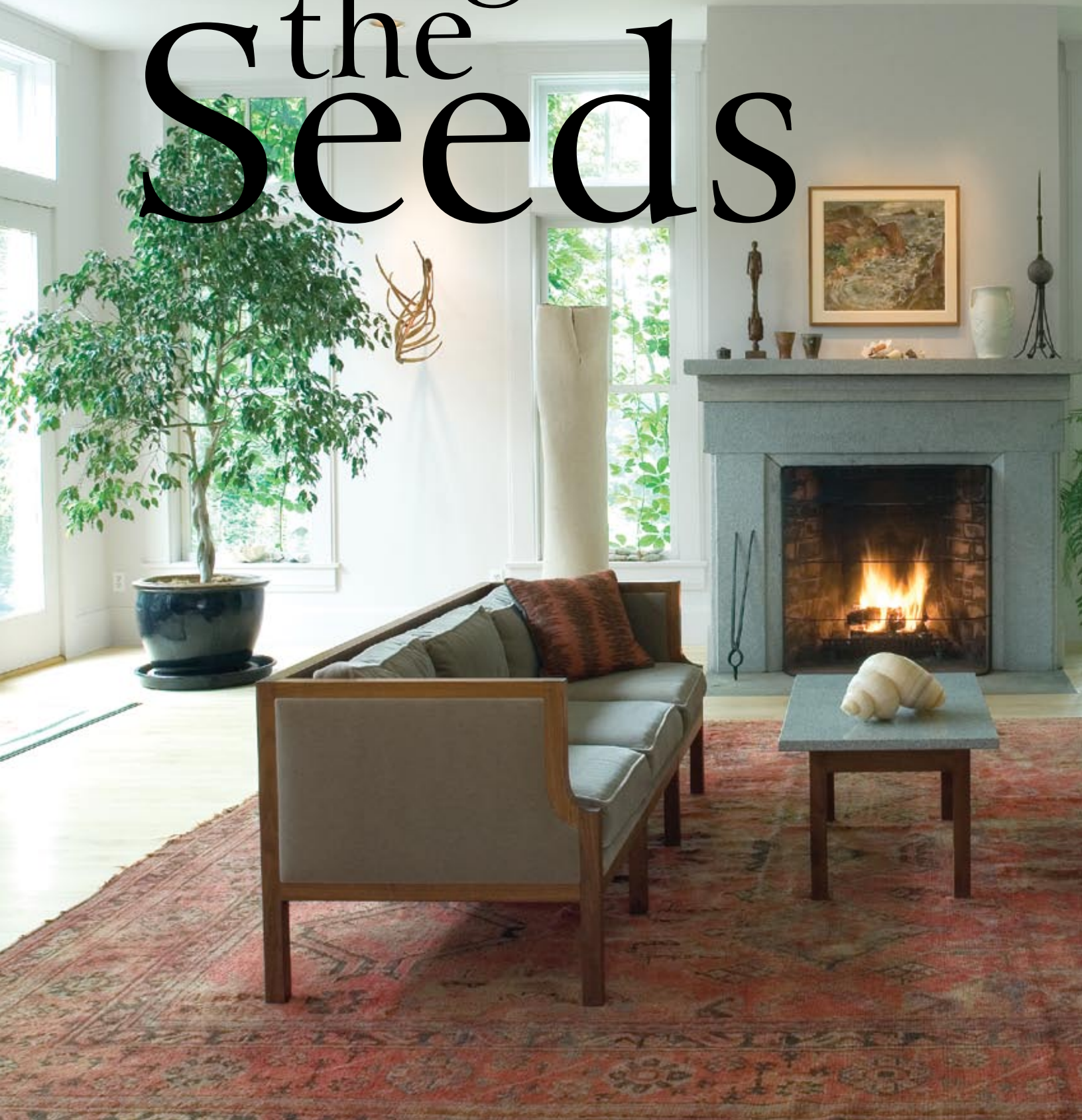
The Art Issue

43 Maine Artists

Living with Art

A Pownal Farm's Sculpted Life
+ On the Marsh in Cape Elizabeth

Sowing the Seeds

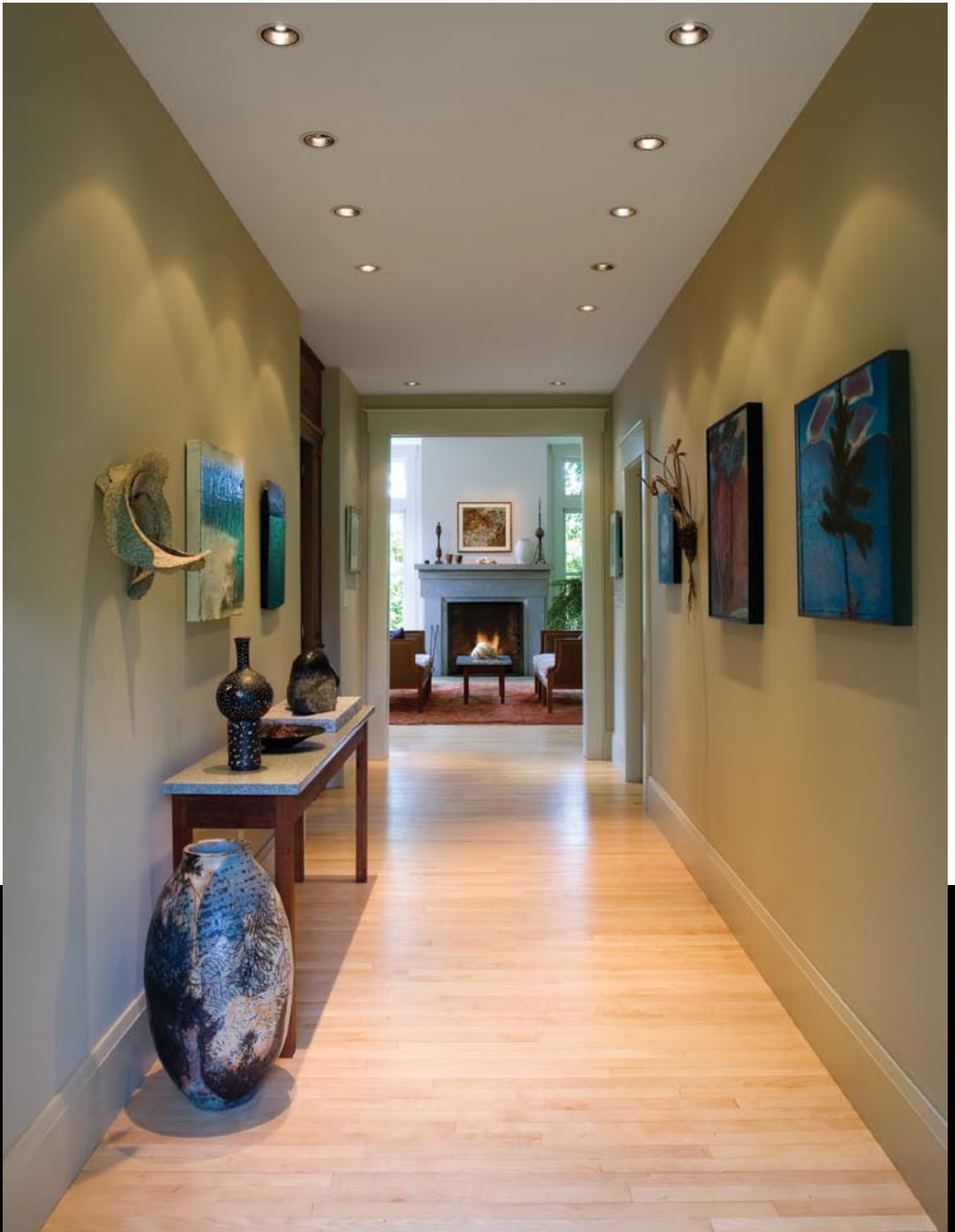


A Pownal farmhouse that entwines art with everyday life

REMARKABLE
by Joshua Bodwell
Photography François Gagné

Hawk Ridge Farm sits atop the crest of a rambling and gently rising dirt road in Pownal. Grand, mature trees border the farm's driveway and sweeping front yard. Sprawling organic gardens give way to sloping fields that roll off toward deep woods. A red post-and-beam barn hunkers against the hillside just above the house. Though it overflows with rural charm, Hawk Ridge Farm is a home that embodies both timelessness and the urgency of creativity and discovery; for contemporary sculptures are perpetually in bloom across its picturesque landscape.

In the perennials alongside the driveway sits a Lise Becu sculpture of a woman and bird. Beside an old stone wall, there is a dark Cabot Lyford sculpture of a reclined female form. And out by the tall stalks of corn stands a massive abstract granite piece by Jesse Salisbury. Art has been interwoven into the experience of Hawk Ridge, so it should come as no surprise that the farm is home to independent art consultant and sculpture dealer June LaCombe and her husband, Bill Ginn, the director of the Global Forest Program at the Nature Conservancy.



Under the thoughtful touch of LaCombe and Ginn, Hawk Ridge Farm has evolved over the past three decades into a home that blurs the boundaries between the bustle of everyday life, the enduring energy of art, and the bounties of nature.

EVOLUTION

When LaCombe and Ginn discovered the farm 30 years ago, the circa 1850s Greek Revival cape was in serious disrepair. Clapboards were peeling off the exterior, the horsehair-plaster walls needed patching, and insulation was minimal. The couple hoped to resurrect the old barn that was then attached to the cape, but in that first year it caved in. However, the couple's devotion to the property never faltered: they repaired and expanded the cape and constructed a new barn. Ginn harvested massive pines from the farm's backwoods, milled the raw wood into timbers, and meticulously cut the hundreds of mortises and tenons for a traditional post-and-beam barn. Finally, more than 30 neighbors joined the couple for an old-fashioned, daylong barn raising.

In addition to maintaining extensive gardens, patches of blueberries and raspberries, and many peach, plum, and pear trees, LaCombe and Ginn operated Hawk Ridge as a commercial sheep farm for nearly two decades. Their flock, which grew to more than 100 sheep, was sold as breeding stock or meat, while LaCombe hand spun the sheep's wool on a wooden spinning wheel. Today, the sheep are gone, but the farm is still home to horses, peacocks, chickens, guinea hens, ducks, cats, and dogs.

LaCombe and Ginn's passion for the natural world was reflected in their day jobs at the Maine Audubon Society's Falmouth headquarters, Gisland Farm. While LaCombe worked at Gisland as a naturalist, a sanctuary planner (she laid out the center's trails and gardens), and director of education programs,

Ginn became the executive director of the Maine Audubon Society. It was also during this time that LaCombe organized an exhibit of abstract avian sculptures by Maine master Edwin Gamble at Gisland Farm. The experience of spending so much time with Gamble's work had a profound effect on LaCombe—it unlocked a deep sense of the vital importance of living with art and uncovered a personal passion for sculpture. "I've long felt that art is part of a more contemplative, less consumptive life," LaCombe says today. "It satisfies something that buying more and more things just never will."

For the past 18 years LaCombe has organized numerous sculpture exhibitions while representing a stable of sculptors working in mediums such as granite, bronze, wood, stoneware, and steel. Over the years, she has become arguably the most staunch and passionate advocate of sculpture in Maine. One of LaCombe's great gifts is for siting work outdoors—she often plucks sculpture out of white-walled galleries and museums and displays it in "living landscapes," as she does to this day at Hawk Ridge Farm or at outdoor shows around the state. For LaCombe, art and life have become so deeply intermingled that her yard is filled with both sculpture she owns and sculpture she is selling for artists, and her home doubles as an exhibition space.

A ROOM FOR ONE'S ART

Sixteen years ago, LaCombe and Ginn built a three-story addition to their home on the spot where the original barn stood. An L-shaped structure off the Cape connects the main house to the new addition, just as it once connected the home to the old barn. With advice from their friend, the architect Carol Wilson, LaCombe and Ginn designed the dynamic addition themselves; local veteran builder Charlie Farrell of Farrell and Company constructed the addition. While the second and third floors house living spaces, a studio, and an office, the first floor was created with a single purpose in mind: to display art.

The addition's new "front door" opens into a grand, deftly lit hallway that is reminiscent of a museum, but far more personal. To the right is the original Cape and to the left is a library that doubles as LaCombe's office. At its end, the art-filled hallway opens into a great room with 11-foot-high ceilings that feels custom-built for showcasing sculpture. In fact, the largest wall in the room was specifically planned to hold a broad, two-piece marble sculpture by Carol Driscoll. "We put walls where one would put a window, and windows where one would put a wall," LaCombe says of the room's design.

In the great room, the couches and chairs were placed to

The new front door on the farm's addition opens into a wide, museum-like corridor (left). While the hallway is filled with art, such as Paul Heroux's tall vase at the lower left, the great room at the end feels as though it was implicitly designed for the display of art.

Art explodes from every corner of the farm's great room (previous spread). In the right corner stand two avian pieces by Edwin Gamble. Beside Gamble's art sits a cluster of LaCombe's own work, entitled "Touchstones Spheres."

The orbs are made from natural materials, such as mica, vines, and iron ore, which LaCombe collects on walks around the ridges and woods surrounding her home. "The walks to collect the materials are part of the artistic process," she says. Even the great room's furnishings are art: beyond the elegant mohair couches built by artist Duane Paluska is a granite fireplace that was custom-carved by Nick Whatley of Morningstar Marble & Granite.

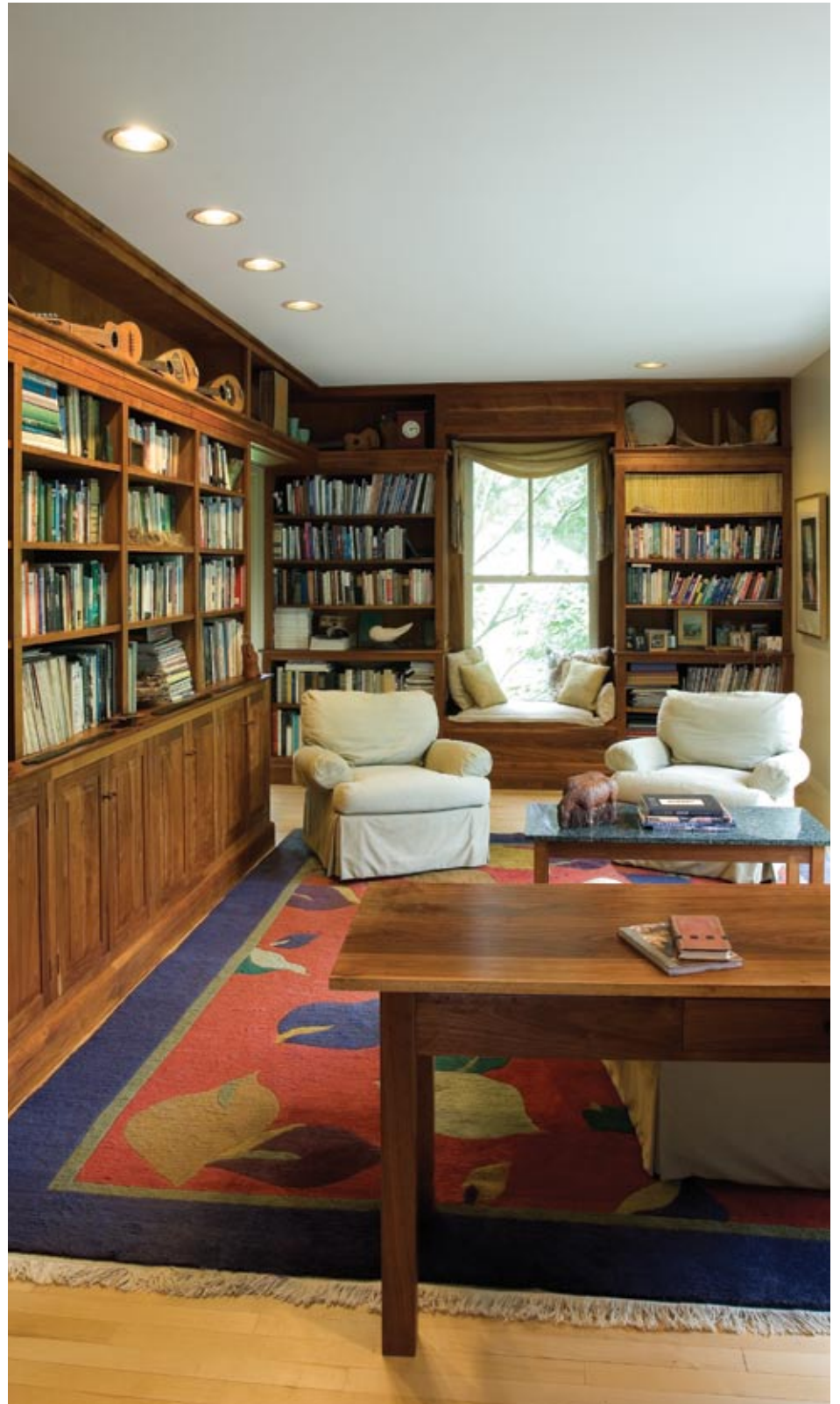
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In the home's bright kitchen, a wall of south-facing windows warms the brick floors (above, left). The black-slate countertops were made from old schoolhouse chalkboards and are a perfect place to jot down phone messages or the night's dinner menu. The kitchen is home to two Cabot Lyford sculptures: "Persephone" on the island and "Pink Cloud" on the old stove to the right; above the stove hangs an oil painting by Maine artist Meg Payson. LaCombe says she tries to blur the boundaries of art and life, "I would like the whole to be seamless—where one does not know where the art starts and stops."

LaCombe uses the farm's warm library as a home office (above, right). Her husband, Bill Ginn, built the walnut desk (along with the coffee table and hall table) under the tutelage of Kevin Rodel, the Brunswick-based artisan who designed and crafted a massive walnut table for Hawk Ridge Farm's great room.

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- A Great Room
- B Gallery
- C Office
- D Wood Storage
- E Entry/Mudroom
- F Mechanical
- G Kitchen
- H Dining Room
- I Sitting Room
- J Exercise Room
- K Bedroom
- L Borning Room
- M Entry

Italian lights dot the view from the original Cape into the home's addition (above). The original Greek Revival Cape portion of the home (above, right) was "modernized" last year when all its drafty old windows were replaced with new double-paned, argon-filled windows. The roof and walls were carefully reinsulated from the outside, so as not to disturb the original trim and horsehair-plaster walls.



REMARKABLE

allow ample space for art. A muted but animated light pours in from all angles: from the two sets of French doors, from the generous, door-sized windows that line the walls, and from the high transom windows above. Outside, lush woodbine climbs the windows. LaCombe says the vines shade the room on summer days, then put on a show of their own when autumn turns them blazing red. With a little rearranging every now and then, LaCombe says the great room never grows static. “I actually move my sculpture all the time,” she says. “Wherever you put it, you see not only the sculpture, but the space around it, in a new way.”

LaCombe’s home has evolved into a living example of how life is inextricable from both art and nature. “When people come to this house,” says LaCombe, “they respond to our connection with the land, and to the mixture of gardens, animals, and sculpture.”

LIFE IS ART

At Hawk Ridge Farm, a life in art and an art-filled life have been combined in perfect union. It’s a combination LaCombe hopes will inspire others to not only buy but *live* with art. Supporting artists has always been central to LaCombe’s life and work, and she often uses a portion of whatever commissions she earns to buy pieces from the sculptors she represents. “When a piece of art sells,” she says pragmatically, “it enables the artist to continue to create.”

Today, the gardens and fields, the barn and home at Hawk Ridge have become the gallery walls of life, and the farm itself could be seen as a masterwork in progress. And LaCombe wouldn’t want it any other way. “My sense has long been that we need fewer cars and more art,” she says without a trace of flippancy.

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