

In 1970, Kari K. Holm had first pick among her siblings of the family land on Hanko, an island 60 miles south of her Oslo, Norway, home. After much consideration, she and her husband, German-born architect Jürgen Kiehl, selected an area at the farthest, most remote, exposed tip, where the tree line abruptly ends and nothing obstructs the open view. Designing a house for this setting was a thrilling puzzle of aesthetics and terrain for a young architect. The house they built that year suited the couple for 30 years of long summer vacations, but recently, as Kiehl tells us, it was time for an upgrade. »



Norwegian Wood

As told to Margit Bisztray
Photos by Pia Ulin
Illustration by Christine Berrie

Neighbors can tell the Holm-Kiehls are at home when their boat is tied at the dock (top) and the Japanese koi kite flies over the front door. "People scold us if we don't

raise the kite," says Holm (sitting with Kiehl, above). From the bench outside, the couple can wave to friends passing in boats and make use of the long summer evenings.

Kari inherited this land in 1970, the year we married. At the time, I was a student; to be given a piece of this landscape, and the opportunity to design a house for it, was nothing short of a dream.

We had visited Sea Ranch on California's Sonoma-Mendocino coast in 1967, and it made a huge impression on me. The other great influences were Louis Kahn and his idea that every element of a building has its own unique function, but all cobbled into a whole—the concept of house as village. I brought these inspirations to my drawing table.

Originally, the house had three units: two identical sloping volumes facing in opposite directions around a central rectangular prism. Once it was built, locals described it as “two outhouses and a box.” The side units



were the shape of the traditional outhouses in a Norwegian barn. As soon as I heard that description, I knew I'd succeeded. I think Kari's father, a contractor, was offended I didn't ask his advice. When he walked into the kitchen, the first thing he said was, “That post isn't necessary.” And he was right, but I love wood and this was my first wooden house. I used twice as much wood as I needed to. It's all pine. I like it. Pine is cheap and not too busy.

Norwegian summers are short, and it's customary to spend as much time outdoors as possible. Because of the exposure here we wanted to make sure that no matter how the wind blew, there would be shelter. We also wanted sunlight through the course of the day. So for every indoor space there is a corresponding outdoor space—a deck, a sheltered area, a balcony. ▮



Kiehl's mentor, Horst Beier, built a ladder (top) from the living room to the guest-bedroom loft. Built-in benches (above left) function both as seating and as spare beds.

Holm says the striped, hand-woven fabric she found in Greece is indestructible, and the cork flooring throughout the house has gone 40 years without needing replacing.



The master-bedroom addition (above right) juts forth like the prow of a ship. Kiehl's original sketch of Hanco (above) hangs on the wall.



“I see the addition as defining the next stage of life for us, but it’s hard to think in terms of time.”



The landscape here is fascinating. Where we built the house marks the transition between two topographies: one rocky and one forested. The rocks are 800 million years old and were molded by ice a mile thick. There are distinct shapes to the rocks, and cows and sheep that once grazed here have worn down the paths between them. Those are the paths we take to and from our boat dock, and we know them by heart, even in the dark. It was important not to disturb the natural sculpture of this setting, and also not to build where there were trees. The kitchen, which is at the center of the house, is higher than the rest, because the rock below it is higher. It’s also where the house comes together, the place where everyone participates.

In 1976, instead of buying a new car, we built the second part of our “village”: three identical units grouped in a triangle. They contain a sauna, an office, and a sleeping room. In the center is a shower Kari’s uncle built: a bucket with a pulley system. He wasn’t the only one who helped us either: My mentor from Germany, Horst Beier, with whom I apprenticed as a student, helped me build the front deck and the built-in benches in the living room.

Norwegians have always returned to the land, and lived primitively part of

the year at their cottages. But that tradition is in danger. Today, people want comforts. They want the Internet and heated floor tiles.

The first 30 years here we had no electricity. We cooked by gas. We had a gas fridge. Our bedroom was up a steep staircase in a loft. But in 2000, we decided to make this house livable to us in our galloping old age. Kari’s back has gotten worse, and she was eventually going to have trouble climbing stairs. This is when it came time to design the new addition.

That process was very hard. I made numerous drawings, including one inspired by a lighthouse, because we can see five from here. I finally decided on a boatlike shape that wouldn’t compete with the original structure. Now we have a master bedroom on the first floor and an indoor bathroom of sorts, but still no plumbing. Between the two is a sunroom with a skylight and a day-bed for cloud-gazing. Extending from this sunroom is a deck behind glass doors, creating more sheltered outdoor space. Giacometti lives there—a gift for my 60th birthday from a sculptor friend. I see the addition as defining the next stage of life for us, but it’s hard to think in terms of time here. Here we tell time by the ferries to Denmark and the call of a cuckoo bird. ▮



Magnets and hooks keep kitchen necessities within reach (top left). Blocked from the wind, a deck at the rear of the house (top right) is a favorite place for sunbathing and

also shelters planters of herbs. The sauna door handle (below) is a simple piece of driftwood. “One principle rule I followed,” says Kiehl, “was: Don’t build on outdoor

space if it can work as outdoor living space. Norwegian summers are short. We want to be outdoors as much as possible.” ▮



Compact Disc

The dining table from 1900 was acquired from a mountain farm and could not be expanded to seat large parties. Kiehl fashioned a large disc of plywood to place over the table, enlarging it to seat up to ten people. When not in use, the disc hangs on a wall in the sleeping quarters of the sauna complex, like a modern sculpture.



Put Cork in It

Kiehl opted for affordable and practical quarter-inch-thick cork flooring throughout the house, which can handle both weather and use and hasn't needed replacing in almost 40 years.

Calder Palette

Color accents, like the bright red stove, inside the house are primaries inspired by Alexander Calder, whose prints adorn the walls.



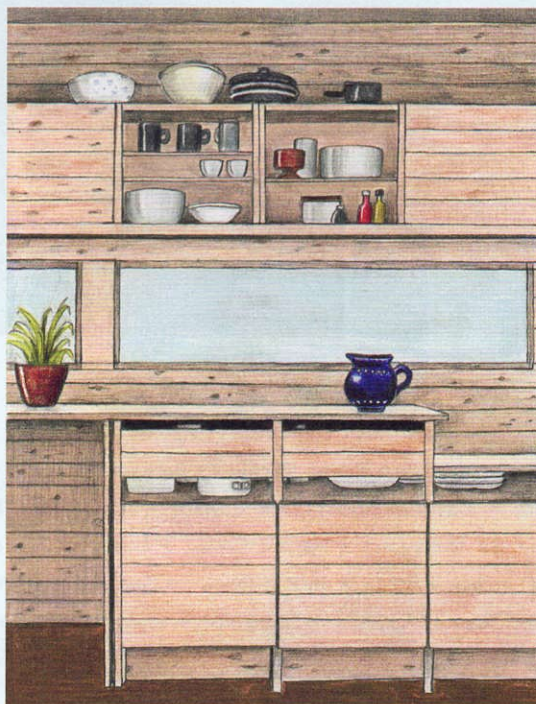
The Bucket List

Holm's uncle fashioned a bucket shower for the family one Christmas. It consists of a simple metal bucket with a showerhead attached to the bottom. Water is heated in a kettle on the sauna rocks, then mixed to a pleasant temperature with rainwater out of a barrel. A spigot controls the flow (green for water, red to stop it) and a pulley system raises and lowers the height.



The Big Sleep

Holm and Kiehl wanted as many beds as possible for overnight guests. Built-in benches thus function for seating and sleeping throughout the house. The house has slept up to 16 people.



Cabinet Fever

Kiehl used money he won in an architecture contest to buy the modular kitchen cabinets, a winning design by Kjell Lund and Nils Slaatto in a mid-1960s architectural contest. Additional pieces from the set are used throughout the house as end tables, bookshelves, and storage cabinets, keeping the furniture minimalist, practical, and harmonious.

Click here for more information:

Alexander Calder prints: dijfineart.com

Cork flooring: corkandfloor.com

Modular benches: foreverredwood.com

Residential saunas: finnleo.com

Wood-burning stove: rais.com ||||

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