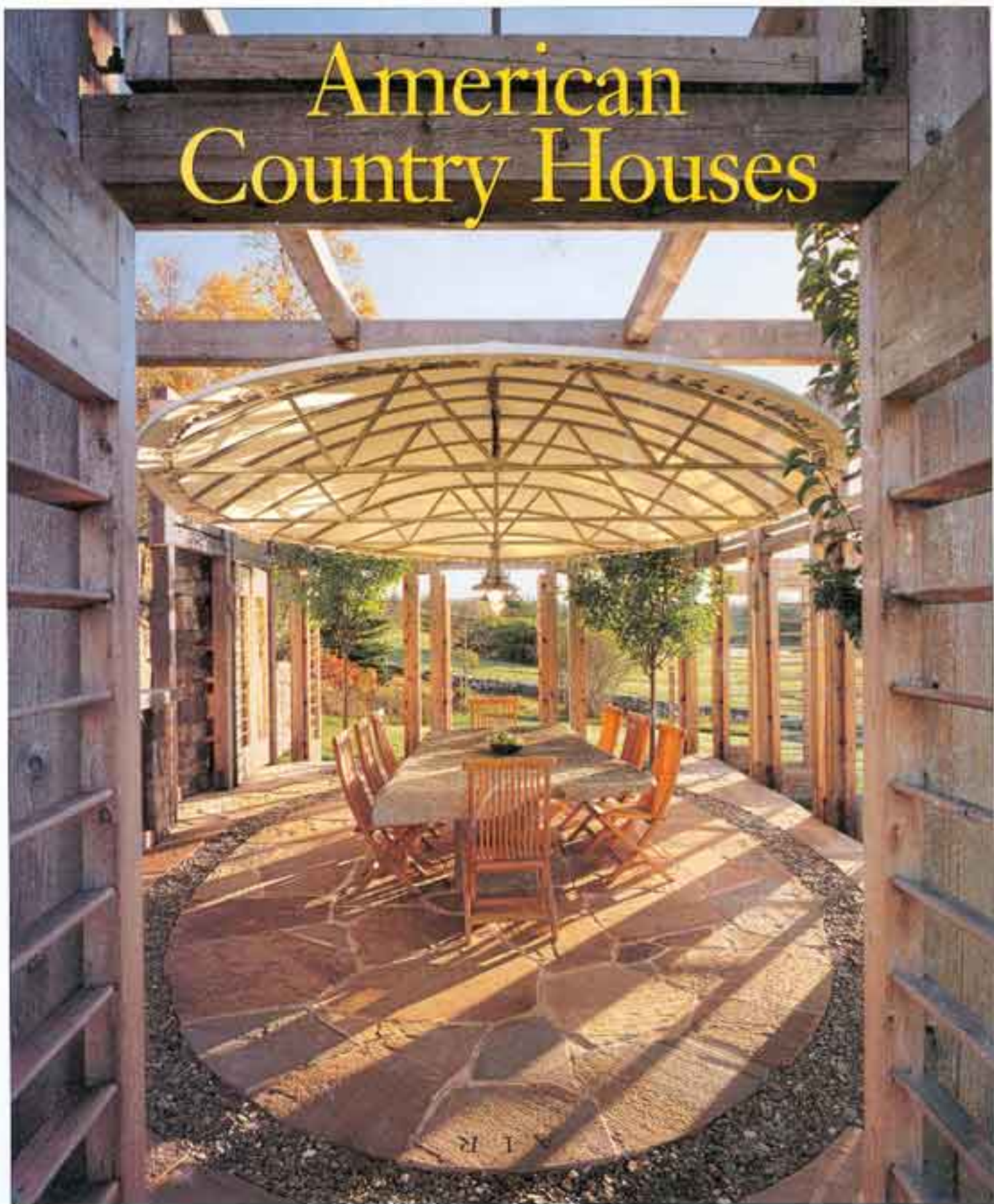


# ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

THE INTERNATIONAL MAGAZINE OF INTERIOR DESIGN

JUNE 2002

## American Country Houses



Architecture by Samuel H. Williamson, ASLA  
Text by Philip Nobel/Photography by Brian Vanden Brink



**ABOVE:** On Maine's North Haven Island, Oregon-based landscape architect Samuel H. Williamson crafted a 540-square-foot summer dining pavilion overlooking Penobscot Bay for John and Caroline Macomber. "In it, the residents feel enclosed yet open to nature," says Williamson.

If you know where to look, you can pick it out from the deck of the *Captain Neal Burgess* as the ferry draws near the dock on North Haven Island, Maine. Just past the Sugar Loaves, a menacing spine of rock hard by the entrance to the protected waters of the Fox Islands Thorofare, a vignette blinks open for a few seconds between two stands of wind-wracked spruce. You see a meadow rolling up from the high-tide line, a small pond edged in turf and, behind it, on top of one of the island's typically abrupt bluffs, the main house of John and Caroline Macomber's compound. Just below it, nearby but hidden at the base of the hill, is their new but already weather-beaten sum-

mer dining pavilion, civilizing this one small corner of the ragged Maine coast.

The Macombers' property is one of those classic "can't get there from here" destinations: halfway out narrow Crabtree Point, miles from the center of North Haven village, an hour by boat from the small Route One town of Rockland across fogbound and frequently angry Penobscot Bay. It's yet another hour to the interstate, and when you get to it, you're still pretty far Down East.

For this reason—its perfect isolation—buildings on North Haven tend to be simple and tough, respecting cruel winters even as they seek to maximize too-short summers. The Macombers' pavilion is no exception. As imagined by Samuel H. Williamson, a Portland, Oregon, landscape architect, the structure presents that paradoxical combination of aloof, almost classical detachment and tenacious earth-hugging specificity that is found in

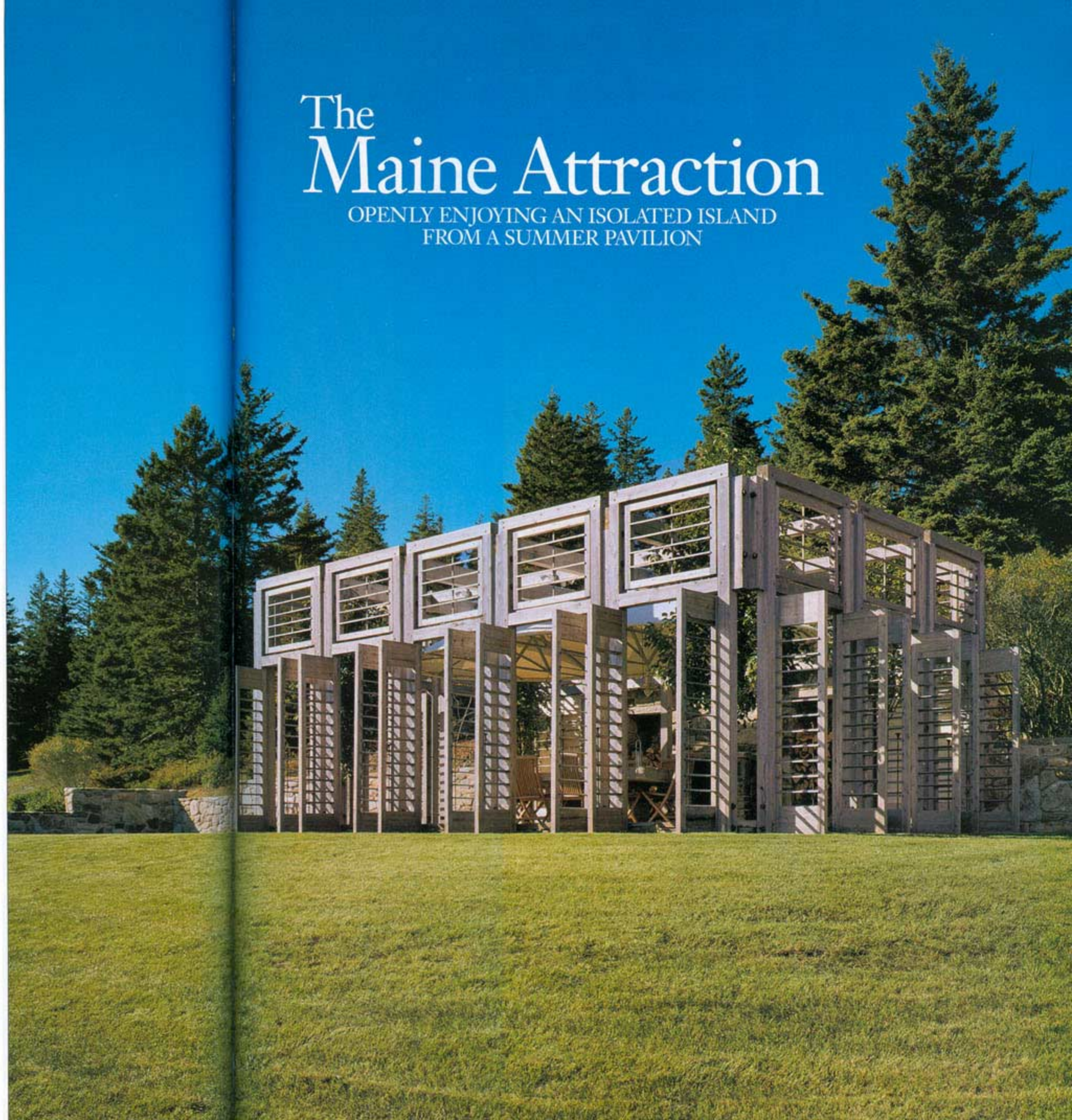
some of the best New England buildings.

Williamson created the pavilion with John Hoke, a Portland designer, and they each brought a preoccupation to the drafting table; Williamson had been thinking about temporary canvas structures and Hoke about building a box that would open up to let people in. The result is a hybrid: an 18-by-30-foot rectangular "box" of unfinished white cedar—entered through any of 11 pairs of louvered doors—supporting a canvas roof on an oval steel frame. The rear wall, against the hill, is formed by a rough stone hearth that extends out into the landscape as a retaining wall on either side of the pavilion. Two cabinets conceal the

**RIGHT:** Made from native materials such as white cedar, granite and beach gravel, the structure is "set into the slope of the hill to engage the landscape and minimize the visual impact," notes Williamson. Designer John Hoke, of Portland, Oregon, helped conceptualize the project.

# The Maine Attraction

OPENLY ENJOYING AN ISOLATED ISLAND  
FROM A SUMMER PAVILION





The table weighs three tons and had to be installed before the rest of the pavilion could be built.

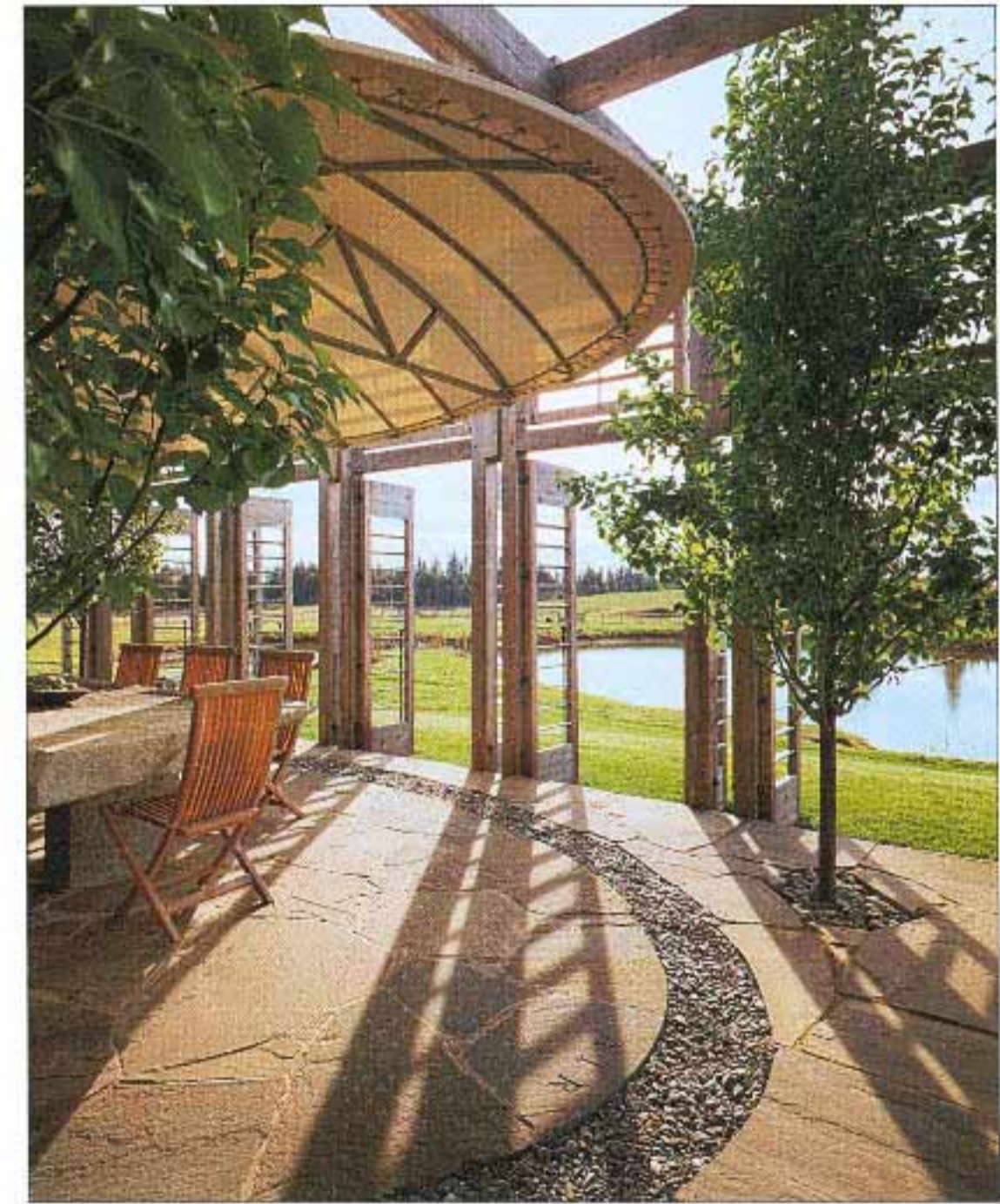
bare necessities for rustic dining (no secret Sub-Zeros here!), three pendant fixtures hang down from the roof, and four hardy Chanticleer pear trees grow in the corners, where the inset canvas oval curves away from its wooden container.

"The building was done in about 15 minutes after we put those two ideas together," Williamson says, modestly underselling the elegant and site-appropriate details that distinguish this small project. These include the use of steel gudgeons and pintle hinges to hang the doors—a nod to the nautical and a simple solution to breaking the building down in winter—and tall cane bolts to secure them. To lock closed, the bolts fit holes in the stone sill of the pavilion; when open, the bolts find a series of drilled-granite blocks set into the lawn away from the building perimeter. To ease construction, the pavilion was designed in modular panels that were fabricated off-island and shipped over on the ferry. The large bolts visible on the structure are an honest testament to this method of construction (which has already proven itself in a hurricane that carried away the Maccombers' dock).

The floor of the pavilion is considered with the same balance of the practical and the poetic. The outer edge of the canvas roof is shadowed be-

*continued on page 258*

LEFT: Central to the pavilion is an imposing granite dining table, which rests underneath a metal-and-canvas canopy that "refers to boat hulls lifted into the rafters for winter," according to Williamson. "Rain rolls off the canopy into the oval gravel band in the floor," he adds.



ABOVE: On each of the four sides of the pavilion, the words *air*, *fire*, *water* and *earth* are etched into the pavers. "*Air* is on the windy west side, *fire* is near the fireplace, *wa-*

*ter* is on the pond side, and *earth* is on the land side," says Williamson. BELOW: Near the pavilion is a Williamson-designed picnic circle set off by a low, curving stone wall.



## THE MAINE ATTRACTION

---

*continued from page 185*

low by an oval band of gravel, brought up from the beach complete with stray shells and sea glass. In the Japanese manner, this band catches rainwater as it courses off the roof, and it also provides a convenient break between two surface treatments: dry-laid granite paving on the outside (to pamper the pear trees) and mortar-set stone in the center around the formidable dining table.

"We were thinking we would do a wood table until our mason said, 'You know, I've got some big stones here,'" Williamson says. The "big stones" turned out to be granite slabs, touched with lichen, that would not be out of place at Carnac. The table weighs three

---

### Buildings on North Haven Island tend to be simple and tough.

---

tons and had to be installed before the rest of the pavilion could be built. "In 1,000 years," Caroline Macomber muses, "there won't be anything left but that table, and people will rush to the most wonderful conclusions."

Right now, its use is perfectly clear: an inspired setting for a family and their good friends to enjoy an exceptional piece of land. The summer pavilion is the centerpiece of the annual lobster party that draws 200 to the Macomber's property ("Everyone fights for a seat near the hearth," Caroline Macomber says) as well as more private recreation. "We have wonderful, mad games of boules, and then sit there as long as we can," she says. "It's the hub of our family."

Sitting in the open pavilion, sheltered just enough, one is concerned only with whether the passing boats will steer clear of the many hazards on the approaches to North Haven—Drunkard Ledge, Dogfish Ledge, Calderwood Rock, the cruel Sugar Loaves. There are stories to tell and time to tell them; there are seals and deer. And when the sun sets, the only unnatural sound, beneath the whir of the wind and the clatter of waves rearranging gravel on the beach, is the lonely bass of a foghorn on a lighthouse across the Thorofare. Haven, indeed. □