



Architects Gerard Damiani and Debbie Battistone turned a budget buy into a condensed cabin getaway (left). Taking a cue from a nearby farm structure, the couple used thin strips of larch to disguise imperfections in the original concrete block structure (below).



TEXT BY
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PROJECT
Minimal House
ARCHITECT
Studio d'ARC
LOCATION
Lake City, Pennsylvania

Cottage Industrious

A simple cabin on the banks of Lake Erie packs function into just 510 square feet.

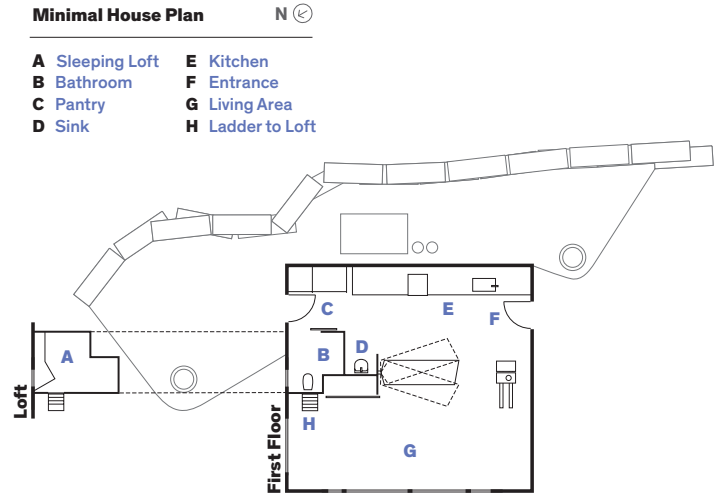


One hot summer night in 2012, Gerard Damiani and Debbie Battistone, the husband-and-wife team behind Pittsburgh’s studio d’ARC, took themselves out and, over margaritas, decided to buy a weekend home. They had just one sticking point: price. “I want cheap,” Damiani told his wife. She spent the rest of the evening scouring local Erie real estate websites to see if waterfront properties existed for around \$25,000. She found exactly one, a 1950s fisherman’s cottage in a tranquil beach resort community within Lake City, two hours north of Pittsburgh. The house was ideally situated on Lake Erie but was in total disrepair, its mint-green concrete walls cracking and sagging into the earth. Inside were two tiny, claustrophobic bedrooms with only seven-foot-high ceilings and an eat-in kitchen and living area in which no one would want to dine. “It was held together with duct tape and spit,” says Damiani. “I thought, ‘I could never sleep here.’” Then they climbed a ladder into the attic and saw something exciting: a pitched roof made out of knotty pine.

“It looked like the hull of a ship. I just imagined lying in bed and looking up at this thing,” Damiani recalls. It was enough to convince them to buy, but the necessary—and extensive—renovations would take over a year. “We didn’t have the cash to do it all at once, and we didn’t have all the answers all at once,” Battistone says. “But we like working slowly and figuring things out as we go along. It’s a luxury that you don’t get with a client’s project.” Damiani describes the renovation process as “kind of improvisational, like jazz.” First they punched out the low ceiling to expose the wood roof and gutted the interior. Next they stabilized the sagging walls. The new wood-slat facade, combined with some underground structural work to the foundation, put the house in good stead. Then they had to figure out the interior. “It’s such a small space. If you start to add a bedroom, a living room, a kitchen—everything gets so marginalized,” Damiani says. “Instead, we wanted it to be completely open but really flexible in terms of how it operates.” >



At the lake house, the couple host guests, watch through binoculars as birds go by, sketch, grill, and just relax. “We come up here primarily to get away,” says Damiani (left). Romanzia rolling blinds extend from the floor to cover the Architectural Collection glazing by Eagle Windows (above). A change in materials signals the shift between different areas of the house. The kitchen area is clad in walnut, while white oak marks the living spaces. The curve of the door handle (below) follows the golden ratio—the basis for Le Corbusier’s Modulor system of proportions.



Chunky lumber chairs of Enzo Mari’s design surround a custom table that pivots 44 degrees (below). “The chairs fit the overall aesthetic of the room because they’re made out of an ordinary material and fastened together in a rugged way,” Damiani explains. Steel tie rods replaced the lowest rafters, allowing for better views of the ceiling. A custom ladder made of bent steel with oak treads leads to the sleeping loft, while a white oak panel swings opens to reveal an inset window (right). Longtime collaborator Jeffrey Kramer crafted the home’s wood elements.



“The house has everything that a domestic program usually has, but in one space.”
—Gerard Damiani, architect

ILLUSTRATION: LOHNES + WRIGHT

The solution was to create one large room, divided into two sections by a swiveling dining room table—it can pivot into the kitchen, extending the food prep area, or swing toward the water, becoming a serene workspace. This division is reinforced by the use of two interior woods: walnut for the kitchen and service area and white oak for the living space.

For such a small project, the house is packed with subtle details, from the wood panel that swings open to reveal a narrow window, to articulated joints that make an ordinary section of dry-wall pop, to gutters that extend a few feet beyond the roof like petals.

Damiani says that the house's limited square footage was as much an opportunity as a challenge. "If you think it through, you don't have to sacrifice any comforts, and the small footprint allows you to acknowledge and amplify the qualities of the place," he says. "The house becomes an aperture for enjoying the landscape." □



The kitchen area features an undercounter refrigerator and freezer by Sub-Zero and a stainless steel sink with a faucet by Arne Jacobsen for Vola. FLOR's Reverb tiles make up the carpet (left).



When they're not using the IKEA sleeper sofa in the living area, the couple slumber in a bed loft (left) atop a plywood-clad volume that craftily hides the toilet, shower, boiler, and utility closet. At just 54 inches tall, the loft space allows one person to sit at the reclaimed oak desk, which is angled

toward lake views, without hitting his or her head. The rugged stool was inspired by the work of Charlotte Perriand. The concrete block wall at the back of the property is original. In front of it, washed river gravel acts as a weed barrier—and a resting spot for canoeing gear (above).