



# Timber and Fieldstone

Architect Matthew Bialecki creates a stone and shingle retreat in upstate New York; it is both elegant and vernacular.

**A**RTS AND CRAFTS architecture encompasses much more than Mission style: here, New York architect Matthew Bialecki drew inspiration from Adirondack lodges, some of the work of Greene and Greene, and his client's pleasant memories of a lakefront vacation home. The successful result is a spacious house that blends the Craftsman vocabulary and a rough-hewn, organic aura with the latest in energy efficiency.

BY DAN COOPER | PHOTOGRAPHS BY STEVE GROSS & SUSAN DALEY



The open floor plan in this new house is reminiscent of Adirondack lodges. Matthew Bialecki designed the two-sided fireplace to warm either the kitchen or the screened porch. **TOP LEFT:** Great care was taken in siting the house. The fieldstone and timber were acquired locally.





## Matthew Bialecki Associates

Hardly a Johnny-come-lately to the public fascination with the Arts and Crafts Movement, Matthew Bialecki of Gardiner, New York, has built his reputation on meticulously designed structures that maintain the ideals of his predecessors. "We've just celebrated our 20th anniversary," Bialecki says with pride about his firm. Raised in California, Bialecki became enchanted with the work of Greene and Greene at an early age. "The Arts and Crafts Movement has been my life-long passion, and we've always focused on its

traditions along with the vernacular of the Hudson River Valley." Bialecki's firm also works according to the tenets of sustainable design. The architect is experienced in other periods and in historic restoration as well. He's designed such diverse buildings as an Adirondack log Boy Scout camp pavilion and an 1880s stone hunting lodge, along with Shingle-style train stations and a large number of private residences. The firm has opened a Manhattan branch to serve their growing number of city clients. [bialeckiarchitects.com](http://bialeckiarchitects.com)

"The house's design was influenced by the Arts and Crafts houses of Greene and Greene as well as the Adirondack Great Camps of the 19th century," notes Bialecki. "Another inspiration came from the old stone walls that crisscrossed the original site. We also used locally harvested Eastern hemlock for the timbered structural frame, to contribute to the rustic impression.

The house was commissioned by Valerie and Fred Knecht, for a former 54-acre farm in Columbia County, New York.

"It was important that the family's home share an affinity with the

spirit of the Arts and Crafts movement, and to honor the landscape as well," the designer adds. Much thought went into the actual location of the house: "At one point, Fred Knecht and I actually climbed a tree to check out the view and to see how the breeze and light affected an area. We wound up moving the site farther up the hill to its present location."

The rough stone and weathered red cedar shingles belie the 4700-square-foot structure's recent vintage, giving the impression that it must have been erected nearly a century ago. "The genesis of the style is from Fred's family," says Bialecki. "They had a lakefront house in northern Minnesota, and sold it, and

ABOVE: The architect on site at the Knecht residence.  
BELOW: (left) Massive stone lintels were incorporated into the windows and fireplace. (right) The weathered red cedar siding and field-stone create the impression of a much older structure.



By using a tree trunk as a structural column, Bialecki continued his theme of bringing the outdoors into the spacious interior of the house. Contemporary pieces mix with furniture that came from an old family lakefront house in Minnesota.





Fred wanted to capture the spirit of that place, so the new home is very spacious.”

The theme of stone with timber continues in the interior of the building, with wood floors, high timber-frame ceilings, stone veneer walls, and exposed framing. One might think that these would have the potential to create a dark and heavy interior, but Bialecki’s design permits an abundance of light and space. The many windows and doors contribute to the airy feel, and prevent any sense of boxiness or gloom. The layout is designed specifically for casual and relaxed living, so there are a reading loft and sleeping porches along with the open floor plan of the main area. A two-sided, raised-hearth fireplace warms either the kitchen/breakfast area or the screened porch.

“The furnishings were provided by the clients,” says Bialecki. “Valerie has a great eye, and Fred still had some of the old hickory furniture from his family. We tried to blend contemporary design and the past . . . not do a rote interpretation of what’s come before. Greene and Greene used a literal translation of the natural environment, but I tried to use a more abstract, metaphorical approach with this house.”

One of the standard bearers of contemporary Arts and Crafts architecture, Matthew Bialecki is also an avid proponent of sustainable design and green building. He

ABOVE: (left) Fieldstone property walls were the inspiration for the house’s exterior. (middle) Natural wood and stone are used throughout the residence. (right) Cabinet details, lamps, tile, and an island that resembles a center table are period allusions in the kitchen, which flows into the living area. BELOW: Framing was exposed throughout the structure. The railing recalls woodwork by Greene and Greene. OPPOSITE: A canopy of massive beams doesn’t darken the light-filled master bedroom.

feels that this now-fashionable approach to construction is not only compatible but a true continuation of the tenets found in the origins of the Arts and Crafts Movement at the turn of the last century. “The Knecht house is actually a high-performance building within its historical design,” he explains. “It’s designed as an advanced passive-solar, energy-efficient structure with a strong emphasis on the design of the building envelope for minimal heat requirements and total passive cooling. The massive masonry walls act as thermal storage, stabilizing the interior temperatures by storing daytime heat and heat from the fireplaces, then slowly radiating it at night. The roof is a unique, massively vented system providing passive cooling for the home.”



The house’s structure is boldly on view. Perhaps the most remarkable feature of the interior is a load-bearing column that Bialecki specified be fashioned from an entire tree trunk: fitted with metal mounts, it stands proudly in the midst of the main living area. He feels that “the best houses have a some eccentricity of style; they should be grounded in conviction, but be a little quirky as well as pragmatic.” \*