



# BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

The Nesting Ground collaborative designs homes that integrate  
landscape, community, and environment

BY KATHERINE GAUDET // PHOTOGRAPHY BY MICHAEL D. WILSON

Some home design trends that have been taken for granted over the past few decades are starting to shift. Nationwide, the square footage of new builds is a bit lower; lot size is going down. Open plans are losing steam (perhaps working from home reminded us of the value of walls—and doors that close). And the people designing and building homes are changing too, as more women enter the male-dominated building trades. One could say that Nesting Ground, a Cumberland-based collaborative of three women who focus on highly efficient, small-footprint homes, is out in front of these trends, but as the group's members describe it, they're actually bringing back an old-fashioned emphasis on site-specific, community-based design.

Nesting Ground consists of developer and builder Patrice Cappelletti, architect Emily Mottram, and landscape architect Kerry Lewis. As Nesting Ground, they seek to design communities from the ground up, starting with Solar Way, a five-home community in Cumberland that includes Cappelletti's and Lewis's homes. "Building efficient structures is one thing, but to build the community, you have to build from the inside out, and from the outside in," says Mottram. "Thoughtful development that starts on the outside and brings it full-circle is really missing from the building industry. What people want, especially in the last year and half, is a renewed sense of community. Over and over, we hear from people who wander into the neighborhood: 'This is what we wanted, but it didn't exist.'"

Landscape architect Kerry Lewis hosts a community dinner behind her home, Copper Farmhouse. She used gentle grading to create a flow from the home's great room to the terraced patios and the woods beyond, adding a sense of spaciousness to a small-footprint home while connecting the interior with the outdoors.



The Cumberland neighborhood is situated on 25 acres, much of it wetland and conserved forest, with walking trails where residents are likely to cross paths. "For the approvals, we had to call it a subdivision, but it's a community," says Cappelletti. The first structure she built on what was formerly an "irresponsibly harvested" logging property was a yurt, which still functions as a neighborhood hub. Regular community dinners and firepit gatherings augment the unplanned interactions of the homeowners who have chosen to live in this conservation-minded development. Lewis tells me that she and the neighbors across the gravel road leave their porchlights on until they go to bed. "I like knowing that someone is there," she says. The porches, too, are intentional: "As Patrice always says, we want to bring back front-porch sitting," Mottram says. "The porches have a reason to be there. It's not just the traditional vernacular of Maine; we want to make them functional for

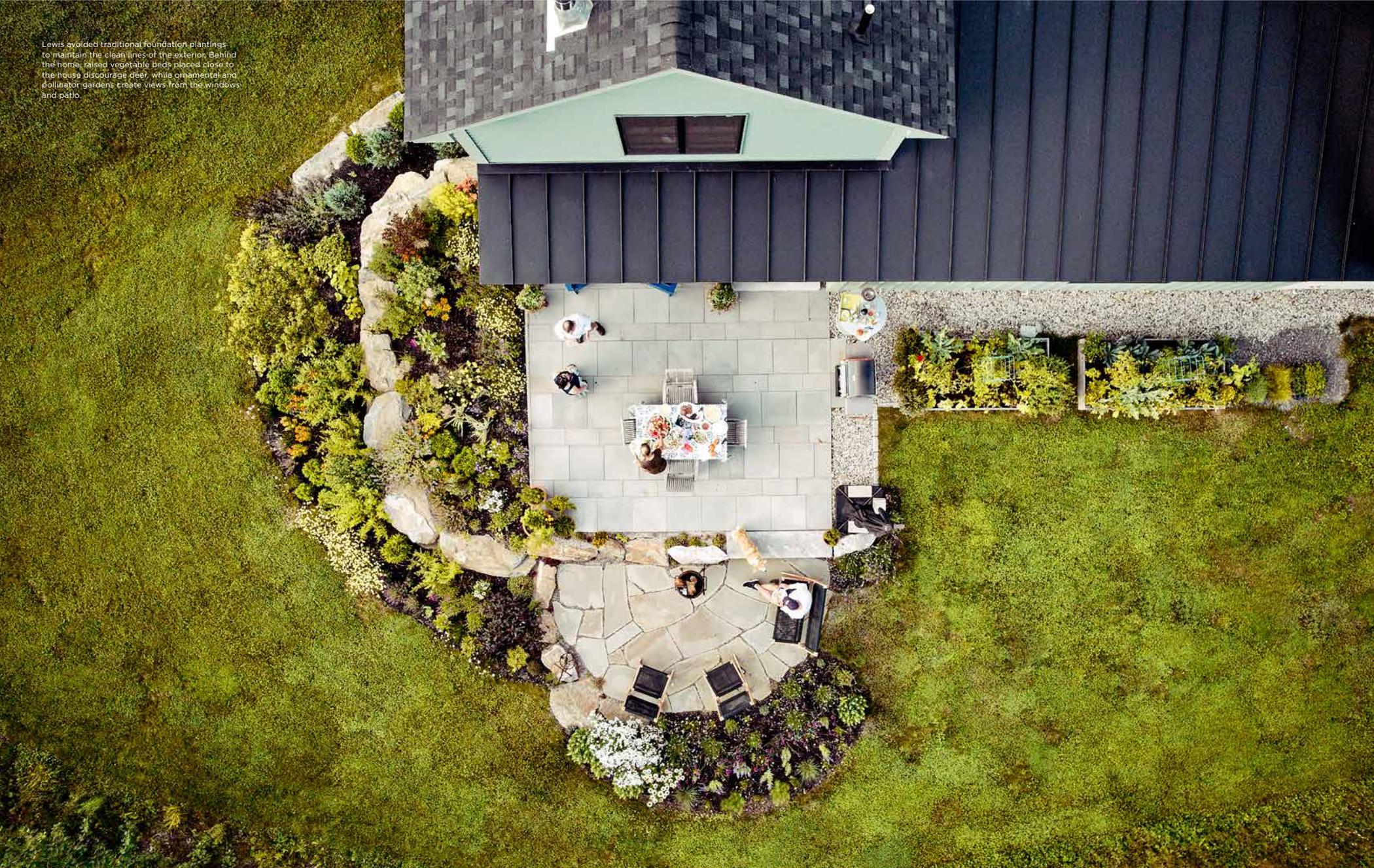
the energy performance of the home." The porch roofs and windows are configured to let in light and heat from the low-angled winter sun while keeping out the higher beams of summer.

The three agree that Lewis's home, called Copper Farmhouse, epitomizes the group's approach. It was the first collaboration of the three, begun in 2018 after Lewis (a longtime friend of Cappelletti's) decided to move to Maine from Massachusetts. "It doesn't work as well without each of us," says Mottram, who had collaborated with Cappelletti before Lewis joined the team. "We were good at solar orientation, siting the houses, making approachable houses. But Kerry Lewis, as a landscape professional, knows how to bring the outdoors back in." Cappelletti agrees: "The outside is really important, the feel of how you live outside and inside. Before the design process begins, you must consider the connections between the land, site, and natural surroundings."

Solar Way is a five-home community in Cumberland (above), built on 25 acres that include wetland and conserved forest. (Opposite) The kitchen's copper accents are complemented by the green soapstone counter.



Lewis avoided traditional foundation plantings to maintain the clean lines of the exterior. Behind the home, raised vegetable beds placed close to the house discourage deer, while ornamental and pollinator gardens create views from the windows and patio.





A conventional approach, says Mottram, is to transform the site to enable easier construction. "The excavation contractors want to bring in a lot of fill and build up the land to the house. Kerry says, 'Why scrape away the natural landscape and bring in fill?'" "It starts with siting the house in the land," says Lewis. "Where's the driveway going? What are the views we can create beyond the property that will make the property feel bigger? Picking your head up from the ground so you can see what is beyond is super important. The way we do it is more complicated; it takes more thought, but that's why the houses feel connected to the land."

The team's thoughtful, personalized method is apparent in Lewis's home, which was designed to serve three purposes in a compact space. For most of the year, she lives there with her dog, Hudson; in the summers she's joined by her parents; it's also her year-round workspace (she shares her office with

Mottram. "You can optimize small space if you plan for all the things you're going to do in the space," says Mottram. Designing a natural flow toward outdoor spaces also makes the home feel larger.

To accommodate aging in place, the home's entrances are low to the ground: the front door is approached by just two shallow stone steps, and the back patio and gardens are terraced for a gradual descent toward the back of the site. From the front entrance, there is a clear view to a large window at the end of the house, creating a sense of light and space in cozy quarters. The first-floor owner's suite looks out over raised-bed vegetable gardens (they are tight to the house, says Lewis, so the deer don't bother them) toward a huge, ancient apple tree at the edge of the woods. It's just a few steps down the hall, past a small laundry room, to the airy great room. The farmhouse kitchen looks out over the pollinator gardens at the front of the house, while a

(Clockwise from top) The kitchen was designed around Lewis's vintage furniture, including a dining table that was once a conference table in her father's office, her parents' hutch, and a tailor's counter that was repurposed as the island; new cabinets were distressed to match the island's finish. The Nesting Ground team meets in the Copper Farmhouse studio. The exterior is sided in cedar shingle, board and batten pine, and vinyl. As a single homeowner, Lewis chose to keep the materials that would need regular maintenance on the single-story parts of the home. Siding the taller volume in vinyl also left more of the budget for elegant details, like wrapping the shingles around corners rather than using corner boards.

Watercolor landscapes painted by Lewis and tile from Grow House Grow create a serene space for soaking in the owner's bathroom. (Opposite) A Wittus Shaker woodstove is a modern anchor for the great room. The slate hearth is extended across the back of the room and is surrounded by tall windows, creating a sunroom effect. The bluestone patio echoes the pattern of the hearth, then transitions to more irregular shapes farther from the house.





sleek woodstove anchors the living area at the back. Upstairs, there's an in-law suite for Lewis's parents on the west end, and a large office and studio space on the east; separate stairways lend privacy to each space. The home's energy is provided by a solar panel array located on the garage roof, while heat pumps heat and cool the space and an energy recovery ventilator provides continuous fresh air for the home. The home has everything it needs and nothing it doesn't. Rather than minimalist or spare, it feels lived-in and comfortable, with the owner's personality and taste built into every corner.

While they celebrate the success of Copper Farmhouse and the Solar Way neighborhood, the Nesting Ground team isn't resting on its laurels. They're currently working on a future neighborhood with the potential for three or four houses, using what they

learned from the Solar Way project to be more clear about their aesthetic vision from the beginning. In the future they'd like to build a larger community—perhaps ten homes. In addition, they want to keep shrinking the size, aiming to create comfortable homes in under 1,700 square feet. Their approach requires careful thought, but it's also, Cappelletti says, instinctive: "Every time I look out, birds' nests have appeared in the framing, and I just watch them. Those birds knew instinctively where to place their nest, what materials to find, where their eggs are sitting, so their family is safe in the nest. As women, I think we typically have a bit more instinct to create nesting." Personal and connected living spaces emerge from close attention to the world outside as well as the people who will live indoors. And, between the nests, the invisible bonds of community spread and grow.

What are now small trees at the side of the home (opposite) will eventually provide privacy and shade, without shutting out the other homes in the community. Throughout the home windows and walls have minimal trim, contributing to the sense of openness, while warm woods create coziness. A print by Sarah Madeira Day hangs in the stairway (above, left). The downstairs half-bath continues the copper theme, with wallpaper from Cole and Son (above, right).